

Official Report (Hansard)

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Suggested amendments or corrections will be considered by the Editor.

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 17 June 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Committee Business

Petition of Concern: Gerry Kelly MLA: Sanction of Exclusion

Motion proposed [16 June 2014]:

That this Assembly, in consideration of the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges [NIA183/11-15], imposes upon Mr Gerry Kelly MLA the sanction of exclusion from proceedings of the Assembly for a period of five days beginning on the Monday after the resolution. — [Mr Ross (The Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges).]

Mr Speaker: The first item of business today is the postponed vote on the Committee report on the complaints against Mr Gerry Kelly. *[Interruption.]* Order. The vote, of course, will be on a cross-community basis.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 56; Noes 37.

AYES

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

OTHER:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs Overend and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, 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, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lynch and Ms Ruane.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>[60.2%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>[0.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Some Members: Shame.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Question is negatived. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let us move on.

Mr Storey: Lawbreakers.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen: Closure

Mr Speaker: Mrs Foster has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22 and will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject.

Mrs Foster: The petition is signed by those in the community in County Fermanagh who value and want to retain Collegiate Grammar School in Enniskillen. I welcome members of the Collegiate action group to the Gallery this morning, along with members of the board of governors, friends, supporters, staff and, indeed, some pupils.

The Western Education and Library Board recently published a development proposal, which would mean the closure of Collegiate Grammar and Portora Royal schools by September 2015. That, we are told, is to facilitate the creation of a single co-educational, non-denominational voluntary grammar school on split sites at either end of Enniskillen, which, of course, is an island town.

The reason for that course of action, we are told, is to allow for a sustainable Devenish College, which, of course, was to have a newbuild over 10 years ago. That was first promised when the Duke of Westminster High School was closed, and there have been many false starts since then. Last year, we were told by the Western Board that the new school building would come when Lisnaskea High School was closed, but, of course, it has not. Now the board tells us that to have a sustainable Devenish and, therefore, a newbuild, the two grammar schools must close and one new grammar school must be put in their place.

I, the board of governors, the parents, pupils and staff of the Collegiate and, as the petition shows, the community of Fermanagh reject this bizarre plan by the Western Education and Library Board. I say "bizarre" because Enniskillen Collegiate is the most oversubscribed school in any sector in County Fermanagh, and yet it faces closure. It is placed tenth in all of Northern Ireland for its GCSE results, and yet it faces closure. It is well regarded across Northern Ireland and, indeed, beyond for its excellence, and yet it faces closure. No wonder I call the decision "bizarre".

The supporters of the development proposal say that too many children have access to grammar-school education in Fermanagh. That does not factually stand up to scrutiny, as the lowest Association of Quality Education score accepted by the Collegiate is considerably higher than that accepted by many grammar schools across Northern Ireland. That is particularly true this year, with many girls being turned away. Indeed, there is an argument for increasing the numbers at the Collegiate rather than closing it.

Also, the argument that grammar schools are filling up at the expense of secondary schools does not stand up. Grammar-school intake has remained static due to a cap from the Department of Education. If numbers in Devenish College are going down despite the closure of other schools in the sector, it is because parents are exercising parental choice by opting for other non-selective schools in the area or, indeed, beyond. That is the reality, and closing the Collegiate will not change that trend. The Collegiate is very proud of its ethos, its results but, most of all, its girls.

In the most recent statistics regarding university access, the school was in the top eight in Northern Ireland, and the girls are certainly reaching their full potential. In that regard, I commend the leadership of the principal of the school, Elizabeth Armstrong, for her vision for the school in the future. I support her in that vision, but, more than that, so do the people of Fermanagh. I present this petition on their behalf.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs Foster moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I thank Mrs Foster for the petition. I will forward it to the Minister of Education, John O'Dowd, and send a copy to the Chairperson of the Committee, Mervyn Storey.

Ministerial Statements

British-Irish Council: Summit Meeting

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): In accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the 22nd summit meeting of the British-Irish Council (BIC), which took place at St Peter Port, Guernsey on 13 June 2014.

The deputy First Minister and I attended the summit on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, and we were accompanied by Danny Kennedy MLA, the Minister for Regional Development. The Government of Guernsey hosted the summit, and the heads of delegations were welcomed by the Chief Minister, Deputy Jonathan Le Tocq. The United Kingdom Government were led by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP. The Irish Government were led by the Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny TD. The Scottish Government were led by the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Ms Fiona Hyslop MSP. The Welsh Government were led by the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, Ms Edwina Hart AM. The Government of Jersey were led by the Chief Minister, Senator Ian Gorst, and the Isle of Man Government delegation was led by the Chief Minister, the honourable Allan Bell MHK.

The summit provided another opportunity for the British-Irish Council to play its unique and important role in furthering, promoting and developing links between its member Administrations through positive, practical relationships and in providing a forum for consultation and exchange of information on matters of mutual interest.

As is now customary at each summit, the Council discussed the current economic situation. Each member Administration outlined their latest economic indicators and the strategies that they are putting in place, and we were pleased to be able to report the latest positive economic news from Northern Ireland.

The Council noted that the previous summit hosted by Guernsey had taken place four years ago in a very difficult and challenging economic environment, and it was encouraged by the positive signs of improvement now being reported by each Administration. The general tenor of the discussion suggested that there were grounds for cautious optimism about future economic prospects, but all

Administrations also acknowledged the need to sustain their efforts in the areas of productivity, innovation, inward investment, exports, skills and reducing unemployment.

The Council also discussed the economic importance of transport links. The discussion reflected the island nature of all the Administrations and recognised our interdependence in ensuring and promoting the flow of people, goods and services among each other and further afield. The Council acknowledged that the promotion of effective transport links between member Administrations can be beneficial to their economic development and to the strengthening of positive and practical relationships amongst the people of these islands.

In that context, we and the other devolved administrations once more drew the attention of the United Kingdom Government to the negative effects of air passenger duty on the economic and social development of our regions. The Council also discussed how the member Administrations' strategic development initiatives should best interrelate in order to promote efficient and effective travel and trade between the jurisdictions.

The Council also received an update on the work that had taken place across each of the twelve British-Irish Council work sectors since the previous summit in November 2013. In particular, the Council welcomed the paper introduced by the Minister for Regional Development on the collaborative spatial planning work sector, setting out the various positions of the member Administrations. It noted the challenges and opportunities set out in the paper and requested officials to continue to work collaboratively via the group to identify opportunities to work more closely with other BIC work sectors.

The Council received the secretariat's end-of-year progress report against its business plan. It also received a copy of the 2013 annual report and welcomed its publication. The Council also noted that the branding for BIC had been refreshed and was being used at the summit for the first time.

Finally, the Council noted that the next BIC summit would be hosted by the Isle of Man Government in November 2014.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the First Minister for his update. I note that there is no

explicit reference in the statement to youth unemployment, which, I think, has been a previous focus of the Council. Will the First Minister provide the House with an update on any successful initiatives that have been undertaken by the Council in that area?

Mr P Robinson: The Member is right: we have had two meetings of BIC at which youth unemployment was the key issue. It was referenced only to the extent that there had been a marginal decline in youth unemployment in the various member Administrations. Indeed, bad though youth unemployment is here, Northern Ireland has a lower level than many of the other Administrations present at the BIC summit.

Youth unemployment is being addressed here by a number of initiatives. If it has the opportunity at some stage, DEL will, no doubt, give details of its training initiatives. It is undertaking one initiative, the United Youth project, arising out of T:BUC, on behalf of the deputy First Minister and myself. Through that project, DEL envisages taking 10,000 young people and putting them on a scheme that will train them up in three separate areas for a one-year period. The three areas are steps into work, good citizenship and the cross-community element. We are playing our role in dealing with those figures, but a range of training initiatives is being undertaken by DEL as well.

Mr Spratt: I thank the First Minister for his report to the House. Given the support of the other regions in the UK, does the First Minister believe that more concessions are possible in relation to air passenger duty?

Mr P Robinson: I would not describe it as a gang up, but, certainly, the three devolved Administrations argued the same case on air passenger duty. As Members will be aware, the Northern Ireland Administration was the only part of the United Kingdom to be successful in having the power to decide its own level of air passenger duty for long-haul flights. We, as an Executive, moved that to zero to support the travel industry's long-haul flights. However, we are a peripheral part of the United Kingdom, so if people want to get to the capital of the United Kingdom, they have to travel by air or sea. That means that we are at a disadvantage to many other parts of the United Kingdom in cost terms. Of course, the same can be said of Scotland, particularly. We are pressing on the issue.

Changes to air passenger duty were announced by the Chancellor, but they were simply to consolidate three of the bands of air passenger duty relating to long-haul flights into one. They do not affect Northern Ireland, because we are already exempt from that. However, we continue to press on the basis of our economic pact with the Government; it is one of the issues being considered. However, I warn the Assembly that if we were to be successful, the European Union would require us to have a reduction in our block grant to take account of that, and that is likely to be somewhere in the region of £60 million to £90 million.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I note that the First Minister referred to the high level of economic discussion that was had, and that is important in the current challenging environment. However, was any focus given to the rising cost of living and what we can do to tackle and alleviate hardships on families and young people?

Mr P Robinson: It was not discussed specifically, although, in general terms, it is always an issue that has to be taken into account. We welcomed the fact that unemployment levels across the Administrations were reducing. Not all Administrations, of course, have suffered an economic downturn; the Isle of Man has had consistent growth and, I think, has about two people unemployed.

In some areas, it is a greater problem than in others.

11.00 am

Members will have seen the latest labour force survey figures, which show that, for the seventeenth consecutive month, we have had a reduction in the claimant count in Northern Ireland. That is a good signal. The best way to get people out of poverty and deprivation is for them to get into employment. That is an important factor. It is a matter that the Executive continue to keep under consideration, and we do whatever we can, given the limited budget we have available to us, to help in that regard.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chéad Aire as ucht a ráitis. Chím ins an ráiteas go bhfuil tagairt do na ranna oibre ach ní mórán mionsonraí ins an ráiteas faoin méid atá gnóthaithe acu agus ba mhaith liom ceist a chur

ar an Chéad Aire. An bhfuil sé sásta go bhfuil obair chruthaitheach á déanamh ag na ranna oibre?

I thank the First Minister for his statement. There is a reference to the 12 work sectors, but there is not much detail about what has been achieved by them. Is the First Minister satisfied that there is a tangible outcome from the work of the 12 sectors?

Mr P Robinson: There was not much detail because they are not discussed; you simply take possession of the reports from each of them. Of course, several of those are led by our Ministers. I am not sure which particular work stream the Member has an interest in, but I am sure that the Minister with responsibility for that area will be very happy to give him further details. None of the Ministers we have on any of the work streams has indicated any impatience about slow progress being made, so I must assume that things are going swimmingly.

Mr Lunn: I thank the First Minister for his statement. He referred to the economic importance of transport links among each other and further afield, so I hope that I am not stretching the limit slightly by asking whether there has been any discussion around links with the important European capitals. It is easy enough to get to Majorca from here, but you cannot get to Dusseldorf, Paris or Brussels. Has there been any discussion around that?

Mr P Robinson: Part of the discussion is about identifying where there may be new routes and where there is a demand. One of the aspects of the work being carried out by our Regional Development Minister, who is leading the work stream on that area, is getting reliable data as to the movements of people and goods. Those are the kinds of factors. There is then a decision to be taken as to whether there is a sufficient clientele to open up an air route or sea passage, and, if that is the case, whether — remember that most of those are commercially driven — there is any role for intervention on the part of government.

Mr G Robinson: In the context of strengthening east-west relations, I particularly welcome the announcement yesterday of the Open coming to my constituency of East Londonderry.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr G Robinson: Will the First Minister give us the potential benefits of the announcement for Northern Ireland?

Mr P Robinson: I hope that the local newspaper is listening closely to what is being said.

Mr G Robinson: It already knows. *[Laughter.]*

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I were very pleased to join the Enterprise Minister, Arlene Foster, for the announcement. It must have taken people quite by surprise when we announced it yesterday, given some of the trailers that had been run for the occasion. It is a significant development. I remind people that it is putting Royal Portrush on the rota, which means that we are not necessarily talking about a one-off event; we are talking about the potential for it being part of an ongoing rota of locations throughout the United Kingdom that are used for the Open.

It indicates that we have facilities that can match those you will find anywhere else in the nation. It also indicates the high regard for golf that there is in Northern Ireland. When the European Tour came to Royal Portrush, it had its largest ever attendance, which indicates that we have a population that is keen to visit golf tournaments. That was one of the factors that convinced the R&A that it should look to Royal Portrush as a potential venue.

On the wider front, this will obviously have a significant impact in the constituency represented by the Member. It may have a bit of disruption during the Open itself, but that is a small price to pay for the advertising that the local area will have across the world. About 90 million people will be watching over a long period and will see the scenery of the north Antrim coast. That is the kind of publicity and advertising that you just could not pay for. It is an excellent opportunity for people to see what they can come and see.

Having a championship course is no small thing in itself. The golf tourism industry is sizeable throughout the world, and golfers like to play championship courses. People can go round a championship course and pretend to themselves that they are taking part in the Open. Golf tourism is a very significant part of our tourism investment in Northern Ireland.

There are many reasons to be optimistic, if one represents that constituency, but it is also good for Northern Ireland. It indicates that we have moved on from the dark days of the past. This is the benefit of having a new era in Northern Ireland, where there is a level of peace and stability that we have not had for many generations.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I was tempted to ask the First Minister whether the issue of an Enniskillen bypass was discussed, given the importance of economic transport links between member Administrations and the fact that this is the first anniversary of the G8.

To be serious, may I ask the First Minister whether there was discussion of the issue of free travel between member states for tourists coming from selected countries far away, such as the Far East, given that people who come in through Belfast or Derry can travel around the rest of Ireland freely but those who come in through the South cannot come up North because of visa restrictions? Was that matter discussed, or can the First Minister give us any kind of update on it?

Mr P Robinson: It was not discussed at the summit, but it has been discussed by the deputy First Minister and me in the context of the economic pact that we have with Her Majesty's Government. Indeed, the Prime Minister has had a meeting with the Taoiseach on the issue. I have spoken to the Taoiseach on the issue as well, and I have to say that the response was positive. It is on the agenda and is part of the economic pact. Over the next couple of days, the deputy First Minister and I are due to have conversations with the Prime Minister on the progress being made on the economic pact. I assure the Member that this is one of the issues that we will want to speak about.

Mrs Hale: I thank the First Minister for his statement to the House this morning. He has already touched on our lower rate of youth unemployment. Can he tell the House how our economic recovery compares with the other United Kingdom jurisdictions?

Mr P Robinson: I am glad to say that there seems to be a fairly even spread in the recovery process. The reason I am glad about that is that, on all occasions in the past, Northern Ireland has been last to come out of any economic downturn. It has often taken us a number of years to get back to previous levels while the rest of the United Kingdom has been getting on with life as if nothing had happened. This is a change in the patterns that have developed in the past.

As the labour force statistics show, our unemployment is now down to 6.9%. Given the number of job announcements that we have had and some that, we know, are in the pipeline, there is every indication that we will

continue to reduce unemployment further. Indeed, in a survey, 58% of local employers indicated their intention of employing additional personnel during the next 12 months. Those are all indicators that things are moving in the right direction.

That is not an indication that we should in any way be complacent, however. A lot of work is required, and there are considerable pressures, particularly on our Budget, given that the United Kingdom Government have been holding down revenue streams and putting money more towards capital streams. That presents a considerable difficulty to our Administration in the programmes that we develop.

Mr Allister: I note the reference in the statement to the discussion of the economic importance of transport links and the promotion of effective ones. In that context, has there been any discussion about essential improvements to the A75, which is such a key link for our freight industry into the rest of the United Kingdom? I ask because, when one looks at the BIC's 2013 report, the sorts of things that are mentioned when focusing on the transport sector are the coordination of smart card technology and the mutual recognition of blue badges. Those may be important in their own right, but perhaps more strategic issues, such as the A75, are really where better economic prosperity lies. Does the First Minister agree?

Mr P Robinson: I agree that they are very important, but I do not agree that they have not been discussed. I simply do not know whether they have been discussed, because the work goes on within the work streams, and the Minister for Regional Development is our representative there.

I had a discussion in the margins: the A75, I think I am right in saying, is the Scottish road. I had a discussion with Fiona Hyslop during the break in the summit. She referred to our having discussions about the A75, so that must be ongoing. I will get the Minister responsible for the Department for Regional Development to write to the Member on the issue. Of course, it is a strategic route, not just for Northern Ireland but for many of the hauliers in the Republic of Ireland, so there are benefits for a number of the member Administrations in having it improved.

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): With your permission, Mr Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I will make a statement on the eighteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in environment sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Thursday 8 May 2014. The statement has been agreed with Minister Kennedy.

Danny Kennedy MLA, the Minister for Regional Development, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Phil Hogan TD, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. I chaired the meeting.

Ministers had a discussion on various priorities within their remit and noted that those will be contained in a report to be considered at a future NSMC institutional meeting as part of the ongoing review of sectoral priorities. Ministers noted that the contract for the all-island air quality research study into airborne pollution from the combustion of residential solid fuels, in particular smoky coal, has been awarded and that the study is expected to be completed by August 2014.

The council welcomed the consideration by the North/South market development steering group of a new programme related to the circular economy. It requires a new way of thinking in all aspects of the value chain and aims to keep the added value in products for as long as possible and to cut residual waste to close to zero. Ministers noted that the Northern Ireland carrier bag levy, currently applied to single-use bags, will be extended to low-cost reusable bags from January 2015. Ministers also welcomed the engagement in discussions on the proposals for a new used tyre scheme in Ireland and the exploration of the potential for a complementary scheme in Northern Ireland.

11.15 am

The Council noted that the proposed programme of work for 2014-15 is in the process of being reviewed and agreed. The Ministers also welcomed the intention of beginning shortly the waste repatriation at the first of those sites scheduled in the programme. Ministers also noted that Dublin City Council has established a framework agreement for the disposal of repatriated waste and continues to

progress the public procurement process for the haulage of excavated waste to authorised disposal facilities. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to continue to target resources on joint enforcement action against illegal operators and called on relevant Departments to engage on tackling this issue.

The Council noted that coordination is continuing between both jurisdictions in relation to preparations for the second-cycle river basin management plans under the EU water framework directive. The Council welcomed the publication in Northern Ireland of the consultation on significant water management issues.

Ministers welcomed the provision of funding by both jurisdictions for the cross-border pilot project for the management of invasive flora and fauna on the River Blackwater in Northern Ireland and continued cooperation on beach awards and beach care schemes such as Blue Flag and the Coca-Cola Coast Care scheme run by An Taisce and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. The Council also welcomed the commencement of discussions on common approaches to the implementation of the marine strategy framework directive.

Ministers noted that tenders for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) research project into the environmental impacts of unconventional gas exploration and extraction (UGEE) are being evaluated. The Council noted that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) second state of the environment report was published in December 2013. Ministers welcomed the publication of the EPA's 'Who's Who' of environmental research expertise in Ireland, which will assist collaboration by environmental researchers from the island of Ireland in Europe-wide research projects.

Ministers also noted that the EPA's research strategy for 2014-2020 will be published by the end of June 2014 and that, consequent to the enactment of the Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) (Amendment) Act 2013, Science Foundation Ireland may now fund environmental research on an all-island basis.

The Council agreed to hold the next environment meeting in November 2014.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I thank the Minister for his statement. I am sure the Minister is aware that the Committee carried out an inquiry into

used tyre disposal a couple of years ago. One of the recommendations in the report was:

"Northern Ireland should liaise with the Republic of Ireland when considering a suitable mechanism for dealing with used tyres. A strict producer responsibility scheme would be counterproductive unless introduced in both jurisdictions".

Will the Minister elaborate on what sort of used tyre scheme they are developing in Ireland and how it might impact on Northern Ireland? Will we work together to have a complementary scheme?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Chairperson, Ms Lo, for her question. I have held bilateral discussions with Minister Hogan on the subject. His Department is developing detailed proposals to replace the current tyre schemes in the South with a full producer responsibility scheme. Minister Hogan has invited officials from my Department to join a working group established by his Department to develop those proposals. I have only too willingly accepted that invitation and feel pretty sure that that collaboration will help to ensure a joined-up approach on the issue right across the island.

Whatever tyre scheme is eventually implemented in the South, it will be important that it is compatible with existing and future arrangements for the management of used tyres here to avoid negative consequences North or South. With that in mind, my officials and I will consider the detailed proposals emerging from the South, with a view to tabling proposals for a complementary UK-wide scheme for agreement with colleagues in England, Scotland and Wales. It will be necessary to reach that type of agreement if such a scheme is to be introduced effectively in the North.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement, not least because, had it been his predecessor, he would only be about halfway through the statement by now. The subject of the cross-border movement of waste comes up again and again at North/South meetings on environmental issues. That is particularly the case with the sites where waste has been illegally dumped, and there seems to be consistent promises of actions. Will the Minister put some meat on the bones? The statement refers to:

"the intention of beginning shortly the waste repatriation at the first of these sites scheduled in the programme."

When specifically are we due to see the first removal and repatriation of waste? By what stage do we hope to have the waste removal from those sites completed?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Weir for that question. I am pretty sure that he is aware of the commitment in the road map agreement with our counterparts in the Republic of Ireland to undertake the repatriation of waste. In total, 17 sites were identified, with an estimated total of 273,000 tons of waste to be removed.

I welcome the level of cooperation that has existed between the two Departments and competent authorities since the signing of the framework agreement. A total of nine sites have been completed since repatriation began in 2010, giving a total of 76,000 tons of waste to date. It is extremely important that the remaining sites, some of which contain the larger amounts and quantities of waste, are repatriated in a timely manner to minimise potential environmental harm or damage.

This year's work programme is still being finalised, but I expect that the removal of waste from three — hopefully, four — sites will be done this year. I expect work on the first site to start by the end of this month. It may have already started, and I will come back to the Member on that.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabhail leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra go dtí an pointe seo agus as ucht a ráitis fosta. I want to ask the Minister about the planning aspects of wind energy policy and the possible future focus on that in the North/South Ministerial Council. Does the Minister see any merit in a single island approach to wind energy policy? I think specifically of setback and separation distances of wind infrastructure from residents.

Mr Durkan: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabhail leis an Uasal McElduff as an cheist. I thank Mr McElduff for that question. The issue of wind energy has become more and more controversial in the North. That is not exclusive to the North; it is being experienced similarly in the Republic of Ireland. We share a land border, and there are often proposals for wind turbines or wind farms along the border that have as much impact on those living in the North as on those living in the South and vice versa. Therefore, I certainly see some merit in Mr McElduff's suggestion. I have had informal discussions about it with my officials, and I have had an informal chat with Minister Hogan. I see merit in it and shall pursue it.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his statement. What is his view of the benefits of working with the Irish Government through the NSMC to tackle the difficulties with climate change?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Eastwood for that question. Whilst Ministers and officials engage bilaterally in mitigation and adaptation with colleagues in the South, a more formal arrangement through the NSMC would ensure wider engagement on relevant interests to everyone's benefit. There are many areas of climate change where increased and enhanced cooperation within the NSMC structure would be beneficial. For example, following the recent extreme weather events right across this island and, indeed, beyond, which resulted in severe flooding, it would be mutually beneficial to learn lessons and cooperate where appropriate on this environmental, economic and social problem. The jurisdictions also have a common goal to ensure that greenhouse gas emissions are minimised and to support the development of a low-carbon economy. It has been the practice that Ministers on both sides of the border have met bilaterally to discuss common issues, including climate change, and it is also the case that climate change has been an issue of huge interest within the British-Irish Council structure, and I know that there was a statement on that earlier. Officials have been working on climate change mitigation and adaptation. They keep each other briefed on policy developments and participate jointly in conferences and other events. A lot of cooperation is ongoing that, I believe, could and should be enhanced, and it will be.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his statement. Obviously, he will be aware of the importance or non-importance attached to fracking in County Fermanagh and other areas of Northern Ireland. The Minister's statement notes that tenders for the Environmental Protection Agency's research project will be initiated. What input will the Department of the Environment or any other Department of the Northern Ireland Executive have into that report and research?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. I think that he might have beaten Mr Flanagan to the punch on that one. Fracking is a hugely important and controversial issue in Fermanagh especially but also right across the North and, indeed, the world. Therefore, it is vital that we carry out as much research as possible into the potential dangers and risks associated with it. That is why I have been

keen for my Department to work with the EPA on this research programme.

NIEA had initially committed to co-funding the all-Ireland research programme with £50,000 in 2014-15 and the same amount the following year. The earlier answers that I gave in the Assembly were based on these figures. However, given the increased attention that the issue is attracting in the Chamber and throughout Ireland and the UK, the agency wished to ensure that maximum value was realised from the research programme. We, therefore, believed that a more significant contribution was required to put the agency on a more equal footing with the other two funding partners, which have committed €500,000 each. So we are on a more equal footing but still nowhere near an equal footing. My Department will contribute £100,000 in this financial year and £100,000 in the next financial year.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his statement to the House. On the cross-border movement of waste, I particularly welcome the commitment to continue to target resources at joint enforcement action against illegal operators. Why does the Department ignore offences committed in the Republic when considering waste licence applications from firms in Northern Ireland that have been engaged in illegal dumping activities?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mrs Cameron for her question. Some would say that the Department also ignores offences committed in the North when dealing with applications for licences here. More work needs to be done on identifying who is a fit and proper person to have a waste licence. That will involve increased and enhanced cooperation with our neighbours in the South as we share a land border.

People commit crimes on both sides of the border. It is something that I certainly will want to look at, and I will want to look at the procedures and processes that the Department or the agency use when assessing applications and to have a complete overhaul of that system, which, at times, seems over-cumbersome for good and legitimate operators, yet huge gaps remain in it that can be exploited by opportunistic criminals.

11.30 am

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. The Minister raised the issue of UGEE.

Obviously, some technocrat somewhere has taken issue with the use of the word "fracking", but I think that we should continue to call it fracking and should not hide behind any smokescreen of whatever UGEE is supposed to be.

Will the Minister indicate to the House why, despite the fact that, as he has acknowledged himself in a written answer to me, a significant number of the 1,356 respondents to the public consultation on the research programme indicated that they wanted to see a health impact assessment carried out, that is not being included as part of the work? Both Governments are now spending nearly €1 million on it. It will be a waste of money if it is not done right. Will the Minister explain to the House why it has not been included and whether there is any chance that he could change his mind and actually put it in?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Flanagan for that question. The research that has been commissioned into fracking and its potential harmful and ill effects is not and will not be exhaustive. In March, I visited the EPA in Washington to have a look at the research that it has carried out over a number of years at a cost of some \$20 million, and that, in itself, is, as yet, far from conclusive. I can tell the Member and those who called for a health assessment to be part of this study that any planning application that comes forward for anything associated with fracking will be subject to a full health assessment.

Mr A Maginness: I note the Minister's answers to the last two questions about fracking. It seems to me that the debate on fracking has not yet reached the point where people can make full decisions. Will the Minister give a sense of where we are at with that debate, North and South and within the context of the North/South Ministerial Council?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. I reiterate to the Member my decision on fracking, which is that, in the absence of sound evidence that fracking is safe, is not harmful to the environment and is not harmful to human health, no application for fracking will be passed. In my opinion and that of the Member, and any Member who has raised the subject of fracking here, that evidence does not currently exist. Given what I learned from my visit to the EPA in Washington, it is unlikely to exist in the foreseeable future.

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

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his report. Minister, you refer to the environment, air pollution and smoky coal. It is my experience that there are smoke control zones and, therefore, people there should not be using smoky coals. What are your views on the burning of other hydrocarbons, such as lignite and, indeed, peat?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Cree for that question. Air pollution from residential combustion of solid fuels is of significant concern to both jurisdictions. The Northern Ireland levels of certain carcinogenic air pollutants known to be produced, particularly by burning smoky coal, can reach and sometimes exceed EU target levels. However, as the Member quite rightly pointed out, it is not only smoky coal that causes damage to our environment and our health. Therefore, when the levels for what is "smoky" coal are set, as they have been in the Republic and will potentially be here in the future, they encompass other fuels as well, believe it or not. In the Republic, peat falls under the level, so it is deemed non-smoky. The levels that are proposed or which will be set here for the purposes of this study are much lower than those in the Republic, so, in this jurisdiction, peat would be above the level and would therefore be classified as a smoky fuel.

Lord Morrow: I think that the Minister identified 17 illegal dumping sites, of which nine have been cleansed and eight remain. If my calculations are right, that leaves 197,000 tons to be removed. Will the Minister tell us how many prosecutions are pending for the nine sites that have been cleansed?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. In my answer to Mr Weir, I outlined the extent of work that was still to be done in the repatriation of waste. I do not have at hand the information on the number of prosecutions associated with sites that have been cleansed. However, I will certainly get back to the Member on that in writing.

Mr Wilson: First, I am surprised at the way in which the Minister has ruled out any permission for fracking applications before he has even heard them or his Department has considered them.

To follow up on Lord Morrow's question about illegal dumping sites where waste from the Republic was dumped in Northern Ireland: this is an issue that was first raised when I was Environment Minister. At that stage, the Irish Republic agreed that it would cover the cost of clearing those sites, since the rubbish had

come from the Republic. Given the passage of time and the way in which the costs are likely to have escalated, has his Department any figures on what the cost of clearing the rest of the sites will be? Secondly, if the cost has gone up, has it been discussed with Ministers from the Republic how that additional cost will be dealt with by the Exchequer in the Republic and not fall to the public purse in Northern Ireland?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Wilson for his question. I am not sure whether he heard my earlier answers because I am pretty sure that I did not rule out permission for any applications for fracking. I ruled out any permission for fracking, or anything associated with it, in the absence of evidence that it is safe and sustainable. As yet, that evidence does not exist.

On Mr Wilson's question about the repatriation of waste and the cost of doing that: the cost will still lie with the Republic of Ireland, which accepts sole responsibility for it. As Mr Wilson quite rightly pointed out, the cost has gone up. Therefore, the programme has undoubtedly slowed down as a consequence. I do not have the exact cost here, although I can get it to the Member later this afternoon. However, conversations are ongoing between the DOE and Minister Hogan's Department on this issue. We are looking at the possible use of sites in the North for this waste, maybe to cut down on fuel costs and so forth.

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill 2014: Further Consideration Stage

Moved. — [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Budget (No. 2) Bill today. Members will, of course, be able to have a full debate at Final Stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Committee Business

Work and Families Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 30 November 2014, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Work and Families Bill [NIA Bill 34/11-15].

On Monday 12 May 2014, the Assembly referred the Work and Families Bill to the Committee for Employment and Learning for scrutiny. The intent of the Bill is to allow working parents the ability to manage their parental and work priorities with flexibility.

At its meeting on 26 March 2014, the Committee for Employment and Learning agreed to call for written evidence and submissions from organisations and individuals. In addition, signposting notices were posted in the local press. The Committee believes it is essential that all stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on the Bill, as it will impact on employers and employees.

Although scrutiny of the Bill is likely to be straightforward, it is a substantial piece of legislation with 24 clauses and two schedules, and the Committee wishes to fully examine in detail the impact of each of the clauses and speak to all parties who wish to make representations on the Bill. The Committee believes that it is essential that it is afforded the time to exercise its scrutiny powers to the full and asks the House to support the motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Work and Families Bill to 30 November 2014.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 30 November 2014, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Work and Families Bill [NIA Bill 34/11-15].

Standing Orders 31, 35 and 37: Exceptional Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: As the next three motions relate to amendments to Standing Orders, I propose to conduct the debate as follows. I propose to group motions (a) to (c) as detailed in the Order Paper and conduct a single debate. I will ask the Clerk to read the first motion in the group, and will then call the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move it. Debate will then take place on all three motions in the group.

When all who wish to speak have done so, I will put the Question on motion (a). I will then ask the Chairperson to move formally motions (b) and (c) in turn, and I will put the Question on each motion without further debate. I remind the House that cross-community support will be required. If that is clear, I shall proceed.

Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I beg to move

(a) After Standing Order 37, insert –

"37A. Public Bills: Exceptional Further Consideration Stage

(1) If, after the Further Consideration Stage of a Bill, and prior to its Final Stage, the Minister or member of the Assembly in charge of the Bill submits a statement to the Speaker, in writing, asserting—

(a) that, as a consequence of an amendment made to the Bill, either a provision of the Bill is outside the legislative competence of the Assembly, or the Bill has a serious technical defect, and

(b) that the Assembly had not fully considered prior to making, or not making, any relevant amendment that the Bill might, as a result, be outside the legislative competence of the Assembly or have a serious technical defect,

the Bill shall be set down on the list of pending future business until a date for Exceptional Further Consideration Stage is determined.

(2) A statement submitted to the Speaker under paragraph (1) shall be circulated to all members of the Assembly, as soon as is practicable, and published in a manner determined by the Speaker.

(3) An amendment proposed to a Bill at Exceptional Further Consideration Stage shall only be selected if the Speaker is satisfied—

(a) that the amendment is intended either -

(i) to bring the Bill within the legislative competence of the Assembly, or

(ii) to correct any serious technical defect;

(b) that the proposed amendment deals with a matter specified in the statement under paragraph (1)(a) and which has arisen as a consequence of an amendment made to the Bill; and

(c) that the Assembly had not fully considered prior to making, or not making, any relevant amendment that the Bill might, as a result, be outside the legislative competence of the Assembly or have a serious technical defect.

(4) Subject to paragraphs (1) to (3) above, the provisions of Standing Order 37 and Standing Order 39 shall apply to Exceptional Further Consideration Stage of a Bill as if in those Standing Orders for 'Further Consideration Stage' there were substituted 'Exceptional Further Consideration Stage'."

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

(b) In Standing Order 31, line 1, after "33(1)" insert –

"37A,"

(c) After Standing Order 35(19) insert –

"(19A) Paragraphs (17) to (19) apply to Exceptional Further Consideration Stage as they do to Further Consideration Stage."

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I am pleased to bring these motions to amend Standing Orders to the House today.

Motion (a) inserts a new Standing Order to provide for an Exceptional Further Consideration Stage. Motions (b) and (c) are consequential amendments. Perhaps I could begin by giving the background to the proposed amendments.

During the last mandate, Members may recall that, following Further Consideration Stage of the Justice Bill, the Speaker took the view that, due to an amendment made at that stage,

certain provisions of the Bill were outside the legislative competence of the Assembly. Currently, the Assembly has no procedure to enable the correction of such a defect after Further Consideration Stage. Section 10(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 is designed to ensure that a Bill shall not be introduced if the presiding officer decides that any provision is outside the legislative competence of the Assembly.

11.45 am

There are also provisions in the Act and in Standing Orders for a mechanism to amend a Bill after Final Stage. Reconsideration Stage is where the Bill comes back to the Assembly after Final Stage. That could happen in a limited number of circumstances, including cases where the Supreme Court decides that any provision is outside the legislative competence of the Assembly or where the British Secretary of State decides to not forward the Bill for Royal Assent.

As a result of the lack of provision to correct defects during the passage of a Bill, the Speaker used his discretion in respect of the Justice Bill to hold an Exceptional Further Consideration Stage to enable the House to debate a single amendment to bring the Bill back within legislative competence. That required the House agreeing to suspend Standing Orders 39(1) and 42(1).

The Committee on Procedures was asked to consider whether a mechanism could be established to correct a Bill after Further Consideration Stage and prior to Final Stage rather than passing it, only for it to be returned for reconsideration. Obviously, if that happened toward the end of a mandate, the Assembly might be dissolved before it had an opportunity to reconsider the Bill.

Options were put to the Committee regarding how best it could deal with issues of legislative competence being identified before Final Stage. Those included dealing with them on an ad hoc basis, relying on the Speaker's discretion and the precedent set by the Justice Bill, and including provisions in Standing Orders. The Committee concluded that Standing Orders should make provision for a new amending stage rather than issues of legislative competence being dealt with on an ad hoc basis. The new stage would occur in very narrowly defined circumstances after Further Consideration Stage and prior to Final Stage.

The new Standing Order — Standing Order 37A — sets out the procedure for an

Exceptional Further Consideration Stage. As the name suggests, that stage would be used only in exceptional circumstances and not routinely to correct drafting errors or to propose amendments. Its use would be restricted to circumstances where a legislative competence issue or serious technical defect has arisen due to amendments made during the passage of a Bill. The Speaker will interpret and apply admissibility criteria in respect of amendments tabled at that stage.

Today's motions will ensure that the Assembly has a procedure in place for dealing with those issues. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I commend the motions to the House.

Mr Clarke (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I welcome the opportunity to conclude today's debate on the motions to amend Standing Orders, which provide for an Exceptional Further Consideration Stage.

I thank the Chairperson for his opening remarks. As he outlined, motion (a) will insert a new Standing Order — Standing Order 37A — to provide for an Exceptional Further Consideration Stage. Motions (b) and (c) are consequential amendments.

The new stage, as described, provides for a corrective mechanism in the event of any amendments to a Bill during its passage taking it outside of the Assembly's legislative competence or a serious technical defect being identified. Only amendments that are likely to rectify those issues will be selected by the Speaker at the Exceptional Further Consideration Stage. I commend the motions to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(a) After Standing Order 37, insert –

"37A. Public Bills: Exceptional Further Consideration Stage

(1) If, after the Further Consideration Stage of a Bill, and prior to its Final Stage, the Minister or member of the Assembly in charge of the Bill submits a statement to the Speaker, in writing, asserting—

(a) that, as a consequence of an amendment made to the Bill, either a provision of the Bill is outside the legislative competence of the

Assembly, or the Bill has a serious technical defect, and

(b) that the Assembly had not fully considered prior to making, or not making, any relevant amendment that the Bill might, as a result, be outside the legislative competence of the Assembly or have a serious technical defect,

the Bill shall be set down on the list of pending future business until a date for Exceptional Further Consideration Stage is determined.

(2) A statement submitted to the Speaker under paragraph (1) shall be circulated to all members of the Assembly, as soon as is practicable, and published in a manner determined by the Speaker.

(3) An amendment proposed to a Bill at Exceptional Further Consideration Stage shall only be selected if the Speaker is satisfied—

(a) that the amendment is intended either -

(i) to bring the Bill within the legislative competence of the Assembly, or

(ii) to correct any serious technical defect;

(b) that the proposed amendment deals with a matter specified in the statement under paragraph (1)(a) and which has arisen as a consequence of an amendment made to the Bill; and

(c) that the Assembly had not fully considered prior to making, or not making, any relevant amendment that the Bill might, as a result, be outside the legislative competence of the Assembly or have a serious technical defect.

(4) Subject to paragraphs (1) to (3) above, the provisions of Standing Order 37 and Standing Order 39 shall apply to Exceptional Further Consideration Stage of a Bill as if in those Standing Orders for 'Further Consideration Stage' there were substituted 'Exceptional Further Consideration Stage'."

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(b) In Standing Order 31, line 1, after "33(1)" insert –

"37A, "

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(c) After Standing Order 35(19) insert –

"(19A) Paragraphs (17) to (19) apply to Exceptional Further Consideration Stage as they do to Further Consideration Stage."

Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process

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

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Education on its inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the school improvement process [NIA 132/11-15]; and calls on the Minister of Education to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

The inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the school improvement process is the second inquiry that the Education Committee has undertaken in this mandate. Members received written submissions from around 60 stakeholders and undertook around 17 oral evidence sessions. There were two informal events and a school visit, and we spent about half of the present session of the Assembly considering and deliberating on the evidence.

I take the opportunity at the outset to thank the many witnesses to the inquiry, including schools, principals, teachers, academics, district inspectors, associate assessors and representative organisations. I also want to thank the Department, in particular the Education and Training Inspectorate, for its responses and cooperation. As Chairperson of the Committee, I also express my gratitude to the other members of the Education Committee for their enthusiasm and hard work throughout the inquiry. Finally, I pass on, on behalf of the Committee, our thanks to the staff of the Education Committee, particularly our Committee Clerk and his staff, for organising the evidence sessions and for compiling what, I believe, has turned out to be a longer than expected report. Their hard work and diligence on the matter is very much appreciated, and I want to place on record that thanks today.

It is a long report, with a smaller than usual number of findings and recommendations, and I want to take a little time to highlight a few of the issues to the House. First, and for the avoidance of doubt, let me be very clear that the members of the Education Committee, separately and collectively, agree that professional inspection of the effectiveness of our schools is a good idea. The concept sits very well with the values of the teaching profession, which quite rightly sees itself as being reflective, striving for improvement and focusing on delivering the best educational experience for all our children.

Members agreed that inspection, as intended in the Every School a Good School policy, usually provides some useful direction for schools on their improvement journey. So, inspection is clearly a good thing. However, it is equally clear that simply and repeatedly inspecting our schools will not in itself make them any better. Imagine if a teacher had a child who is underachieving in the school. Simply telling that child repeatedly that their attainment is inadequate or unsatisfactory will not, on its own, make the child any smarter or make their performance any better. The child needs to be helped and properly supported. As it is with children, so it is with schools.

The Committee has heard before about significant reductions in the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) for schools and the adverse impact that it has on school improvement. Members were, however, disturbed by suggestions from witnesses to the inquiry that some sectors were considerably better off than others in that regard. I think that that, if true, is unfair and makes no sense whatsoever. I also think that that was not the intention of the Every School a Good School policy.

The Committee's first recommendation is therefore for proper support for school improvement services. The Committee also recommends a stronger alignment between inspection and support, as is currently the practice in Scotland. This will ensure that there is, as the OECD recommended, a balance between the challenge provided by the inspectors to schools and the support that schools must have if they are to improve.

The Committee, when taking evidence, was greatly struck by the very different perceptions of the Education and Training Inspectorate. To be sure, inspection is an uncomfortable process and will, from time to time, lead to difficult exchanges and even some ill feeling, particularly if inspection results are poorer than

a school expects. That ill feeling may explain some of the negative evidence submitted to the Committee. That said, the very great differences in schools' experience and the mass of associated evidence cannot be so easily explained. It is on that point that I want to digress for one moment. I trust that the inspectorate does not see the report as an attack but as a genuine attempt by the Education Committee, and those who collectively make it up, to reflect the genuine concerns and fears of many schools about the process. A simple dismissal, "We do not recognise that fear exists", is not acceptable and does not face up to the realities.

Why does the inspection experience vary so much? That is a question that we need answers to. There are a number of reasons. By way of context, let me briefly explain one of them: area planning and its impact on inspection. I can advise the House that it appears to be widely believed by schools that a bad inspection report can lead to a significant reduction in parental confidence and, therefore, enrolment. That, in turn, it is argued, can make a school unsustainable and even lead to its closure. It appears that the area-planning process, with its focus on the sustainability of schools, has had quite a lot to do with the new context for school inspections. I will not comment on the process itself, but what I will say is that area planning has certainly altered perceptions and raised the stakes for schools during the inspection process.

The question then is what is to be done? The Committee believes that, in the first instance, everyone must recognise that there is a new inspection landscape. That said, inspection reports must, of course, continue to provide parents with a clear understanding of a school's strengths and weaknesses. However, that must be done in such a way that a school is not inadvertently misrepresented and, consequently, its sustainability unfairly undermined.

The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Department do away with the one-word summaries of school performance. No longer should schools be labelled "unsatisfactory" or "inadequate", or even "good" or "outstanding". Those descriptors misrepresent the breadth of educational experience in many schools. They do a disservice to schools and can often inadvertently mislead parents into believing that a school is all good or all bad when that is simply not the case.

The Committee recommends a similar practice to that adopted in some other jurisdictions,

where single-word descriptors are replaced by more meaningful text. The Committee also recommends that two reports be produced for every school inspection. There should be an internal formative document designed to help improvement, and it should be accompanied by a more summative publication, in the public domain, which will explain in plain English where a school is strong and where it needs to improve. These reports should be free of coded references and jargon and clear enough for everyone to understand. Therein lies a huge challenge for the current process.

When I say "everyone", I really mean parents. They are the key group in the school improvement process who, so far, have had limited or no opportunity to take part. The Committee agrees with leading educationalists and the OECD report that the Department has missed a trick by not doing more to include parents.

12.00 noon

Every email press release that the Department sends to the Committee carries a link to the Education Works campaign. The campaign is designed to encourage more parents to get involved with their child's education. The principle behind the campaign is endorsed by everyone. It is therefore surprising that one arm of the Department promotes that message increasingly and another — the key delivery partner in Every School a Good School; the Education and Training Inspectorate — does not. Indeed, ETI indicated that it has had almost no recent engagement with parents, other than through its inspection questionnaires. As I said before, that does not make sense. It is for that reason that the Committee recommends, in line with the OECD report, that a representative parental consultation platform be established. That will, it is hoped, be the gateway through which many more parents get involved with and contribute to the school improvement process.

During its deliberations, the Committee was also more than a little taken aback by the poor relations, incessant sniping and high levels of misunderstanding and frustration amongst education stakeholders. It seems that relationships generally are in need of repair. A good beginning would be for the inspectorate to have a complaints procedure that commands greater confidence. A reformed procedure should admit the possibility of error or revision by ETI and allow for investigations to be undertaken, in some instances, by outside personnel. That would go some way to improve

relations, enhance perceptions and secure more buy-in for school inspection.

A number of changes are proposed in the report, and I have mentioned some of those. My colleagues on the Committee will explore the other changes during the debate, including the treatment of the value added by schools, the important role of the district inspectors, the promotion of self-evaluation and changes to the use of questionnaires. The Committee agrees that all those changes amount to a new beginning for inspection and school improvement.

A new beginning needs a new name. The Committee for Education has therefore proposed a rebranding of ETI as the Northern Ireland Education Improvement Service. The new name and brand would signal a break with the past and an explicit commitment to a two-way collaborative model of school improvement, which will combine inspection with adequate levels of support for schools.

A majority of Members also felt that the linkage between the Department and the new school improvement service needed substantial change. A majority of Members had concerns in respect of the relationship, or perceived relationship, between the Department and ETI. Those Members felt that the Department had recently proved itself to be both immune to criticism and oblivious to good advice. Examples of that are the implementation of the computer-based assessment process, levels of progression and the original proposals for the common funding formula scheme, to name but a few. ETI, on the other hand, was perceived by some as simply being the enforcement arm of the Department. That sometimes widespread view tended to undermine the professional authority of the inspectorate's findings.

What is required is a statutorily independent, professional organisation that can report, without fear or favour, in respect of all aspects of education policy. A majority of Members want to see that role undertaken by the new Northern Ireland Education Improvement Service. Those Members also want all communications between the new body and the Department to be transparent and understandable.

This is the time of year when schoolchildren get their end-of-term report. I am going to resist the temptation to boil down our 1,300-page report to a single word or simple throwaway catchphrase, like "must do better" or "needs improvement", however apt that might be in this instance. Instead, I will say that the Committee

believes that a reformed, rebranded and independent inspectorate will be more than capable of delivering a much-needed school improvement process. The recommendations will address perception and trust issues and lead to a more collaborative relationship and productive outcomes for all. As Chairman of the Education Committee, I therefore commend the report to the House.

In conclusion, I want to make a few comments as a Member of the House and as the DUP education spokesperson. The report, I trust, will not be yet another that sits on the shelves of the Department or in the Library of the House and ignored.

I believe that the issues in this report are far too important, particularly for the schools that are involved and for the pupils who attend our schools. I have no doubt that, given their professionalism, the district inspectors, associate inspectors and all engaged in the inspection process will, if given the opportunity, be able to respond to this report in a way that is positive and which will lead to improvement.

I give this very simple warning, however: let it not be said that this was just another day at the Northern Ireland Assembly. Let us all, collectively, work together to see the implementation of this report and the introduction of the Northern Ireland improvement service. Then, I believe, collectively with parents, teachers, schools, the Department and the inspectorate, we will continue to deliver and ensure the best possible outcomes for our pupils.

This week, I have two pupils from Ballycastle High School with me on work experience.

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

Mr Storey: That school and its pupils want improvements to be made for their benefit.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Committee's report this afternoon. I want to put on record my thanks to the Committee staff for their steadfast and professional support throughout the process and to all those individuals, organisations and interested parties who participated in the witness sessions. I also thank the schools that hosted the Committee as it explored the merits of self-evaluation and the school improvement process.

Looking through the report, we can see the vast number of areas where the Committee has identified issues and recommended some very interesting points of action. Indeed, some of the highlights include increased support for struggling schools; alterations to the format of inspections, including the use of what some, including the Chairperson, have termed "plain English"; and looking at the role of parents in the overall process to give them a platform to become more active and informed. The Chair talked about the renaming of the inspection body to capture the culture of self-improvement in the education system as a whole. There is also the unique dynamic of Irish-medium education in a full immersion setting, which requires a specialised inspection process.

I want to focus on recommendation 16, which is to do with the statutory independence of the inspection body. The Sinn Féin members of the Committee have argued for some time that this recommendation does nothing but put the horse before the cart. How can we seriously stand here today and recommend that the inspectorate be independent but, in an effort to determine whether this status is desirable, we should afterwards carry out research? We think that that is crazy. No Minister would ever give serious consideration to such a predetermined recommendation. Indeed, I regret the fact that our report includes such a recommendation, as I feel that it downplays the significance of some of the others.

We have absolutely no theoretical or ideological opposition to an independent inspectorate; indeed, an independent inspectorate may be preferable moving forward. However, as I have outlined in the report, we suggest that evidence-based research should be undertaken prior to a decision either way on independence. It is important to stress that, during our inquiry, we received no evidence that supported an independent inspectorate. Moreover, the governance of the inspectorate was not included in the terms of reference for the inquiry. Occasionally, the question was put to witnesses regarding their perspectives on independence, where some offered thoughts on the way forward. Many stressed, however, that it was an issue that they had not considered in any great detail before offering some initial thoughts.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: Yes.

Mr Storey: Does the Member not accept that the submission made by the NIPSA

representatives — we never got a satisfactory answer from the Department or the inspectorate as to the interference or the changes that were potentially made to reports — clearly indicated that something was going on to which someone has still not put their hands up?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his intervention. There is a line in the report that says that there was absolutely no evidence collected to support any accusations made. Indeed, in the very same week that it was suggested we should replicate the independence of Ofsted, the Education Minister at Westminster, Michael Gove, sacked Sally Morgan, the head of Ofsted, many believed, for no reason other than her political affiliation as a Labour peer. The question remains: how is that independent? Are those who seek an Ofsted model of governance content for the Minister to be able to sack at will the so-called independent head of an inspectorate?

There are at least a dozen fundamental questions that need to be addressed before settling on the preferred governance standing, including who will fund any such independent body; who will appoint members of such a body; and who will hold those members to account. Those are the sorts of questions that need to be answered long before we can seriously agree on the governance status of any future inspectorate body. It is surely more logical to research and evaluate a range of governance options as we move forward, and to defer any consideration in respect of statutory independence until such work has been completed.

For that reason, a Cheann Comhairle, I cannot support the motion, which calls upon the Minister to implement all of the recommendations that are contained in the report. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Rogers: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. A number of factors influenced the Committee's decision to conduct the inquiry. They include the Department's attempt to enhance the ETI's powers, concerns that were expressed about the high stakes of the nature of inspections and the apparent lack of consistency in the measurement of value added. I will address the debate purely from a schools perspective. I suppose that, at the outset, I have to say that my experience of inspections, both as a teacher and as a school leader, was positive, but I have met many for whom it was a different story.

I believe that the Department and the Education and Training Inspectorate need to learn lessons

from the report. Lesson one: it is not the inspectors who deliver school improvement, but the leaders and teachers in schools. Again, I pay credit to them for their dedication and hard work. An inspection can, however, assist the school improvement process if, first, the staff and governors have confidence in the process, have ownership of the findings and believe that they are valid. The district inspector plays a vital role in developing that trust. It is a very important but challenging role. I believe that there should be two reports: a short report for public consumption and a more detailed report which could feed into the school's development plan in order to drive further improvement. The majority of schools support the idea that there should be more practising principals and teachers on inspection teams. There should also be a more transparent complaints procedure.

Secondly, schools must have the resources available to effect improvement, bearing in mind that there are many factors that influence school and student performance, including the home learning environment and the quality of early years and previous education.

Thirdly, staff must be motivated to drive change. The ETI is very quick to say that it is not its responsibility to provide support. Instead, we have to depend on a depleted CASS service. Classroom teaching and leadership are key to school improvement, but we must bear in mind a recent ETI report which suggests that over half of lessons are not very good or better and that, across the sectors, management needs improvement in 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools. Quite bluntly, there is little high-quality staff development available, even if schools could afford it.

Take something like schools' self-evaluation — a must if we are ever going to develop school inspections into a quality assurance process. It is probably 20 years since I first organised a school's self-evaluating conference, but that process is still not well enough embedded in all of our schools because, I believe, the necessary expertise is not there to deliver it. There is a lot of expertise in our team of inspectors. However, apart from some good examples, they have not got the time to disseminate that good practice. There is some excellent work out there — special education comes to mind.

We need to see school support services and school inspection processes being more closely aligned. The language that is used in inspection reports is extremely important. We

need to change language like "inadequate" or "unsatisfactory". Words like that do nothing to motivate people.

The second lesson is that inspections should be data-informed, not data-driven. I was very taken by a principal of a school where up to 80% of the pupils were on free school meals. Its inspection was going very well until it was compared with end of Key Stage assessments. That was devastating for staff. The ETI could walk away after the inspection, but it was the principal and the senior management team who had to pick up the pieces among a totally deflated staff. The ETI does not see the aftermath. Even when an inspection goes well, stress builds up, and heads see an increase in sickness absence after an inspection.

12.15 pm

The ETI tells us that the data is only part of the picture, but it seems to drive everything else. In some cases, when the data is suspect, as is the case with end of key stage assessments, numerical targets simply inhibit improvement. We need a more holistic assessment of a school's performance. How can you use the same measure at the end of Key Stage 4 for students who were getting straight As at 11 and those from another post-primary school who were barely able to read?

Maybe there is just one lesson for us all here,
—

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

Mr Rogers: — and that is to listen to our teachers.

A professional, independent, broadly based, balanced inspection of schools is an essential component of school improvement.

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

Mr Rogers: I finish by recording my thanks to the Committee staff and all those who took the time and effort to contribute.

Mrs Dobson: I very much welcome the opportunity to join Members here today as the Committee presents the results of its inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate. Since we launched the inquiry back in June last year, we have taken considerable evidence from over 60 varied and distinguished organisations and individuals. That evidence and assistance have been invaluable to the Committee in arriving at what, I believe, is a

balanced and sensitive approach to the subject but one which recommends action rather than inertia.

At the very outset, I join other Members in stating my gratitude to the Committee Clerk and staff for the work they conducted throughout the inquiry; work that has been invaluable to Committee members.

During our evidence sessions, I am glad that we were able to clear up that the central reason for inspections in our schools is the pupil, not the bureaucratic process, the teachers, the buildings or the parents. Pupils must remain central.

The measure of any successful inspection should be the action that follows it. If areas for improvement are identified and there is no improvement, there is little point in an inspection taking place in the first place. Therefore, I believe that one of our key recommendations to provide additional support to help struggling schools to undergo a programme of improvement is entirely correct.

The process of communicating the results of inspections is also absolutely key. If parents are not able to fully understand the results of an inspection carried out at their child's school, that needs to be improved upon. Striking a balance is critical for staff and parents alike. It would be wrong to have an over-simplistic portrayal of the school's performance, nor would it be correct to publish an over-complex inspection report.

We must recognise that engagement with parents also has to improve. An answer to a question that I asked during the session in which we took evidence from the ETI officials sticks in my mind. I was told that the process of engaging in evening meetings with parents at a school due to be inspected had been discontinued some years back by the inspectorate because the turnout was so small. The reason given was this:

"it simply was not worth the resource."

The inference was that it was somehow the fault of the parents for not turning up to the evening meetings, rather than a failure on the part of the inspectorate to effectively communicate with parents.

Inspectors must begin the process of greater and more innovative connection with parents. That will strengthen the value of the inspection process overall. Inspections have to become more about the end product and the result rather than the process.

As I bring my remarks to a close, I once again praise the Committee staff for their hard work. I believe that they have come up with a radical report, which suggests reforms that, if implemented, will make a real difference to our schools and our pupils. Teachers and principals must no longer see inspections as threats but, rather, as opportunities for improvement in the education of our children. That will mean a change in mindset, which, I believe, will and must come sooner rather than later.

I urge the Assembly to support the report and the Minister to act on its recommendations for the sake of every single pupil in Northern Ireland.

Mr Lunn: I am glad to contribute to today's discussion. The report has taken a long time to produce. I do not think that we expected to spend six months on it, but it seemed to develop a life of its own. I do not want to be disrespectful, but we seemed to turn over the odd stone and then had to investigate a bit more what was under it. In no particular order, I thank the staff, in particular Peter McCallion, who is with us today, for managing to draw together a mass of evidence into a cohesive report that I encourage everybody to study, particularly the inspectorate.

Most people agreed that an effective school inspection system was a desirable thing. I thought that there would be some doubt about that, but that came through loud and clear. At least, in that respect, we are not going to follow the Finnish model, where they do not appear to have inspections at all.

The nature of inspections came in for some discussion and scrutiny. Should they be based on the present model of two or three days? Should they be announced two or three weeks in advance, or should they be unannounced? A body of opinion and the evidence that we got favoured unannounced inspections, and, frankly, I would, too. At least it has the effect of removing the enormous stress for the principal and staff of preparing for an inspection.

Another thing that came through — others have mentioned it — is the disparity between the experience of the inspectorate and how it views inspections and, dare I say it, the victims — that is, the staff and the principal in the schools — who definitely take a different view. As far as the inspectorate is concerned, the inspections are helpful, cooperative, supportive and non-confrontational. They are kind of an arm-around-the-shoulder, touchy-feely, helpful exercise that everybody will benefit from, and

the staff and principals will be kept apprised of what is going on at all stages right through the inspection and receive a helpful report afterwards. I think the staff see it differently. They see them as stressful and critical, with no real recognition given, particularly no recognition of the value that schools have managed to add in the course of their year's work, perhaps in difficult circumstances.

We took evidence from one school principal who came to talk to us. I will not name the school because I do not think that it is named in the report, but it is a primary school in a difficult area of north Belfast. There are paramilitary influences, and there are a lot of problems with truancy, absenteeism and parental failure to encourage their children. Over a number of years, the school had managed to improve gradually the situation of the pupils. When the inspectors came and did their inspection, the principal's comment was that, if he had been given a satisfactory rating, he would have challenged it, because he thought that the school was better than that. He thought that the improvement that the school had generated deserved better than that. The school got an unsatisfactory result, which was absolutely devastating for the staff, for him and for the pupils. It just floored them. The appeals process does not seem to cater for that. Appeals are not successful. There is a recommendation in the report that we should have a more structured appeals procedure, and I agree absolutely with that. It should be an appeal to a body that has nothing to do with the ETI or the Department.

The independence of the inspectorate kept coming up. I support the recommendation that it should be independent of the Department. I wish that somebody would explain to me — perhaps the Minister will have a go at it — what the rationale is for the inspectorate being part of the Department, to put it around the other way. It cries out to me that it should be an independent body. As far as renaming it is concerned, at least it would put a different emphasis on the thing and perhaps draw a line under the past.

I am running out of time. On the Irish-medium sector and the immersion part of it, the fact that inspectors who cannot really speak Irish go into Irish-medium schools kind of defeats the object, does it not? That needs more resources and a proper recognition of what the Irish-medium sector is trying to do. It is an insult to the sector that the inspectorate cannot —

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

Mr Lunn: — provide an Irish speaker to inspect an Irish-medium school. I will have to stop there.

Mr Craig: I start by declaring an interest as a member of two boards of governors, one of which has had major interaction with the inspectorate for the past couple of years. I am like a lot of Committee members — bar one, I think — in that I am one of the few people who, unfortunately, has had experience of the inspectorate. That experience has been good and bad. When I look at the school that the inspectorate came into, I see the positives and benefits of its coming in. There is definitely an atmosphere of staff being more focused on specific issues, which is one of the big benefits. The inspectorate clearly expanded the school's use of data and pupil tracking, and it greatly raised the focus on pupil profiles as a tool for seeing how a child's ability increases throughout his or her school life, which is of great benefit. The inspectorate has also led the school to review its entire curriculum. Once you understand how children are improving or not improving, you have an indication of what they are best suited to educationally.

All of that is very good stuff, and I cannot complain about the fact that, last year, the inspectorate saw that school as one of the most improved in the Province when it came to academic achievement. Those are all the good things that came out of the inspectorate going in and changing what was happening in schools. Aligned with that, however, are the downsides, the things that I do not believe the inspectorate gets right. First, it comes in and takes a snapshot of what is going on. It does not sit down with the key players in the school and allow them to explain what progress has been made and how the school is attempting to do some of what it will eventually implement anyway. I can give a simple example. The inspectorate criticised the school for not having a head of maths. In fact, the inspection interfered with and stopped the process of interviewing for that very post. Then, they had the cheek to criticise the school for having no one there. They do not really interact with the staff and senior management of the school on what plans are in place to improve on some of the issues that it ends up criticising it for.

The use of anonymous surveys is highlighted in the report, and I fully support the point made. My experience is that anonymous staff surveys, in particular, give a platform to those who have not achieved or advanced in the school and feel aggrieved. All you get from those individuals is negativity, which you would expect because nobody likes not being the winner in an

interview. I like the fact that the report clearly identifies that as a major issue in how the inspectorate should operate.

The language used in the reports is highlighted at, I think, section 7 of the recommendations. I do not think that any member of the Committee had an issue with the main body of inspection reports. The problem is that no one ever reads that. The press definitely do not read it; they look at the end of the report and at the language used in the conclusion. That is what does critical damage to the reputation of any school. I welcome the fact that our recommendations say that more moderate language should be used throughout all reports.

Running centrally through all of this is the fact that everybody agreed that there should be independence for the inspectorate. I find it hard to believe that the Minister would fight against independence for the inspectorate while his party —

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

Mr Craig: — fought for the independent oversight of the police. That is hypocritical.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension today. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.30 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise Members that question 7 has been withdrawn.

Milk: Prices and Quotas

1. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, following the removal of milk quotas, what action her Department will take to address the volatility of milk prices. (AQO 6368/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The dairy sector makes a very important contribution to the local agrifood industry. To ensure its future sustainability, it is vital that the sector remain competitive and profitable.

When milk quotas end, there will be no constraints on production, and future decisions will be taken by the dairy sector in the context of input costs and market returns. Some turbulence in the market may be expected as other countries ramp up production, and this, in turn, could affect milk prices here. However, I am encouraged by the first report of the economic board of the new EU Milk Market Observatory and the EU's optimism about market prospects and milk prices going forward.

My Department's overall aim is to help the dairy sector to improve its performance and grow its potential in the marketplace in a sustainable way. For example, we provided joint support with Invest NI for an industry-led dairy competitiveness study aimed at helping the sector to plan for the future, post milk quotas. The recommendations of that study are now being taken forward by the dairy industry.

The dairy sector has the potential to grow further and to exploit the opportunities arising from the predicted expansion in world population. My Department will continue to support the dairy sector's growth ambitions, as set out in the Agri-Food Strategy Board's report, 'Going for Growth', through the provision of education, training, technical support and research to help to improve efficiency,

competitiveness and innovation. In addition, it is envisaged that the sector will be able to avail of support under the new rural development programme.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Following the much discussion that there has been in the press about illegal movement of milk and milk actually flowing from farmers in the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland, can the Minister enlighten us on what discussions have taken place between her and the Agriculture Minister in the Republic to stop this illegal trading of milk?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously I condemn illegal trading of milk or any illegal activity. This is something that we have discussed at North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings, albeit not any of the specifics. I assume that the Member is referring to the article in 'The Sunday Times' at the weekend, which indicated that the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) in the South is investigating potential paramilitary links to that activity. I am aware of that report. It is vital that all agencies work together and that we are able to cooperate with each other no matter what your role is. I can assure the Member that my Department, through its enforcement team and my staff, will play its role in making sure that we protect the reputation of our milk industry, which is key to moving forward, and expose and bring to court anyone involved in any illegal activity.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí. Will the Minister please elaborate on the support that her Department has given to the dairy sector?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. My Department has provided support in many ways, particularly, a number of years ago, through the industry-led dairy competitiveness study, which is helping the dairy industry to prepare for the ending of milk quotas in 2015. Dairy UK is leading on the implementation of that study's recommendations. The work of the Agri-Food Strategy Board has set very challenging targets for the local agrifood industry up until 2020.

The local dairy industry receives, and will continue to receive, significant assistance from Government through the work that we do around research, training, knowledge transfer, benchmarking and product innovation alongside financial assistance through the regional food programme and the rural development programme. My aim is to ensure that the dairy sector can meet the challenges ahead and

continue to make a very important contribution to the local economy and to life in rural areas.

Mr P Ramsey: Minister, following on from Mr Dunne's supplementary question about the discussions that you have had, could you outline to the House any discussions that you have had with Minister Coveney regarding the dairy milk industry in Ireland and the abolition of milk quotas?

Mrs O'Neill: I apologise; I did not quite hear the question. If you want me to elaborate on the conversations —

Mr P Ramsey: It is regarding the Irish Government's position and the milk quotas in the South.

Mrs O'Neill: There will be natural challenges post quotas. We are at an advantage in that, in the past, we have never reached full quota; we have always worked at about 10% below quota. Quotas have not restricted any production here, so that is a plus in a sense.

However, in the future, there are obvious challenges across Europe. Indeed, with the growing world population, there are obviously opportunities that we need to exploit in moving forward. We need not look on quotas as a negative. While there are challenges, I think that our challenge is to make sure that we exploit other markets that may be open to our local industry and that we work across the island, because we can market what we have to offer right across the new markets that we will try to get in to. There are obvious advantages in that, and that is something that I have been discussing with Simon Coveney.

Mr Kinahan: Minister, you have said today that the Department is going to help, and you have given us a lot of generalities but no specifics. Can you please be more specific as to how we are going to increase our market share and help milk farmers and so on?

Mrs O'Neill: It goes without saying that the work that we have done with the Agri-Food Strategy Board has looked at the challenges and opportunities for the dairy sector, and I want to be able to play my role. I think that some of the key roles for the Executive to play are particularly around exploring new markets and going into countries where we may not have been before, as well as looking at what markets are open that we can be competitive in post-quota. There are many opportunities, and I want to play my role through DARD support for the dairy industry, whether that be through

the regional food programme, the rural development programme or the practical supports around innovation and research and development.

There are many levels of support that can come from my Department and others to help the industry to be sustainable in the future. The industry has been very aware of the ending of quotas for quite some time and has been preparing. The piece of work that the industry did alongside my Department and DETI, through Invest NI, has been key in helping plan for the future. As I said, there are many levels of support that we have been involved with, and I am happy to provide any further detail that the Member wants in writing.

Single Farm Payments: Future Allocations

2. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the efforts she has made to obtain agreement on the future allocation of single farm payments. (AQO 6369/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The process of reforming single farm payments has been ongoing for some time at European and local levels. My officials and I have sought to keep stakeholders in the North fully engaged in this process.

In October 2013, I launched an extensive public consultation on the reform of pillar 1 direct payments, which provided considerable analysis and outlined a suggested package of support to help focus the debate and crystallise views. I have personally met a broad range of organisations representing all sections of the farming community. My officials have attended a large number of stakeholder meetings that were attended by well over 3,000 people. It has been hugely valuable to me to hear from all sides in the debate as I work towards delivering a fair and balanced outcome. Everyone has had the opportunity to express their views and preferences in a very open and transparent manner.

The formal consultation drew a huge reaction, with over 850 responses received. I have already announced a substantial number of CAP reform decisions on which there was significant agreement and which have been broadly welcomed. However, a number of key decisions remain to be taken. The allocation of almost €2 billion of taxpayers' money over the remainder of this decade has to be done carefully, wisely and fairly. Given the importance of the remaining decisions, I will

take them to the Executive. Political discussions are ongoing, and it is my intention to bring my proposals on these issues to the Executive in coming weeks.

I am, of course, mindful of the 1 August 2014 deadline to notify the European Commission of our implementation plans, and it is my intention that we will be in a position to have an agreed CAP pillar 1 structure before that date.

Mr Allister: The Minister cannot be ignorant of the dire consequences for the farming community if we move immediately to a one-region, flat-rate distribution; her own departmental figures demonstrate that beyond doubt. Apart from the platitudes about seeking agreement, what actual steps has she taken to seek consensus on this matter? When, for example, did she last meet the key stakeholder on the producer side, the Ulster Farmers' Union? She talks about bringing a paper to the Executive: has she yet tabled that paper?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think that that is two questions so far.

Mr Allister: Is she just running down the clock to get her objective of a single region —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. This is Question Time, when Members have the opportunity to place a question to the Minister.

Mrs O'Neill: We have taken quite a number of decisions to date. However, there are some key decisions still to be taken, and I am actively pursuing our getting to a stage where we have an Executive paper that we can agree on. I do not think that it is ideal that we go to a position where there is a flat rate immediately. As part of the whole consultation exercise, I have listened carefully to the views of everybody concerned, and I am only interested in a fair outcome and a balanced approach to CAP reform. We are talking about serious amounts of taxpayers' money, and they should be distributed fairly.

In terms of taking a decision, a political process is ongoing. I am involved in that process and I hope to be in a position in the next number of weeks to be able to bring a paper to the Executive for agreement.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she state, at this stage, if she has been involved in discussions with party leaders and some Executive colleagues to try to reach a consensus paper that could be presented to the

Executive to end the uncertainty, given that Scotland has now reached agreement?

Mrs O'Neill: I have not been involved in discussions with party leaders. There is a political process ongoing. I am going to keep repeating that. There is nothing else to add to it. I hope to be able to bring the paper to the Executive for full discussion and, hopefully, agreement, in the next number of weeks.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I will be a bit more focused than my colleague from North Antrim. Given the fact that a flat rate immediately would be a shock/trauma to the industry, what can the Minister do today to reassure the farming industry that that will not be the case?

Mrs O'Neill: I think that my track record speaks for itself. Over all the consultation processes, I have listened very carefully to all stakeholders. Nobody has said that they did not have the ear of the Minister, because I made sure that my officials engaged at town hall meetings and at community centres. No matter where they were asked to go, they went. We have clearly listened to the views. Unprecedented numbers of people responded to the consultation, and we have taken our time and made sure that we analysed that properly.

I see the sector as being one of the most fantastic sectors. Look at the economic recession that we have been going through and the economic climate that we are in. This is the industry that has continued to shine. Nobody sitting on the Benches on this side is trying to disadvantage anybody in the industry.

Looking to the future, what we need is a fair and balanced CAP. We are talking about serious amounts of money, and it is only right and proper that it should be distributed fairly and that we have a sustainable industry into the future. I assure anybody from the farming community that all my decisions will be fair and balanced.

Mrs Dobson: Frankly, I think this is a disgrace. There are three weeks left in the Assembly term before the summer and there is still no deal, and the 1 August deadline is looming. The Minister said that she will bring it to the Executive. I hope that she does, but —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mrs Dobson: — if she does not, will she accept that the clouds are gathering and she will have

lost the confidence of the sector? If she does not bring it to the Executive —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mrs Dobson: — will she do the honourable thing and stand down?

Mrs O'Neill: I can say it no differently. I am in a political process. I aim to have a decision and to bring something forward to the Executive in the next number of weeks. I can dress it up or change my language if the Member wishes, but that is the situation. I will take my decisions in a fair and balanced manner. I will not be rushed into decisions. We are talking about £2 billion of money. I am not going to be rushed into a decision just to please people. *[Interruption.]* I accept that anybody in the farming community — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs O'Neill: Because of how it affects farmers, I have listened very carefully, and nobody can be in any doubt of that. The track record speaks for itself. I will take my decision to the Executive, hopefully in the next number of weeks. I do not think that it is in anybody's benefit if Europe takes the decision for us, because we are elected here by local people to take decisions, so that is my intention. If that is not the case, it will not be because I have been found wanting.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Stephen Agnew is not in his place.

Fisheries Task Force

4. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on what date the fisheries task force will have its first meeting. (AQO 6371/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: You will be aware that at the end of February I announced that I was planning to appoint a fisheries industry task force to undertake a fundamental examination of the challenges and opportunities facing the industry and to identify options for reform to help to ensure the future sustainability of the local fishing sector. At the same time I announced the provision of further financial assistance to the sector. Since that announcement, my Department's priority was to develop and deliver the assistance scheme whilst seeking to establish the task force. The inaugural meeting

of the fishing task force will take place on Friday 4 July.

Miss M McIlveen: Will the Minister detail what will be on the agenda, whether it will include options for a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme and if it is possible that fishing representatives will have the opportunity to pursue other agenda items through the task force?

Mrs O'Neill: At the first meeting, I want the task force to consider all the options and issues that it may want to scope further and, absolutely, a decommissioning scheme will still be on the table for discussion. The Member will be aware that we tried to progress it in the past but that there was no agreement. I am still keen that we can explore that issue further and I think there will be opportunities under the new funding round for that to happen. That will be on the table alongside all the current issues that are impacting the fishing industry at the moment, of which there are many, particularly around profitability for the industry.

What I want members of the task force to do at the inaugural meeting is to sit down and look at whether they are content with the membership, because we want to make sure that grass-roots fishermen also feel that they are part of the discussions. Everything is up for discussion, and, through the task force, the industry can work with the Department to decide what it wants to prioritise in the time ahead.

2.15 pm

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister tell us what priorities the fishing industry task force should consider?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, the priorities will include things such as profitability for the sector, particularly for certain fleet segments, and the actions that will be required to address that. The decommissioning scheme will obviously be on the table, as will the challenges with wind farms and the conflict there. I think that there will be quite a range of things. Most important to consider in moving forward will be the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund funding stream, how that can be got on the ground as quickly as possible and the types of schemes that fishermen want to see.

Mr Rogers: Minister, this time last year you announced funding through the European Fisheries Fund to include the establishment of a research and development fund to look

specifically at fishing gear with very low catch rates for unwanted fish. Do you have any update on that, please?

Mrs O'Neill: I can provide more detail to the Member in writing, but suffice it to say that a lot of the gear trials have been going forward. If you remember, the history is that Europe wanted to impose a particular type of gear on the industry. I opposed that and brought a proposal to the Commission. We have now trialled quite a number of types of gear through the research project that we took forward. Some fishermen favour certain types of gear over others, and there are obviously competing issues. It is an ongoing piece of work.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister agree with me that the time for talking has long since passed and that, unless and until something drastic is done to improve the lot of fishermen, we will have no fishing industry left? Is she listening closely to what the fishermen are telling her Department? In an answer to another Member earlier, she said that we are local representatives who answer to the people. Can you stand over that statement for the fishing industry?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. That is what we are elected to do. The reason why I am establishing the task force is that, sometimes, fishermen do not always think that their views are being represented, even through groupings or in their communication with the Department. Through this piece of work, my intention is that we will be able to improve communication across the board and look at what we in the Department can do to assist fishermen — all fishermen.

Going for Growth

5. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she last met the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to securing financial support for the agrifood Going for Growth strategy. (AQO 6372/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has played a key role alongside DETI in supporting the Agri-Food Strategy Board, both during the development of Going for Growth and as we move into the implementation phase. That involved ongoing engagement with DFP in preparing the proposed government response to the report.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I have jointly submitted

proposals to the Executive on the way forward for Going for Growth, and I am committed to delivering on its aims and objectives. For example, the report identified significant opportunities for export growth in the USA, Africa, the Middle East and the Far East. I have already visited China to talk to officials about the quality and safety of our produce, and my Department is supporting access to new markets through the efforts of the supply chain development programme and the veterinary service. Most recently, Singapore announced it was opening its markets to beef from the North and to Northern beef sourced from Southern cattle, and I am confident that others will follow.

Irrespective of the proposed market, any growth must be sustainable, and I welcome the Agri-Food Strategy Board's view that any growth must be based on sustainability and profitability for the entire supply chain, recognising the importance that each part plays in producing high-quality, traceable food. My officials continue to liaise with their counterparts in other Departments, including DETI and DFP, to progress agreed recommendations, and have submitted bids to DFP to support preparatory work for a farm business improvement scheme.

Mrs Overend: It has been 13 months since the strategy was first announced, and we have seen very little in that time. In fact, the delivery has been pretty pathetic. I do not mind where the blame lies and whether it is with DARD, DETI or DFP, but, in the eyes of most farmers, you are all letting the sector down.

Can the Minister give a commitment that Going for Growth has not been caught up in some futile game of political brinkmanship between the DUP and her party over the issue of welfare reform?

Mrs O'Neill: I can give a guarantee that I am as committed as I ever was to the Agri-Food Strategy Board's report. As I said, I have sent the Executive my response to it.

I do not think that it is fair to say that there has been no progress to date, as there has been progress. Quite a number of areas of work have taken place across Departments, including mine, to progress the asks of the document.

I will run through a very short list of some of the things happening in my Department in relation to the deferral of the export health charges identified as an obstacle to export. I proactively promoted agrifood in China, and OFMDFM promoted it in Japan. We have had the

opening of the Singapore market to beef and continued work on developing the new rural development programme, which, as the Member will be aware, I have always said is key to delivering some key asks of the Going for Growth strategy, particularly the farm business improvement scheme. The number of DARD postgraduate courses has increased, which was an ask, and we have created a dedicated contact point at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) for EU funding for research and development. We also reopened the manure efficiency technology scheme.

So it is incorrect to say that nothing has been done to date. Quite a lot of work is ongoing, and that is just in my Department. However, I want the report to be finalised at the Executive sooner rather than later.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Given that £250 million was originally envisaged for this scheme, can the Minister outline exactly what Executive funds have been targeted and agreed, and is there a suitable timetable for a Going for Growth implementation plan?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, my response to the document and that of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment are with the Executive, and we are waiting for a discussion on those any day. The key ask in that document is the £250 million for the business improvement scheme, which is key for the sector. We can look at land management schemes and at fencing and sheds for farmers, which are key needs in the industry. I am very keen to get those signed off so that we can implement the bigger projects sooner rather than later.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim bhuíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. What impact will the 0% transfer have on the delivery of Going for Growth?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that one of the key tools in enabling us to deliver on the Going for Growth strategy is the new rural development programme, so it is absolutely vital that we get sufficient funds. I have said clearly that, as a result of not being able to transfer money, the Executive have to step up to the mark to deliver on the additional financial support needed. As I said, I remain committed to delivering on the aims set out in the strategy and am exploring all options available in order to be able to achieve that.

More than ever before, it is vital that the Executive provide the funding and support to enable the Department to deliver on the objectives set out in the 'Going for Growth' document because all parties, particularly the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and me, signed up to it. It is a fantastic piece of work, and it would be a shame if it sat on a shelf and was not taken forward because of a lack of investment from the Executive.

DARD Headquarters

6. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her engagement with departmental staff in Dundonald House in relation to the proposed relocation of her Department's headquarters to Ballykelly. (AQO 6373/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As you will be aware, I remain committed to relocating my departmental headquarters to the former military site at Ballykelly. Since I announced my intention, my officials and I have kept staff fully up to date with developments. Very recently, my permanent secretary wrote to all staff in the Department to inform them that a paper on the business case for relocation is with my Executive colleagues for consideration, and he has committed to providing further regular updates as required.

The consultation with staff and their representatives continues through our agreed industrial relations mechanisms, known as the Whitley arrangements. A subcommittee of departmental and staff representatives meets monthly, specifically to consult NIPSA formally on all relocation issues. More recently, a further subcommittee was established to consider all of the HR issues. Furthermore, my officials have developed a dedicated intranet site, and staff have been provided with an email helpline for any questions that they may have.

As we move forward, my intention is that all staff in DARD will continue to be kept informed of progress and, as appropriate, fully consulted and engaged with throughout the programme. I previously stated my intention to continue with the commitment of the previous Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to engage fully throughout the process with staff and their representatives. To date, the engagement with NIPSA has been extensive and meaningful, and I intend to ensure that that continues.

Mr Copeland: As always, I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she give us some idea of her estimate of the number of staff working in

Dundonald House who, for whatever reason, may be unable or unprepared to move to the north-west? What realistic chance is there of all these staff being offered an alternative position in the greater Belfast area?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have the exact figures with me, but the Member will be aware that we did the initial staff survey in phases. First, we surveyed the DARD HQ staff, then the wider DARD staff and, finally, the wider Civil Service staff. I think that it was only natural, given that DARD HQ has been based at Dundonald House for almost 50 years, that the outcome of the DARD HQ survey was that the majority of staff who work there live in the surrounding area and, obviously, want to stay there. That is totally acceptable, and, of course, that is what they want.

We moved on to the next phase, which looked at the wider DARD staff, and that obviously created a bigger pool of people who want to work in the north-west and Ballykelly. Again, that was the case when we came to the staff surveys for the wider Civil Service. I am confident that there will be opportunities for transfer across the Civil Service and that there will be enough staff to staff a new headquarters in Ballykelly.

Mr G Robinson: Given the recent contrary speculation, will the Minister give the definitive timeline for the relocation of her departmental headquarters to Ballykelly?

Mrs O'Neill: The business case has been agreed. As you know, we set it out on a phased basis, and we are hopeful that we will have staff in place in 2017.

Mr Dallat: The last time that I was in Ballykelly, it was for gross insubordination at a checkpoint, but that, in no way, has deterred my endeavours to go back there. Will the Minister outline the progression that will lead to this swanky new headquarters and all the 800 jobs that she has promised? I do not want to be a doubting Thomas, but the Minister really needs to put flesh on the bones and assure us that this is for real.

Mrs O'Neill: I can absolutely assure you that it is for real and that my commitment for decentralisation is for real. I know that the Member has a particular interest in Ballykelly, but he can see that we are also moving very quickly to move fisheries to south Down, Forest Service to Fermanagh and Rivers Agency to Cookstown. That speaks for itself, in that I have a commitment to make sure that we

decentralise, and I am absolutely committed to the headquarters move. We have a project management board in place. I am not going to lead staff up the garden path. We are making sure that they are fully consulted throughout the process, and they welcome that. This is about a fair distribution of public sector jobs, fair and balanced growth and us being able to stimulate the economy in the north-west with the construction and the ongoing maintenance of the building. The benefits far outweigh any negatives, and I am absolutely committed to the project.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is not that often that a city slicker gets the chance to ask the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development a question. The Minister has mentioned the benefits of relocation a number of times in her answers: will she take a minute to outline those benefits?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. Thanks for that question. This, for me, is absolutely about a fair distribution of public sector jobs. It is something that the Executive are wedded to, and it is a Programme for Government commitment. I want to see this through. As I said, all the other opportunities that will now be available for people across the wider Civil Service to move into DARD in the north-west and to find employment that is closer to home and creates a far better work/life balance are very welcome.

As I said, the benefits of the stimulation of the local economy through job creation and the construction and ongoing maintenance of the building speak for themselves. We want to see this happen. As I said, I have a programme board in place that is very committed to taking forward the project, and I will continue to work with it over the next number of years until we see this come to fruition.

DARD Direct: Strabane

8. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the proposed DARD Direct office in Strabane. (AQO 6375/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Work on a new purpose-built government building on the site of the current social security office at Urney Road, Strabane, is due to begin in autumn 2014, subject to planning permission and the central procurement division's tender process. It will be the venue for the Strabane DARD Direct office and a modern jobs and benefits office. I expect the full range of DARD services to

farmers in the surrounding area to be available from this office by spring 2016. When delivered, the Strabane DARD Direct office will complete the full roll-out of 12 DARD Direct offices across the north.

Feedback from farmers about DARD Direct has always been very positive, and I believe that co-locating with DSD and DEL is a very cost-effective way for DARD to ensure that our customers in the north-west enjoy the same benefits as others.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for her response. How many jobs are expected to be relocated to Strabane? Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for her question. Approximately 39 posts will be relocated to the new DARD Direct office. The majority — about 25 jobs — will be from Asylum Road, and the remainder, approximately eight people, will be relocated from Limavady. There will be about six people from our existing office in Strabane.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is the end of the period for listed questions. We move on to topical questions.

2.30 pm

Lough Neagh

1. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to expand on her reasoning behind her decision not to proceed with buying Lough Neagh. (AQT 1281/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have not taken a decision not to buy Lough Neagh. The Member will be aware that we published the report and we now have the Executive response agreed, which basically states that there is a lot more homework to be done. There is a lot more scoping to be done. We must get the management structure right and have that partnership arrangement working, with one Department taking the lead. The Member will be aware of the challenges due to having so many vested interests, if you like, and so many different interests.

The report sets out clearly and the Executive agreed that the first thing that we need to have in place is the new management structure. We are consulting on that with the new council structures. Hopefully, that work will be finished within four to six months. Ownership is definitely not ruled out. It is still on the table and can be explored further, perhaps better,

with the structure that will be put in place, as opposed to Departments. They will have a better opportunity to look at scoping the potential rather than just the challenges, which sometimes seems to be the nature of government.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the Minister's answer and the fact that she is looking at a partnership approach for management. Will she confirm which Department will lead? The council side is the responsibility of the Minister of the Environment, and we need a joint approach to make sure of this work. Will she ensure that that happens?

Mrs O'Neill: I totally agree that we need a joint approach, but one Department has to take the lead. I am content that it is this one.

Fracking: DARD Involvement

2. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline what role her Department will play in any future consideration of any decision for a planning application for fracking or hydraulic fracturing. (AQT 1282/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have previously stated that I will not allow fracking to happen on DARD land, on Forest Service land, and that remains the case. Obviously, any decisions taken in regard to hydraulic fracking will have to go to the Executive, given their cross-cutting nature.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. What will she do if a decision on planning permission for fracking is brought before the Executive?

Mrs O'Neill: I have made clear my views on fracking: I am still absolutely convinced that, were we to allow fracking on our land, we would damage the clean, green image that we have across the island of Ireland, which serves us well. Any approach taken when it comes to the Executive would be based on that premise.

Beef Crisis

3. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the discussions she has had about the current beef crisis. (AQT 1283/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have met many groups, particularly NIMEA, to make sure that they were

aware of my views. Over the last number of days, I have met the Livestock Auctioneers Association. I have also met numerous farmers and elected representatives to discuss their concerns for the beef sector. We are all quite united about the sector, the challenges that are there for it and whom we need to challenge.

Over the next weeks, I intend to meet the Livestock Marketing Commission (LMC), retailers and processors to make my views known, particularly on something that, I feel, was very poorly done — the changes that they brought forward without any communication with farmers. That will not lead to a sustainable industry in the future. Taking decisions without consulting farmers is not a fair way to do business. The agrifood strategy report points clearly to the fact that there needs to be transparent processes and engagement throughout the supply chain, otherwise things will not work as we want.

Mr McMullan: On the engagements that we hope to have with NIMEA and others, what messages should retailers and processors get to ensure that farmers receive fair payment for their produce?

Mrs O'Neill: The challenges that farmers face over the price that they get for their produce have been well highlighted and documented over the last while. The one strategic issue that needs to be tackled is that, despite high prices last year, the beef sector still faced a lack of profitability. That is a key challenge for us all. It is a key challenge for all of us in government, particularly around the need to exploit new markets and find new avenues for our produce. The key message for retailers has to be that, unless there is transparency and fairness in the whole supply chain, we will not have a sustainable industry into the future. That is the key message that I will make sure that I put strongly when I engage with them over the next weeks.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Stewart Dickson is not in his place. I call Anna Lo.

Rural Development Programme: Match Funding

5. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with her Executive colleagues about match funding for the next rural development programme. (AQT 1285/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: We are working our way through that process. I hope to bring an Executive

paper in the next few weeks that will address the issues. The Member will be aware that in the next rural development programme I want to see fairness and balance. I also want to see farmers, the environment and the rural communities supported. I can give her an assurance that, no matter what my budget is, that will be the approach that I take.

Ms Lo: I very much welcome the Minister's assurance that there will be funding for this. How much funding are we talking about? Do you have enough for the programme?

Mrs O'Neill: Not at this moment in time. We know our European allocation, but we are working our way through what DARD's contribution will be and then what we get from the Executive through the Going for Growth strategy, which will help to shore up the rural development programme. I hope to have some positive news on that in the time ahead, because, as I said, I want to see a fair and balanced programme. In order to do that, we need the money to bring it forward.

Forest Service: Decentralisation

7. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a progress update on the decentralisation of Forest Service to Enniskillen. (AQT 1287/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: We are still on target. The work is ongoing, and we hope, forgive me if I am wrong, that Forest Service headquarters will be in place in Fermanagh in 2015.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that update, although it seems a long time since it was first announced. The delay seems to be quite significant. The number of personnel transferring to Enniskillen will be reduced from the original figure. Will the entire headquarters of Forest Service move or only part of it?

Mrs O'Neill: It is the majority of headquarters staff. I think the number is around 58, but I will confirm that with the Member.

Tree Diseases: Update

8. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the areas that were devastated by the various tree diseases, particularly the vast areas of East Antrim that were affected. (AQT 1288/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Just that work is ongoing. We are going into a period of surveillance, which over

the next number of months will be key, and we will have Forest Service staff out on the ground. We have no new confirmed cases, I think, since I last answered a question from the Member. Surveillance work is ongoing. We are still trying to prevent the spread of the disease and to get our message out as strongly as possible.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for that, but at this stage is there any consideration of a timeline for replacement and planting?

Mrs O'Neill: No. The priority has to be around surveillance work at this moment in time. We are keen to meet our planting targets. We have not always achieved what we wanted in terms of planting, so I am keen that we have some scheme on the ground that allows people to move forward with planting as quickly as possible. However, the priority has to be around surveillance and containing the disease where we can.

Rural Development Programme

9. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, who is no doubt aware that the rural development programme is vital to many rural communities, what reassurance she can give about that programme, given that there has been zero transfer of money from pillar 1 to pillar 2 as a result of a certain court case. (AQT 1289/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is unfortunate, to say the least, that the court case happened. It robbed rural development and rural communities of adequate funding that would have been used beneficially for the farming community and the wider rural community for fantastic projects that, I am sure, the Member is aware of, but some great projects have been taken forward through the rural development programme.

There is a misconception that people like to peddle that money was being taken off farmers to be distributed elsewhere. That was not the case, because in the past all modulated moneys always went to farmers. Farmers are of the rural community, so they deserve services in rural communities also. Does it create a challenge? Absolutely it creates a challenge for the new programme, but I have said clearly that the Executive need to step up to the plate and give the funding that we would have otherwise been able to transfer, which will allow us to have a well-funded programme going forward that is balanced and fair in its approach.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for that extensive answer. Extending the question, has the Minister been able to have any discussions with the Minister of Finance with a view to getting Executive funds to begin supporting the limited pillar 2 money that is there for rural development?

Mrs O'Neill: The allocation for Going for Growth is an Executive decision, so I have approached the Executive with a paper. The Finance and Personnel Minister is also involved in that process. That is where we sit. We hope that we will get some movement on that in the time ahead, because I want to hit the ground running with our new rural development programme. We do not want to be left behind because we are waiting for a funding decision. I am keen that we get a decision on that, and, as I said, the Finance and Personnel Minister is part of the Executive process.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Cathal Boylan is not in his place. As the next period of Question Time does not take place until 2.45 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease for a few minutes.

2.45 pm

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 7 and 14 have been withdrawn.

Training Programmes

1. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assurances she can give that future training programmes, including suicide awareness, will be awarded through open competition to ensure equality of opportunity for providers. (AQO 6383/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Member for his question, and I can confirm that, in line with procurement rules and best practice in delivering value for money, all potential providers with the necessary skills and experience will have the opportunity to offer their services in managing or running training programmes. That does not apply to the Department's own training needs, which are normally serviced through the Centre for Applied Learning, which is part of DFP.

In the specific case of suicide awareness, an assessment of the results of a pilot study will take place in due course, and I am therefore unable to give a full report at this point on

whether and when a training programme will emerge.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she give us a clear assurance that further suicide awareness training programmes will be awarded through competition and not given to your next-door neighbour — next door to your constituency office virtually — as was the case in September 2013 when the Public Initiative for the Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm (PIPS) was awarded £30,000?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is a pity that the Member has chosen to be particularly petty over suicide prevention training programmes. To be factually correct, my next-door neighbour is not involved in suicide prevention awareness; she is Mrs Kane.

Mr Dunne: It is on the same block.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Niamh Louise Foundation, which is a rural suicide prevention awareness programme, and PIPS were cited because they are working with grass-roots groups on the ground. It is a pilot programme. I have seen some of the work on the ground and heard anecdotally across the country, not just in north Belfast, that this should be a success, and I hope that that will be reflected in our report. Based on that report, and hopefully on the success that it will highlight, future programmes, which I hope to bring forward with the supportive of Executive colleagues, will certainly be put out to tender.

Mr Dunne: With equality, hopefully.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister and her Department's intervention on a lot of key projects and their impact. Will the Minister and her Department fund further suicide prevention initiatives, specifically in sport?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. It is important that all Executive members do their best to support the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in tackling suicide and preventing it. It is everyone's business, and sport, but not exclusively sport, has proven to be one of the best examples of people working with grass-roots groups on the ground to access much-

needed services. If funding is committed to the suicide prevention programme in conjunction with Sport NI and others involved in sport, post-project evaluation will be carried out, and, as a result of that, we will certainly bring forward further bids and further examples of where we need a joined-up approach. As I tried to say in response to the primary question, anecdotal evidence is that groups were doing that type of work anyway. It gives value and status to the work that they are doing collectively to try to tackle the scourge of suicide in our communities.

Mr P Ramsey: Suicide is the most sensitive and emotive subject matter that any community and family can face. Is the Minister mindful of the fact that a lot of excellent and shining work is done by the community and voluntary sector across Northern Ireland in helping to prevent suicide and in educating families? Is she minded to include them in any process and any tendering exercises?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I totally agree with everything that the Member said. Indeed, he will be aware through his Foyle constituency that many of the groups work together and do very good work under very strenuous circumstances. Most of the organisations are made up of members who have been bereaved through suicide or of family members who are working with relatives who are experiencing poor mental health.

So it is imperative that those people are always taken into account in anything that we do. I hope and anticipate that the results of the pilot survey will tell us what we already know: that we need to do more of this work with groups on the ground, have a better joined-up approach across government and, most of all, make sure that the people who are furthest away from good access to services are brought right into the middle.

Mrs Dobson: My question follows from your answer to Mr Ramsey and is also on suicide awareness. The Minister will be aware of the local, often voluntary organisations that play such a pivotal role. I know the case of MindWise in Banbridge and the work that it does for the community. What support will the Minister give to small organisations? What steps will she take to ensure that they will not be disadvantaged in any way in competing for future funding programmes?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I support what the Member said about the work of MindWise, particularly, as the Member will be aware, its work in libraries and in rural communities. That work was

undertaken through one project based in an urban area and another in a rural area. The main functions of suicide prevention lie with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. As I have said before and will repeat, it is everyone's business to try to do something to tackle the issue and provide opportunities that help to improve mental health and prevent suicide. I am conscious of the volunteering efforts of the families, in particular, who are involved in those programmes, and of the fact that the problem does not recognise where people live, their postcode, class, gender or politics. We must all do something to help to prevent suicide in our families and communities.

Musical Instruments for Bands

2. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans to increase the annual funding allocated to the Arts Council's musical instruments for bands funding stream, in order to enable more bands to avail themselves of this finance. (AQO 6384/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Through the Arts Council, my Department has been able to maintain the level of funding for the musical instruments for bands scheme at £200,000 for the last four years. I believe that this is a welcome achievement, in light of current economic difficulties, and supports the North's long-standing tradition of music-making and the significant interest in bands here across both main cultural traditions. Should an opportunity for additional capital become available, I would fully support a case to continue and develop this high-impact programme. Increased funding would not only extend its reach but enable the purchase of instruments for brass, accordion and traditional bands. Music-making enhances the social and cultural life of all traditions, and, as Minister, I support all aspects of music and a wide variety of musical styles including classical, contemporary, concert music, opera, jazz and pop.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her response. I think the Minister is aware that the maximum that can be drawn down is £5,000 per band. That can go some way to assist, for example, flute bands. However, for pipe bands, silver bands and accordion bands, that provision is restrictive. Will the Minister look at the upper limit for each application?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The money is awarded to the Arts Council, and it decides what award is

made. However, I will take the Member's concerns back to the Arts Council because I have also had representations from groups involved in Irish traditional music. When, for example, they are buying fiddles or uilleann pipes, the cost can be tens of thousands of pounds. Certainly, I am happy to pass on the Member's concerns to the Arts Council, but I can give no guarantee at this stage that the limit will increase.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her extensive answer. Will she confirm whether her Department supports bands in any other way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The City of Culture included a significant involvement of marching bands, with a number of the events featuring local bands. They added to the Twelfth of July celebrations as part of a cultural programme with partners and stakeholders in the city. Marching bands participated in the Walled City Tattoo, the 400th anniversary of the wall celebration, and the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, amongst other projects. It is my intention to build on the success of 2013, particularly in the city and surrounding areas, and I have made a bid to the Executive in the June monitoring round for additional funding to meet that commitment.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her answers. The Arts Council is often criticised for most of its funding streams being Belfast-centric. Are there any criteria that she can ask the Arts Council to include to ensure that rural bands are also able to avail themselves of that funding?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council is criticised for many things, most times unfairly, in my opinion. The application process is open to everyone, regardless of where they live. It is not the Arts Council's fault that demand seems to come from cities more than rural communities. If there is a demand from bands in his constituency, he should certainly encourage them to apply. There is not a city-centric approach to funding awards from the Arts Council or, indeed, any of DCAL's other arm's-length bodies. Funding is on the basis of need and demand, in this case in rural communities.

Artefacts: Local Storage

3. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what additional storage provision is available for locally excavated artefacts. (AQO 6385/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. The storage of locally excavated artefacts is a matter, in the first instance, for the landowners of the sites where excavations are undertaken in accordance with the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects Order 1995 and the Environment Agency's licensing procedures. No arrangements are in place for my Department to provide additional storage for objects and archives that landowners, developers or commercial archaeologists have not presented to museums for assessment and possible acquisition into their collections.

The Member may be aware that a recent survey commissioned by the Environment Agency, which is responsible for the licensing of all excavations in the North, estimates that over 1,800 archives are held by commercial archaeologists on behalf of developers. Those have a volume of 704 cubic metres, which is the equivalent of 10 40-foot shipping containers, stored at a range of locations across Ireland. I understand that Minister Durkan is being advised on options for taking that forward, which may lead to an Executive paper being presented that will address the post-construction boom backlog and related storage issues.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her response. I have in front of me the survey findings. However, I should point out that the survey also talks about the limited capacity of the museums sector to accept archives. A letter from the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland — that is North and South — also says that there is a lack of properly qualified archaeological curators in museums at a local and national level. That obviously points to the fact that we need more curators in our museums. What steps will the Minister take to address that deficiency?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. I have not been presented with that concern by the museums body. However, I am happy to forward that on. As the Chair of the Environment Committee, the Member will know that there is a weakness in PPS 6 around who has responsibility for archives of artefacts and ecofacts that have been found. I have no doubt of the curation skills and expertise in museums. I hope that the report, which I have not seen, from the working group will provide a better way forward. We all share a fear, not only about treasures that have been lost but those that could potentially be lost in the future. We can exhibit those and learn from them as a society and as communities, because they tell us about

our ways in the past. That sits very heavily on a lot of us. I hope that the Minister of the Environment brings forward, through the working group, a way forward that we all can respond to positively.

Mr Hilditch: I appreciate the crossover between Departments and what the Minister has informed the House of today. In her opinion, has there been any assessment, by either Department, of the cost of providing additional storage for artefacts?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In fairness to the museums, the costs fluctuate depending on the number of artefacts that people say are being held by private developers and private archaeologists. As I said in answer to Anna Lo's question, at this stage, the estimate averages out at some 1,800 artefacts being held, which is in the region of 704 cubic metres or 10 40-foot lorries. That gives you an idea of what we are talking about.

3.00 pm

When the Minister of the Environment brings forward the paper from the working group, it will put a bit more emphasis on what we need to do. I anticipate very strongly that, on receipt of that paper, the Minister of the Environment will make a bid to the Executive because it will, I have no doubt, entail vast sums of public money to have these archives not only assessed but housed, stored and exhibited. I am looking forward to seeing the results of that as well.

Mr Byrne: Has the Minister had any discussions with her counterpart in the Republic, Minister Deenihan, about having some shared storage facilities for artefacts on a cross-border basis?

Ms Ní Chuilín: We have not had any discussions about artefacts. Minister Deenihan and I have discussed the differences in our legislative approaches, but it is in their legislation that the Minister of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht have to have responsibility, and the legislation guides their respective Departments on what they need to do; it is not the case with ours. As I said in my response to Anna Lo, that is one of the weaknesses of PP6. I anticipate that when Minister Durkan brings forward the paper, he will highlight some of those gaps and weaknesses. There is no resistance across this island to Jimmy Deenihan and me working on this; it is a matter of getting a legislative

framework and the resources to do such work in future.

Orangefest

4. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much financial support her Department has given to Orangefest in each of the last three years. (AQO 6386/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. DCAL's funding for events is distributed mainly through its arm's-length bodies. The Ulster-Scots Agency has advised that it provided a total of £9,835.77 in 2011 and £8,009.90 in 2012 to groups using the term "Orangefest" or similar. There were no awards in 2013, although, outside the period in question, the Arts Council provided over £6,000 for Orangefest at the Spectrum centre in 2010 and over £6,000 to the Shankill Festival of Culture and Celebration in 2009 and 2010. The Member should also note that this information relates only to groups that have used the term "Orangefest" or similar; therefore, this may be an under-representation of the funding position.

My Department also provides funding to community festivals administered by local councils. Councils have advised that the fund provided over £4,400 in 2011-12 and again in 2013-14, which also includes their own match funding. Again, this information relates only to groups that have used the term "Orangefest" or similar.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for her answer, although it is disappointing that so little goes to such a large festival, given that 750,000 people attend Orange festivals annually across Northern Ireland, with 250,000 of those in Belfast alone. In her previous answer, she mentioned need and demand, and given that there is clear evidence of need and demand for more funding for this, unlike funding for the Irish language, which is dying —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr Clarke: What assurances can the Minister give that more funding will go towards Orange festivals, given the large number of people who become involved in them?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member should be corrected: the Irish language is not dying; it is flourishing. I am sure that the Member and his friends are happy to know that. In ensuring funding for festivals, the demand is there; it is

up to the groups to lobby their local councils. My contributions to local councils for festival funding need to be matched by the councils. If the Members are not doing their jobs locally, there is not much that I can do about it.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answers up to this point. An dtig leis an Aire a chinntiú má tháinig maoiniú do Fhéile Oráisteach Bhéal Feirste fríd an choiste féilte pobail? Will she confirm whether funding for Belfast Orangefest was awarded through the community festivals fund?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said previously, DCAL provides community festival funding which district councils administer and match. Any culture or community group may be eligible to apply. Orange cultural groups can and do receive community festival funding from local councils. Belfast City Council has advised that Belfast Orangefest has not made any application to the community festivals fund, although it is aware of the programme and is included in the relevant circular lists. Belfast City Council did make an award to Orangefest through the development and outreach fund in 2011-12, the final year of the fund. That funding was never claimed.

Mr McNarry: Does the Minister agree that the money has been well spent so far, and that it is deserving of appropriate increases? If she had the ability, would she make a bid for those appropriate increases?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I agree with the Member in that festival funding is very important, particularly in relation to cultural celebration. Regardless of how we feel about each cultural celebration, it is a very important fund. I agree that it needs to be increased so that people who celebrate festivals all over can access it. It is certainly something that I am happy to look at in the future but, certainly for this summer and the immediate period, the level of funding will remain as it is. I am actively looking at how we can increase it because I believe that, particularly in relation to rural communities and those that face particular difficulties in the summer, festivals are a way in which we can celebrate our culture in a very positive way and hopefully generate economic growth, so that everyone benefits from festivals rather than just those who attend the events.

Culture: Tourism Role

5. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with key stakeholders regarding the role that culture can play in the local tourism product. (AQO 6387/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. My Department plays an important role in promoting cultural tourism by providing the cultural activities and facilities that form a vital element of the local tourism product. My officials work closely with key stakeholders on a range of groups across the DCAL family to help to promote here as a high-quality cultural and tourist destination.

The 2013 year demonstrated our ability to host internationally significant events, such as the City of Culture and the World Police and Fire Games, attracting thousands of visitors here. I am committed to building on the success of the City of Culture with a focus on developing the north-west as a driver for the economy and tourism. Culture has a key role to play in many of those events, as highlighted by the cultural programme, sponsored by my Department, which ran alongside the World Police and Fire Games last summer. It is important that we showcase our cultural offering to the widest possible audience. We will have further opportunities to do that in the future with the return of the Tall Ships and the Irish Open golf to the North.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware that, for almost a full year now, Ligoniel True Blues, Ballysillan LOL and Earl of Erin have wanted to celebrate their culture in a peaceful and respectful manner by returning on their feeder parade from last year's Twelfth of July celebrations. Does she agree that it is very damaging for our tourism product to send out a message that the celebration of culture in Northern Ireland is conditional?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not really sure that to spend £9 million on policing Twaddell Avenue is the best example of cultural tourism or the promotion of culture. I am sure that you would, and I think that that is an indictment on the people who are nodding in agreement with you. What we need to do is resolve that issue. I am saddened and disappointed that because we, as adults, cannot get our act together, we are condemning young people to a life of going through the criminal justice system. You are belligerent and begrudging. You will not acknowledge and recognise equality across the board. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not think that it has anything at all to do with culture. I only wish that you had asked a question that would actually promote what we have to offer here instead of using an example that sections one side of the community off against another. Shame on you.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an Aire faoin Chathair Chultúir 2016. Does the Minister support Derry City Council's bid for the Irish City of Culture 2016?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Given the success of 2013, I fully support Derry City Council's bid for the title. I recently met a range of stakeholders from the city to discuss the bid. Indeed, the city has a strong ambition to become European Capital of Culture and also to achieve cultural world heritage site status.

Derry City Council believes that the status associated with becoming an Irish City of Culture will help to achieve those ambitions through the outworking of strategic and collaborative partnerships across the island.

Last week, I met Jimmy Deenihan to discuss the bid further, but I will put in a caveat that, while we are very supportive of Derry and, indeed, the north-west, we certainly cannot give blanket support to providing huge sums of public money without a proper assessment of the needs of people in the surrounding area and, indeed, what we all hope to achieve through economic and cultural regeneration.

Mr Rogers: What joined-up working has the Minister's Department undertaken with DETI to encourage tourism throughout the North, using the legacy of recent large sporting events that have taken place here?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary. DETI and DCAL, amongst others, are involved in various working groups, looking at what we have done well and what we need to do better.

With the Irish Open announcement and, indeed, the Giro, which we are still basking in the success of, we can show that, last year, the previous year, this year and, certainly, in the years ahead, we have tried and will try to do our very best to make sure that we bring internationally recognised events and activities here, which will help to promote tourism in a very positive way and make sure it leaves a legacy, so that people get involved not only in

the Giro and the World Police and Fire Games, for example, but in physical activity and sport.

People living in towns and villages have not really seen the investment that they feel they are entitled to benefit from, so it is vital that we collectively pull our weight to make sure that we get the best opportunities for here.

Broadcasting: Funding

6. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action she has taken to secure funds for broadcasting, including the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Broadcast Funds. (AQO 6388/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. Although broadcasting powers remain a reserved matter, I am committed to ensuring that the specific characteristics and needs of the North are fully considered in the development of broadcasting policy. I have personally intervened to secure funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Broadcast Funds for a further year until the end of March 2016.

While this is a welcome move, I will continually and proactively engage with the broadcasting agenda, with a view to securing from DCMS a longer-term funding commitment for these broadcasting funds and at higher levels.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. What would be the implications of a loss to the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Broadcast Funds? What would be the implications of that for the sector?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are growing demands for Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund productions. From their inception, both have achieved audiences that have exceeded their targets. So, a loss of funding would have a significant impact on television companies and individuals, including apprenticeships, trainees, and those working in the local production industry. It is estimated that around £5 million in turnover would be lost from the overall independent production sector.

Furthermore, like television production in Ireland — remember that BBC and RTÉ are largely publicly paid for — the Irish language production sector is not sustainable without substantial government investment, nor is the Ulster-Scots production sector. This would

mean that government funding for indigenous languages in the North would fall behind that provided by our Scottish and Welsh counterparts.

Mr Humphrey: On the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund, can the Minister assure the House that there will be consultation with the Ulster-Scots Agency, the Ulster-Scots Community Network, the ministerial advisory group for the Ulster-Scots Academy (MAGUS) and the wider Ulster-Scots community on programmes and concepts for programming in the future to ensure that programmes reflect the culture, tradition and heritage out there in the Ulster-Scots community?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can certainly give that commitment. I am sure that the Member will agree that programmes have improved in recent times. I think that we all wanted to see that improvement. The communication and, indeed, the relationships between NI Screen, the network, the Ulster-Scots Agency and, indeed, MAGUS have improved, and productions have improved with the help of local production advice, skills and expertise. I think that we can already see the result of that.

For me, securing that extra year's funding was important, but it is a small lifeline for those groups. In the autumn, I intend to visit again Ed Vaizey and DCMS representatives and meet representatives from all the other political parties in the run-up to the Westminster election to get their commitment that the broadcast funds will endure well beyond the next mandate and even beyond that again and to ask for an increase in the money awarded, because I think that our broadcast funds need to have better support and better investment.

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: That ends questions for oral answer. We now move on to topical questions.

Sporting Facilities: Regent House School, Newtownards

1. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will continue to help to provide sporting facilities for the local community on the Comber Road site in Newtownards, which is run by Regent House School. (AQT 1291/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not familiar with the project, although I am familiar with the

Member's representation for his constituency on the Ards peninsula. As I said, I am not familiar with the facilities, but I will say this: in rural areas, where there is very little in some of the communities, and, in fact, some of the sporting facilities are the community, it is important that that support be continued. I expect the Member to make representation through Sport NI not only to have whatever investment that is there continued but to have it strengthened and secured. I am happy to take any details from the Member and pass them on to Sport NI.

Mr McCarthy: I am very grateful to the Minister. I would very much like to see her join me on a tour, where I can show her what is required. I pass on comments from Regent House, which thanks —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr McCarthy: — Sport NI for the wonderful provision of funding for the hockey pitches that were officially opened this morning.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr McCarthy: On the back of that, the sites on the Comber Road have been vacant for some time —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. Order. Can we have a question, please?

Mr McCarthy: I am asking the Minister whether she will make sure that there will be no further delay in the provision of facilities at the Comber Road site in Newtownards.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will raise the Member's concern with Sport NI to ensure that there are no unnecessary delays. He will appreciate that I cannot give a commitment from the Dispatch Box that that will not be the case. I do not think that he would expect me to say that, but I will be happy to raise his comments and issues with Sport NI, and I will correspond with him accordingly.

Football Stadia Funding

2. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on funding for the subregional stadia for clubs such as Bangor Football Club and others throughout Northern Ireland that have long awaited such funding. (AQT 1292/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member may or may not be aware that the subregional programme was not due to start until 2015, but I have started the process in the Department and got staff organised, because, hopefully, we will have Casement Park on board soon. We need to have seamless links between the stadia development and the subregional stadia. I am working very closely with the IFA on facilities management. On the basis of that, and, indeed, a confirmation of the budget, I will be happy to take representation from the Member about clubs in his constituency.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer, but can she clarify that she has bid for such funding? I understand that she has made preparations. I said "Bangor Football Club", just for clarity.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of Bangor Football Club, particularly through the work of Alex Easton, in fairness to him. It is the first time that you have ever raised the issue of Bangor Football Club, but I am sure that you have got with the programme, as they say.

It is not appropriate for me to make bids at this stage. It will be appropriate for me to make bids in the autumn in preparation for 2015. On the basis of that, I will bring the information forward to the Member, if he wishes to write to me.

City of Culture: North-west Legacy Plan

3. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the City of Culture legacy plan for the north-west. (AQT 1293/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: At the minute, we have a bid in with the June monitoring round, and we are awaiting its outcome. I know that the Member has raised the issue of Strabane and other parts of the north-west. Discussions with city councils, shadow councils and local councils are ongoing, and deal with groups in the area. So, we are just waiting on the outcome of the bid.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her response. Can I ask her whether she can give assurances that the shadow council will be represented when proposals for the north-west legacy are being discussed and brought forward?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can give the Member that assurance. I am happy to meet her and others from the surrounding areas, as I have already done, to ensure that, yes, the bid for Derry is supported but also to ensure that the areas in the north-west are included. It is vital, particularly for Strabane, that they are represented in any future funding or future investment.

Broadcasting: Investment

4. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline how broadcasting in general will be more secure in the North, given her previous answer in which she outlined the importance of securing the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Broadcast Funds. (AQT 1294/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is vital that we have the same government investment in broadcasting in general and the Ulster-Scots and Irish Language Broadcast Funds as that enjoyed in Scotland and Wales. I will make that case to counterparts in DCMS and to other political parties and their representatives around culture, media and sport. Broadcasting here relies very much on local commissioning and local production, and local people I have talked to, far and wide, who are involved in the industry feel that they are not getting their fair share. It is important that we look at investment in broadcasting, particularly in relation to protecting the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Broadcast Funds.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response. I urge the Minister to continue her efforts to provide better opportunities for all involved in broadcasting, particularly local students, trainees and, often, local companies, to get greater commissioning opportunities.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I certainly will. As I said to the Member previously, the best way to do that is by making sure that all the representatives of the political parties make a commitment before the next Westminster election to the continuation and increase of the investment. That is for not only the broadcast funds but broadcasting in general.

Edward the Bruce

5. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the support her Department will give to celebrate the 700th anniversary of the landing of Edward the Bruce

in Ulster and his subsequent campaign, given that she will be well aware that next year marks that occasion. (AQT 1295/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to write to the Member. I have no details of any specific celebrations. I am aware that areas, particularly in north Antrim, have mooted, if not cited or dictated, that they intend to apply to arts councils and local councils to get support for it. I am very supportive of that, because, at the end of the day, this is about making sure that people who celebrate anniversaries that do not fall within the decade of centenaries have an opportunity to apply to the community festivals fund, for example. It is also about them having an opportunity to apply and work with libraries, PRONI and other arm's-length bodies in DCAL to ensure that we provide as much of a cultural package as possible to help people in those celebrations.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her support. Can the Minister make any resource or any of her departmental officials available to the new super-council — the Mid and East Antrim District Council — which will be celebrating and will be the main attraction for the Bruce anniversary?

Ms Ní Chuilín: If the councils and shadow councils have not already spoken to their arts council, any of the DCAL officials or its arm's-length bodies, I anticipate that they will certainly do so after today's Question Time, led by the Member.

Milk Cup: DCAL Contribution

6. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what contribution her Department will make to the Milk Cup. (AQT 1296/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I was annoyed at the way in which the Milk Cup and Foyle Cup were, pardon the pun, kicked back and forward from one Department to another in previous years. I made the decision to give money to the Foyle and Milk cups. I have made a bid to do so again this year. I still await representation from the organisers for meetings, to see how we can take this forward on a longer-term basis. I am aware that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has also been very supportive. It is important that we do better long-term planning, particularly around the sustainability of the competitions.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her response. The Minister will no doubt be aware of the success of this annual festival of football, its impact on tourism and the opportunities that it

creates for young boys to participate in a world-class event. Will she commit to assisting the organisers in future events?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I support the Member's comments on the status of the Milk Cup competition. Football legends have cited the Milk Cup as an example of an event at which they do what they do and do what they do best. That is certainly the case for people involved in junior soccer. As I said to the Member, I have made a bid. I am keen to try to make sure that there is investment this year and, indeed, for future years. The ETI Minister has the same appetite to do something more on a longer-term basis. To that end, I am waiting for the outcome of the monitoring rounds. I am also trying to work with organisers through officials, Sport NI or both to get better sustainability and projections for the competitions in the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Anna Lo is not in her place.

Sports Facilities: Girdwood

8. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the T:BUC proposals for sports facilities and services at the Girdwood site. (AQT 1298/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. At the minute, the Executive are considering papers on the T:BUC proposals. Girdwood is one of the examples where, working collectively with ministerial colleagues and other bodies such as Belfast City Council, Sport NI and the Sports Institute, we can all pool our efforts and resources to have a better impression of Together: Building a United Community principles and what they look like. It is also very good for children and young people who have not followed the academic route but particularly want to go down the vocational route to acquire skills, opportunities and expertise around sports.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire le haghaidh a freagra go dtí seo. Will the Minister elaborate a wee bit on what the role of Sport NI and other stakeholders might be in the development and delivery of services at the site and other opportunities?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to do that. Sport NI has been practising in sporting programmes for many years, as the Member will be aware. Collectively with the Sports Institute and working with community groups, sports organisations and universities, along with DCAL and, hopefully, the Department for Social

Development, it will be able to target particularly vulnerable or hard-to-reach children and young people who have been working with groups on a voluntary basis for many a year and want to have a career and get employment in that field. Hopefully, with that wrap-around support, they will have better qualifications and accreditations to steer them in the future. Apart from anything else, it is a site that has been earmarked for development. There is no better legacy for an example of ongoing regeneration than a site that is used 24/7, particularly if it is floodlit and youngsters are playing sport.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Jim Wells is not in his place.

Committee Business

Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Education on its inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the school improvement process [NIA 132/11-15]; and calls on the Minister of Education to implement the recommendations contained in the report. — [Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education).]

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the opportunity, as a member of the Education Committee, to speak on this important topic. Whilst I am relatively new to the Education Committee, I also acknowledge the role of the Committee staff and the various sectors that gave their time to give evidence on the subject. It is important that the Committee strives to continually look at how we collectively can improve schools and teaching and learning. We would fail in our responsibilities and duty if we did anything less.

It has been identified through the inquiry that there is benefit and importance to inspection and to encouraging a culture of self-evaluation. Inspection and evaluation can and often do take many forms, from arm's-length bodies to those directly run by Governments. In respect of school inspections, the Committee reflected on a more collaborative approach between the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and schools. It reflected that that was preferable. It considered ways in which that could happen, such as the use of third-party questionnaires, revised inspection reports and a consistent lead role for district inspectors.

The Committee debated, as stated in recommendation 16, that the revised inspectorate should be rebranded and should be independent from the Department. However, that view was not held by all members of the Committee. Members felt that that needed closer examination and scrutiny. Decisions to create an independent body may require legislative change and may have financial implications.

The General Teaching Council (GTC), for example, suggested that the role of district inspectors was "a well-received role" and described them as:

"supporting a continuous improvement process in schools".

The inquiry also referred to Scotland and, in particular, its use of a two-way collaborative approach to inspection by the inspectorate and support services. I would welcome hearing the Minister's response on that. The Committee noted that, despite differing commentary on the nature of inspections or even the means by which they are carried out, almost all stakeholders strongly supported inspection as key to the process of school improvement.

3.30 pm

The Committee recommends:

"in line with the OECD findings, measures should be adopted to more effectively promote a self-evaluation culture supported by training and guidance for school staff and governors; advice from District Inspectors; and including greater engagement with parents."

This was a recurring theme. The Committee also recommends:

"in line with OECD recommendations, the Department should establish a parental consultation platform and that this should be used to inform the development of understandable and accessible information on school inspection and school improvement for parents".

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

As I said when beginning my remarks, it is appropriate that we work collectively to enhance the quality of learning and teaching. However, it is equally important that we do not blindly rush into new structures without due diligence and scrutiny.

Mr Newton: I joined the Committee as the report was being prepared, but I want to thank all who contributed to its compilation, including the many who gave generously of their time, particularly our Committee Clerk and support staff. It is an excellent and very detailed report that should be seen as a constructive step towards addressing this concern.

The Committee report states that we support a "professional, independent, broadly-based, balanced" inspection process. The Committee sees inspection as an essential component of school improvement. The Committee, in

supporting inspection, did not see inspection as a solution in itself. It feels that inspection should be accompanied by support initiatives; that it should be an encouragement to schools when their results are good; and that that good practice should be shared widely.

Before I moved into politics exclusively, my experience was in the realm of assessment for Investors in People and national vocational qualifications. For Investors in People and NVQs, the process is a holistic one against a national standard, a benchmark and a framework of excellence. For Investors in People, in particular, an improvement process is required. However, that improvement process itself requires self-evaluation and a self-evaluation infrastructure in the organisation, which, in this case, is the school. The Committee is looking at and recommending self-evaluation. For vocational qualifications, assessment is about increasing skills, enhancing knowledge and raising standards, whether at NVQ level 1 or NVQ level 5 up to university level. That falls into line with recommendation 12 of the report, which should be strongly considered.

Features of the NVQ and Investors in People look at the issue in a holistic way, whether it is in commerce, industry or a statutory body. To achieve the standards, bodies are required to have good communication, transparency and consistency, and to offer support and constructive feedback around improvement to meet standards, and that requires support. Again, the ethos of the report indicates that all of those things — good communication, transparency, feedback and support through professional assistance — are positive features that should be part of an assessment of any organisation.

Recommendation number 15 — I will finish with this one, Mr Speaker — looks at that ethos and suggests that the name of the inspectorate should be changed to the Northern Ireland Education Improvement Service, which again hones in on the fact that we want to improve the inspection system and that improvement should be its ethos.

As well as a call for improvement, there is also a need for independence of thought.

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

Mr Newton: That is also part of the ethos of the report.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am not sure how valuable these Committee reports are. One hopes that, with the amount of work that goes in to them, there is some value attached, but one thing that I can say without fear of contradiction is that working on this report was certainly an education for the members of the Committee.

If the Minister accepts none of the recommendations, the members at least learned their way around the system of schools inspections and the different views on them that exist. It was interesting to hear those views. Some principals and teachers welcomed inspections and put great faith in the self-evaluation process, but other principals felt intimidated by the inspectors. The inspection teams have the view that they are there to help schools and to help improve education outcomes and all of that.

We dealt with the issue of how much notice of an inspection a school should get. At the minute, they get two or three weeks' notice; I am not entirely sure what the regulation is. However, one of the most powerful figures who came in to the Committee was Sir Bob Salisbury. He is well known to the Education Committee and to educationalists throughout this island. His view is that a school should be ready for an inspection at the drop of the hat; they should not get any notice. That is the way it should be. They should not get two or three weeks in which to run around in a fluster trying to sort out records, assessments and whatever else has to be prepared for inspectors coming in. Anybody who is in business will tell you that the job is not complete until the paperwork is done. Similarly in schools, there may be a lot of bureaucracy, forms to fill in, paperwork and data to input into computers and so on, but the job is not complete until all of that is done, and it has to be presented to inspectors when they come in.

Of course, the monitoring of teaching staff should be carried out regularly by principals in schools so that they are aware of how their teachers are performing in class.

I was also glad to see a recommendation on the issue of inspectors going into Irish-medium schools. I was already aware that some of the inspectors going in — particularly to immersion situations, where all subjects are taught through Irish — did not understand Irish and were making recommendations that ran counter to the ethos of immersion education. I do not know what the Minister will do with the report in total, but I think he should certainly go through the recommendations and, if he finds some

useful, he should certainly adopt them if he can. I suggest that, until such times as inspectors for Irish-medium education can be trained up here in the North, he should look at seconding inspectors from the Southern education system if that is at all feasible.

We agreed for the most part with the report. One issue that we did find contentious was that of independence for the inspection teams. To be quite honest, I am agnostic on the issue of whether the inspectorate should be independent of the Department or not. The issue that I brought forward was that there should be some evidence-based research on whether it is a good thing or a bad thing.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I thank the Member for giving way. Here is where the issue sometimes rests on those things. The Member has very eloquently described the virtues of Sir Bob Salisbury, eminent educationalist. Read Sir Bob Salisbury in relation to an independent inspectorate:

"an independent inspection service would be my way of going forward."

It seems as though some of your colleagues, the Minister, the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Department, we assume, do not agree with Sir Bob on that issue and, lo and behold, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) says that there needs to be an inspectorate that has sufficient autonomy to get on with its work. Are we going to ignore one eminent educationalist and another body that represents a considerable educational sector?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added on to his time.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Absolutely not. I would not at all ignore what they have to say. There were many who came to the Committee and gave their opinion on the issue of independence, but I contend that no one actually produced evidence-based research. That is the simple issue on which I depart from the report. As I said, I am agnostic on the issue. If I see good evidence-based research that says that an independent inspectorate is the best for our schools —

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

Mr Sheehan: — then I am happy to go along with that. Until such a time, I will depart from that particular recommendation.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an phlé a bhí againn tráthnóna inniu – mar a chuirim fáilte roimh aon phlé ar an dóigh lenár gcóras oideachais a fheabhsú agus, dá thoradh sin, tacú lenár ndaoine óga a lánacmhainneacht a bhaint amach.

I welcome the discussion that has taken place this afternoon, as I welcome any discussion on how we can improve our education system and, in doing so, support our young people to achieve their full potential. I also want to acknowledge the work of the Education Committee in conducting its inquiry and in the production of the report that we are debating today. I too express my appreciation to the many individuals and groups who gave evidence during the inquiry, including, of course, my own civil servants.

Today's motion asks the Assembly to call on me to implement the recommendations contained in the report. I have to say that I am not quite ready to give that commitment and I am not sure that the Assembly should either, as I suspect that many Assembly Members have only had the opportunity to read the report over the weekend and today. The course of action they are setting themselves upon involves a legislative process and some quite significant changes to our administration here. I think that Members should rightly take careful consideration of that before voting.

3.45 pm

The report and its recommendations require careful consideration, and it would not be right for me to stand here today and commit to accepting, or even indicate that I was not prepared to accept, every one of the 16 recommendations. Indeed, as I said, some of the recommendations would require legislative change, and I think that the Assembly should be given much longer to debate the relative merits or otherwise of such proposals before being asked to endorse them. Some Members have commented that the Committee has taken several months to prepare the report, and I do not think that Members should make a decision on the best way forward after a two-hour debate. Members of the Education Committee should not take that as a form of criticism; rather they should be pleased that I attach sufficient importance to the report that I want to give it careful consideration.

Before I turn to address some of the points made in the debate, let me say something about the topic we are here to discuss: school improvement. All good education systems continually look at how they might improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools, and all good schools want to improve further.

A key strength of our system, which was identified not by me but by the OECD, was the coherence of our school improvement policies and the appropriateness of their focus on promoting school self-evaluation. However, that review also recognised the benefit and importance of inspection in supporting and encouraging self-evaluation, and commented on the positive approach taken to inspection. Rather than calling on us to change our processes, the OECD recommended — it is an internationally recognised body — that we:

"Keep the focus on improvement and go further in linking school inspection with self-evaluation capacity".

I do not intend to take any actions that would set us back. Rather, I want to move forward, do more of what we already do well and improve what could be better. I also think that my readiness to involve the OECD demonstrates openness to learning from others.

I now want to turn to a number of points that were raised during the debate. I think that there is one flaw that runs throughout the report: its authors have concentrated on the adult in the classroom rather than the child. Throughout the report, there are references, understandably, to concerns that have been raised by principals, teachers and their representatives about how inspections are carried out and the impact that inspections have on the morale of staff, particularly those that register schools as not performing as well as they should, or less than satisfactorily. Indeed, paragraph 246 of the report states:

"The Committee noted commentary from witnesses highlighting considerable concerns in respect of the impact of 'bad' reports on staff morale and parental confidence".

Nowhere in the report is the impact of bad education on the pupil in the classroom commented on or registered. That is who we are all here to serve. It may be convenient for some Members to play to the audience in the sense teacher representatives or teaching organisations and say that all inspectors are bad people, or that it is wrong to bring forward inspection reports that

highlight that the quality of education in schools is not up to the standard it should be, but think about who you are letting down. You are letting down the pupils in the classroom, and nowhere does the report mention the impact of poor-quality education or a poor standard of education in a school on a pupil. Indeed, the delivery of poor-quality education in a school not only has an impact on that pupil but may well have an impact for at least two generations in that family. If an individual child suffers poor education and that is not corrected as early as possible, when that child becomes a parent, he or she will be less likely to motivate and encourage their child to achieve in education.

I think that the authors of the report need to have an honest review of the document and ask themselves what the purpose of the Committee's report was in the first place.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Was it about adults, or was it about the quality of education that we deliver to our children? As I read it, the primary focus has been on adults.

I will go through a number of other points, and I am happy to give way in a moment or two.

On the role of parents in education, I note the Committee's press release, which states:

"Most importantly of all, we are very keen to ensure that there is a new role for parents in the school improvement process. Parental engagement strengthens the effectiveness of education generally and is essential for the school improvement process."

I totally agree with that. I preface all my remarks by saying that I have not made final decisions on any of the recommendations. I will give the report the careful consideration it deserves, and I will then report in detail to the Education Committee on it.

One query jumps to mind in relation to the recommendation that a more detailed inspection report should be given to the school confidentially and a less detailed report should be given to the media and the community. How is that involving parents in education? How is that respecting the role of a parent in education or even the right of a parent to challenge a school over the quality of education that is being delivered to their children? In the era of openness and transparency in government and in the era of the freedom of information request, is it right and proper that we provide one report

to the school and a different report to the public? My inclination is that it is not. I will give it further consideration if there are benefits to it, but I believe wholeheartedly that, if we are to have parents at the centre of education, they must know the information that I, as Minister, have around the school, that the Education Committee has around the school and, indeed, that the inspectorate has around the school. I think that the Committee —

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will give way later in my discussion on this.

There is another area where I think that parental role is important, and I note the comments from the Committee about discussions between the inspectorate and parents' groups. That is a very good idea. It makes sense that the inspectorate should engage with parents' groups and get feedback from parents. However, it is also worth noting that, in the first draft of the ESA Bill — many years ago, for all those who have been around long enough to remember it — an education forum was proposed. That forum would have brought together parents and interested parties to discuss education with educationalists, Ministers, the Education Committee and, lo and behold, the Education and Training Inspectorate. That clause was removed from the Bill, not at my behest or that of my predecessor but at the behest of the current Chair of the Education Committee. If there has been a change of mind on that, that is good, and I believe that, if we can set up —

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will give way later on in the debate.

If we can set up a forum that engages with all the stakeholders in education, including the pupils, the young people, the children, whom this is all about and whom we are here to serve, it will be an excellent way forward.

On inspection reports and the sharing of draft reports in the Department, it has been clarified in the report by my officials and by ETI inspectors that this does not happen. When inspection reports are prepared and finalised with the Education and Training Inspectorate, their content is not shared with other parts of the Department in advance of the inspection outcome being finalised. Other parts of the Department are not given any opportunity to influence or comment on draft inspection

reports. This position, as I have said, has already been made clear on several occasions to the Committee, and it was repeated, inaccurately, today during the debate. As I have said, this is a valuable discussion and debate. Mr Sheehan has said that, if nothing else comes of this report — I assure you that something else will come of the report — it has allowed members of the Committee to go through the role of the inspectorate in detail, but we should have accurate information in front of us in doing that.

On the inspection process, a concern for me would be if we were to come out of this debate with only snapshots of it shown in the media, if any of it is shown. This is perhaps nobody's intention, but inspections may be seen as always being a negative experience and a negative intervention in the life of a school. That is certainly not the case, and the statistics back that up. Indeed, at the start of the month, I was at my third presentation of school leaders and boards of governors, at which we were handing out certificates to the schools that were outstanding and better. On the last occasion, there were about 100 schools, as proud as punch, in the Long Gallery, up receiving their commendations. The Chair of the Education Committee was there, and I believe that Mr Kinahan was there as well. Unfortunately, the media did not cover that. I accept that perhaps bad news sells.

Inspections are valuable because the lessons learned from inspections in which schools are found to be good and better are shared. Their experience is shared in our education system. Indeed, I note from the report that the Committee welcomes the fact that the Education and Training Inspectorate is involved with 20 schools in sharing knowledge on numeracy and literacy. That knowledge has been accumulated from inspections.

Just for the record, since the introduction of Every School a Good School until the end of the last academic year — 2012-13 — three quarters of schools inspected were reported by the ETI to be providing a good, very good or outstanding quality of education for their pupils. Just 5% of schools were found to be less than satisfactory. My concern is that the 5% have influenced the report rather than the 95%. In moving forward, we have to get the balance right. I can accept to a certain degree a school's disappointment when it is presented with a less than satisfactory report, but my job is to defend the educational well-being of the children in the school and to ensure that they receive a proper education. It is also worth noting that, for the schools that have required it,

intervention is having a positive impact for learners, with 80% of schools that required it improving by at least one grade by the time of their follow-up inspection. That has meant that there has been a significant improvement in the life chances of pupils in those schools. The follow-up work after schools have been placed in formal intervention has a positive impact in the vast majority of schools.

There is some contradiction on inspections in the Irish-medium sector in the report and in some of the evidence given in the Chamber today. I will follow up on that, as I have been requested to do. Evidence from the ETI states at paragraph 281:

"ETI rejected any suggestions of a bias against the immersion methodology and advised that the number of Irish language qualified inspectors was disproportionately large given the size of the sector and that it undertook work with its counterpart in the Republic of Ireland so as to enhance its knowledge and appreciation of the IME sector. ETI advised that inspectors will always be provided who are proficient in Irish when required: 'We will always have an Irish-speaking inspector on the team — at least one, if not more'."

I have attended North/South Ministerial Council meetings at which there have been joint presentations from the inspectorates, North and South, and they have reported on their very close working relationship across wide areas of our education system, but particularly they have reported on the Irish-medium sector. It is also fair to say that there are not enough properly qualified Irish-medium inspectors with the proficiency in Irish that we require across the island of Ireland. It is a challenge for us all to keep rolling that forward.

On the structure and the independence — or otherwise — of the inspectorate, I am not wedded ideologically to one or the other. I want a system that works, a system that ensures that a professional inspection is carried out and is married to educational improvement. I want to ensure that the benefits of that are for our young people and our education system. However, an element of research has to be carried out — it has to be detailed research — before we move ahead and say that independence is the way forward because that is what is done in jurisdiction a or jurisdiction b.

4.00 pm

I accept that more research has to be carried out on this, but, during the break, I took the opportunity to get some information on the Scottish model, which has been quoted here today. It is worth noting that, on its website, Education Scotland states of its role:

"Education Scotland was established on 1 July 2011 by the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning as a new public body, charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education and thereby securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all ages.

Our status as an executive agency means that we operate independently and impartially, whilst",

this is the important bit:

"remaining directly accountable to Scottish Government ministers for the standards of our work.

This status safeguards the independence of inspection, review and reporting within the overall context of the National Performance Framework."

So, how independent is "independent"?

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for giving way. One example of how independent it could be is that the current chief executive of ETI would no longer be a senior member of the management team of the Department that is responsible for taking other policy decisions. I also refer the Minister to the GTCNI survey. I think that any teacher listening to the Minister's comments would feel absolutely ashamed that the Minister is still in his post, given his dismissive attitude to the survey that was carried out. It was not 5%. I ask him to go back and look at the figures in the GTC survey. One other point: the Committee is not —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am very conscious that the Member is eating into the Minister's time. If he can be very quick —

Mr Storey: Yes. Let me clarify this point, Mr Speaker, and that is that the Education Committee is not about trying to cover up any issue in any school through misinformation. I want that to be very clear, because I think —

Mr Speaker: I must say, let the Minister —

Mr O'Dowd: Thank you for the intervention. I deeply appreciate the fact that you brought up the issue of questionnaires, because I nearly missed it.

The Committee damns the inspectorate for what it alleges are anonymous questionnaires during the inspection process. It comes out quite strongly against them. It states very boldly that those things should not be used. The GTC survey was an anonymous survey and was called into question by a number of bodies that would involve themselves in —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: — properly constituted and evaluated surveys. So, what is good for the goose is good for the gander. If it is not appropriate for the ETI to carry out anonymous questionnaires — the ETI says that it does not because you can identify yourself in any questionnaire that is sent out — it is not good enough for anyone else to carry out surveys in relation to inspections that are not properly constituted or set at the highest standard of surveys.

The GTC is quoted quite deliberately throughout the report, and I welcome that fact. I welcome the fact that the Education Committee and its Chair have now started to recognise the value of the GTC, because when I bring forward legislation to the House to give the GTC the legislative role that is required to carry out its duties, I hope that it will progress quite speedily. However, you cannot have it one way and the other in relation to surveys etc.

In finishing off, as I said, I will study the report closely and report back to the Education Committee in due course.

Mr Kinahan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I apologise for not being here for all of the Chair's speech at the beginning. Before I summarise the contributions to the debate, I will take a few moments to refer to some of the report's recommendations that were not covered by the Chairperson. I also personally thank for all their work the staff, Committee and all those who came to give evidence or sent it in. I think that it has been an extremely useful exercise.

The Committee's inquiry was triggered by the Education Bill and, in particular, proposals for more powers for ETI and new responsibilities for school governors. The Committee felt that the latter should not simply be based on the

level of academic attainment by pupils but should also recognise the value added through a positive education experience.

The measurement of value added is a complex question, and it solicits strong opinions. The main bone of contention is the context in which a school operates. ETI uses a number of measures to establish context but focuses largely on the free school meal entitlement. ETI categorises schools into one of five bands and compares performance largely on that basis. Many witnesses argued that that practice fails to recognise context and gives a distorted measure of the effectiveness of schools. The Committee is undertaking further research on this issue and will no doubt come to the House on this subject in the future. In the meantime, the Committee agrees that a standardised baseline of attainment at key junctures is a good way to begin to unpick this difficult problem. The Committee also endorses the OECD view that the Department has a lot of work to do to win the trust of teachers and schools in the development of a useful measure of the value added by schools.

During our deliberations, members were very impressed by the associate assessors and district inspectors. It was clear that those groups had a great deal to offer the school improvement process through formal inspection and, crucially, through more informal pastoral contacts. It seemed, however, that the district inspectors have been redirected to the former and away from the latter. Some suggested that this was yet another consequence of the area planning policy. The Committee believes that the balance needs to be restored between those two parts of the school improvement process and has made recommendations accordingly.

Another key part of the inquiry was the role and promotion of self-evaluation in schools. To be clear: we are not at the point where self-evaluation can completely or even largely replace formal school inspection. That said, the Committee believes that any modern learning organisation, particularly a school, should be evaluating its own effectiveness. In support of that process, schools should be polling parents, staff, pupils and governors on the school's strength and weaknesses. This process of questioning and reflection, as the Chairperson said, sits extremely well with the modern teaching ethos. The Committee agrees with the OECD that the Department needs to do much more to support the embedding of self-evaluation. Here again, district inspectors can play a key role not just with school staff and governors but by engaging with parents.

I would like to make a few comments, if I may, as a member of the Ulster Unionist Party on the Education Committee. I will refer to two points that I touched on just now. Before that, I say that my initial feeling from what we have heard from the Minister is extreme disappointment. This was an inquiry done genuinely to try to improve the inspection process and how we help teaching in schools. Therefore, it focused on adults because it is the adults who do the teaching. Yes, there might be a little bit in there that we should have spoken more to pupils, but it was done genuinely, and I hope that the Minister really will take it away and listen to it.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. If the Minister is so concerned about always keeping the child at the centre of all the processes and policies of the Department, it is a pity he did not keep that in mind when we had the issue around computer-based assessment, which has been an abysmal failure. It is a pity he does not keep children at the centre when the ETI has given us a report on key stage assessment that says it is educationally useless. I do not think that is keeping children at the centre of any process.

Mr Kinahan: I hope to see all of us taking this forward as a constructive document because that is why it was done.

When we met the associate assessors and district inspectors, I found that almost all the evidence given was especially enlightening and extremely helpful. At an informal moment, almost as an aside, one of the visiting assessors said to me that the whole system was a disaster, needed review and — this was the key point — needed resources so that they could really do their jobs.

I raise that as part of this debate because, when we invite stakeholders to come, we, as Members of this institution, need to be aware that they need to be emboldened and to feel that they can speak out. That is the only way that we are going to learn ourselves. I suggest that all other Committees take that on board. Our procedures and processes, which we get used to, may be quite alien and off-putting to many of those coming to our Committees.

I also referred to the need for schools to self-evaluate. When we explored that, we did so in a large school and in quite a wealthy school. That led me to think that we should be looking at how we put resources into all schools so that they all have the same means and the same way of being able to self-evaluate. We should even, if necessary, look at grouping smaller

schools' resources so that they can help each other. The teachers need more resources so that they have the time and the flexibility to do that self-evaluation.

I feel that the ETI should adopt its own policy and self-evaluating itself. Their presentation to the Committee seemed to be all about how good they were. The attitude was almost, "How dare you question us?" They gave many good illustrations of how good they were, but all were from their side. I am afraid that I found that rather shocking. We all need to be part of a process whereby we self-evaluate, have some humility and find a way forward.

We all believe that our pupils need to be provided with the most excellent education possible. Today's inspection is about giving pupils and teachers the tools to ensure that they can receive and give that level of education. We need to ensure that the standard of education improves and that that improvement is encouraged by the inspection process.

We all want a system that faces less pressure, less stress and less of a threat, especially that posed by the ever-present looming cloud of area planning. Indeed, this morning, I was talking to one principal who had been listening to the early part of the debate. He said, "I hope that the system will change so that some of the principals who are away with stress-related illnesses can come back into the education system." That is why we focus on the 5% and not the 95%.

We want the process to change and become more positive, and we want that to be done in a pastoral way. We want parents to be included, and, when it comes to language, I was going to say to the Minister that we need to put the whole thing into plain English or a form of English that everyone can understand. If that were the case, we might not need two reports. However, we need to find some system that allows the schools to get the detail and the parents, the press and others outside the system to understand what is going on. I ask the Minister to rethink what he said and find a way of improving schools through a good inspection process without damaging them unnecessarily. I am not against inspection — it is the absolute core of what we do — but we have to find a way to do it better.

The Chair encouraged the Assembly to think about the report and exhorted the Minister to implement its recommendations. I have already touched on that, and I hope that the Minister will, in time, look at them all and, whether

through legislation or more debates, find a way forward.

Mr Hazzard highlighted his support for most of the recommendations but signalled his, and his party's, opposition to the recommendation relating to the independence of the ETI. I am sure that he said that it was like putting, "the horse before the cart", rather than saying, "the cart before the horse". I hope that, in most cases, he puts the horse at the front rather than behind, although technology may allow change. We need the ETI to be independent and know that it is independent.

Mr Hazzard drew unfavourable comparisons with Ofsted and suggested that the terms of reference for the inquiry did not cover independence. He further argued that the evidence from witnesses did not support recommendation 16.

I should point out that the terms of reference did indeed refer to the governance of the ETI and that the majority of members felt that the mass of evidence to the Committee identified obvious transparency concerns. Those members also noted the OECD's assertions on trust issues with departmental policy. The logical conclusion of all of that is that a new governance arrangement for the inspectorate is required. Most members felt that that could be achieved only through statutory independence.

4.15 pm

Mr Rogers highlighted the need for support for staff and school leadership improvement. He emphasised the important role of data in informing, not driving, the inspection process and stressed the unsuitability of the end of Key Stage assessments. I expect that we will hear much more about that next week in that debate.

Mrs Dobson referred to the central importance of pupils in the school improvement process and called for more and better engagement by the inspectorate with parents.

Mr Lunn indicated the importance of inspection to school improvement and set out his support for unannounced inspections. He also highlighted a key and perplexing finding of the inquiry in respect of the very different perceptions of the inspectorate. He felt that a more independent complaints procedure was required, along with statutory independence for the new improvement service. He also referred to recommendation 10, which covers the inspection of Irish-medium schools, and the current reported unusual inspection practices.

Mr Craig referred to his experience of school inspection as a school governor, and he felt that the inspectorate does not currently take into account a school's context or its plans to improve. He also strongly supported the Committee's recommendations in respect of the use of anonymous questionnaires and the pejorative descriptors in inspection reports.

Maeve McLaughlin highlighted concerns in respect of financial implications and legislative changes associated with independence. She indicated her support for inspection generally and for self-evaluation.

Robin Newton highlighted the importance of transport consideration and of performance against standards.

Pat Sheehan referred to the inspector of Irish language schools and called for secondments from the Republic of Ireland. The Minister said that there was always someone who spoke Irish, but the evidence that we took in Committee showed us that there have been cases where, in inspections of Irish language schools — I think it was the immersion type — there were people who could not speak the language or understand what was going on. So, the point could still be well made. Pat Sheehan also supported no-notice inspection and recognised the importance of supporting data for school inspection. Personally, I was concerned by his comment at the beginning, when he said that he thought that we had all learned something on the Committee; that was about the only use you put across for the whole report. It is a phenomenally important report and, I hope, a way forward.

The Minister urged caution and highlighted the OECD report and its recommendations. He also highlighted the absence of pupil feedback in the report and emphasised the importance of pupil progress and the significant impact of poor educational provision. There is certainly a way of getting pupil feedback, but, in my experience and in my time, some of the anonymous questionnaires that went out to schools were used for matters other than inspection and just as a way of griping and getting at the principal.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: I am happy to give way.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member therefore agree that, if it is not acceptable to have anonymous questionnaires as part of an inspection process, it is then not proper to have anonymous

questionnaires as part of an evaluation of inspections, as was done by the GTC?

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his question.

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

Mr Kinahan: Thank you. I do not think that it is quite as simple as that. We need a way to find out views from people, and, from a whistle-blowing point of view, we need some way for people to be unknown. We have to find a way forward. We recommend the report, and I really hope that the Minister takes all the points on board and that we see some action.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 56; Noes 27.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Newton and Mr Rogers

NOES

Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, 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, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Hazzard and Mr Sheehan

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Education on its inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the school improvement process [NIA 132/11-15]; and calls on the Minister of Education to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The motion is carried.

4.30 pm

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: Order. The next item on the Order Paper is the motion on integrated education. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Ms Lo: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to apologise to you for not being in the Chamber during questions to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I thank the Member for coming to the Chamber and apologising to the House. I hope you have set an example to other Members. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr P Ramsey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Would you be minded to relax the regulations on the wearing of jackets, as the Chamber is very warm?

Mr Speaker: Members are feeling the heat of the moment, so I am extremely happy to allow Members to remove their jackets. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr Dickson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Like my colleague, Ms Lo, I wish to apologise to the House for not being in the Chamber during questions to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, I appreciate Members coming to the Chamber and apologising. Let us try to move on.

Private Members' Business

Integrated Education: Article 64

Mr 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. All other contributors will have five minutes.

Mr Lunn: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the High Court ruling on the judicial review taken by Drumragh Integrated College; welcomes the reaffirmation of the statutory duty under article 64 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 "to encourage and facilitate integrated education"; further welcomes the court's confirmation that integrated education, as referred to in article 64, means a stand-alone concept envisaging the education of children together at the same school rather than in a school which has a predominantly Catholic or Protestant ethos; and calls on the Minister of Education to place article 64 at the heart of educational planning and to publish guidance within his own Department and beyond to ensure that this is the case in departmental decisions when planning for education.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thanks for the dispensation on the jacket. It is very warm in here.

This is not the first time that we have debated integrated education. However, recent events, culminating in Mr Justice Treacy's comments on the judicial review application by Drumragh Integrated College, have altered the landscape, hence today's motion.

The Department has since 1989 had a duty to facilitate and encourage integrated education. Three or four years ago, we had a debate here in which the House accepted the use of the word "promote". Of course, the resolution was not binding, but it was still a useful indication of the way in which the House thought. It is also useful to look at the definition and meaning of the two words that are in the legislation. "Facilitate" means "to make easier and to help bring about". "Encourage" has a lot of meanings: to support, to motivate, to give hope or spirit, to recommend strongly, to spur on, to foster and to give help or patronage. I wonder which of those definitions would apply to the Department's attitude to the integrated education movement over the past 40 years. I

suggest that none of them is really appropriate. Those definitions indicate to me a proactive approach, not the passive, slightly begrudging approach that seems to characterise the Department's attitude over the years since I arrived here.

Mr Justice Treacy has confirmed the situation as to what constitutes an integrated education. He has made it clear that integrated education is a stand-alone concept:

"the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils."

He further confirms that integrated schooling as defined cannot be delivered by schools with a predominantly Catholic or Protestant ethos. The article 64 duty therefore relates to integrated schools only — schools that are properly constituted to achieve an equal balance in worship, celebration and exposure to all faiths, with a board that is charged to strive in its ethos to achieve those aims. Our motion therefore calls on the Minister to accept and act on the duty under article 64 to facilitate and encourage, not just to pay lip service, and to accept that integrated education in the meaning of the 1989 Order has now been legally defined as a concept envisaging the education of pupils together in the same school, rather than in a school with a predominantly Catholic or Protestant ethos.

The final part of the motion calls on the Minister to place article 64 at the heart of education planning. Here, of course, we get into area planning, the needs model and the lack of any requirement up until now to factor into forward planning any allowance for the growth of the integrated sector. The court held that the needs model and the inflexibility of the projections used make it difficult for the Department to accommodate its article 64 duty. It also held that the Department needs to be alive to that duty at all levels. Put simply, the area planning approach used by the Department and its article 64 duty are often incompatible. That is what the court is saying. Mr Justice Treacy has done us all a great service by pointing that out. We therefore ask the Minister to publish the guidance from his officials to ensure that article 64 is formally taken into account at the heart of education planning in all planning decisions.

I note the Minister's answers to my recent questions about that guidance and his assertion that it was available to the parties involved in the judicial review and nobody objected to it. That is true as far as it goes, but the guidance that was produced at the judicial review was a confidential draft. What we need is a full

document. Nobody could really object to a confidential draft or make it public, so nobody else has seen it yet. We need a full document. That is apparently due by agreement between the barristers and the court by 19 June, which is two weeks from the closure of proceedings on 5 June, so we wait with interest to see whether the Department will produce something meaningful by that date.

I will be interested to hear the contributions from other parties over the next hour, because all the parties have at some time expressed support for the principle of parental choice in the schooling of our children. The First Minister and deputy First Minister are on record as supporting integration. Indeed, over the years, the First Minister has been quite fond of telling us that the first speech that he ever made at a DUP gathering was in support of integrated education, so I take heart from that.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Briefly.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. I note his comments on the First Minister's support for integrated education. Does the Member, therefore, share my concern that the most recent draft of the OFMDFM good relations indicators proposes to remove any reference to integrated education? Does he agree that it is vital that we include indicators that consider the percentage of young people in integrated education and the percentage of young people who have been turned away from integrated education, given that those are clear good relations indicators?

Mr Lunn: My party colleague has the advantage of me there, but I will take his word for it and agree with his comments.

The current Minister of Education has often said, in answer to questions and in the House, that he is quite prepared to meet his responsibility in this area. The Ulster Unionists and the SDLP have their own policies, but both have, likewise, supported the concept. Many polls, particularly those published by the 'Belfast Telegraph', indicate massive public support. A large majority of people polled over the last number of years have said that, if there was an integrated school available in their area or sufficient capacity in an integrated school that is already there, they would like to use it. Seventy per cent of parents have said that.

The current proposals for sharing and shared campuses are being promoted as beneficial in

bringing pupils together, although the main benefit must surely be in the delivery of the full curriculum. If there is a social benefit from sharing, why not actively encourage full integration, where it is appropriate? Is putting children together full time not the ultimate form of sharing? I do not understand how anybody can disagree with that. So, why is it then that 90% of our children are still educated exclusively with their co-religionists? What does Together: Building a United Community mean if we continue to segregate our children from age five through to university age?

Justice Treacy has given the Department a considerable push in the right direction. What I want to hear from the Minister is that, subject to the legal advice that he seeks — he is perfectly entitled to do that — he will accept the judicial review rulings and clarifications and act accordingly. I want him to confirm that integrated education will now receive the priority, facilitation and encouragement to which it is entitled and that the movement will be allowed to expand according to parental demand.

The increase in total pupil numbers in integrated schools last year was a pitiful 250. Tellingly, numbers in the Irish-medium sector went up by 400. At the same time, roughly 700 children were refused a place in an integrated setting of their choice due to a lack of accommodation.

The old excuses for restricting the growth of integrated education are being dismantled by the High Court ruling, and the ramifications of that ruling will be felt in years to come. I hope that the Minister and his Department will step up to the plate, that, in future, article 64 will be front and centre in all decision-making and that no child whose parents want a cross-community setting for their education will be denied.

We do not advocate some sort of wholesale move towards the integration of all our schools, welcome as that would be. Realistically, the establishment of new integrated schools in situations where that is clearly the ideal solution and active encouragement for schools whose parents and governors want to transform would be a good start.

I should make it clear that the parental choice of a faith school does not need to be compromised by this approach. Indeed, current results confirm the excellent performance of Catholic maintained secondary schools. We are not seeking to deny anyone their right to choose; rather, we want to emphasise it and to

persuade the House of the rightness and benefits of giving integrated education its place, with the assistance from the Department to which, as Justice Treacy has confirmed, it is entitled.

I hope that the House will accept our motion. I look forward to hearing from other Members, particularly from the Minister.

4.45 pm

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I will make a few comments at the commencement as Chair of the Education Committee to inform the House that the Committee received further legal advice and clarification in relation to the Drumragh judgement. As the House will know, protocol will not allow me to disclose that legal advice. However, I can say that it clearly defined what integrated education is and what it is not, and it is an issue that we will return to in the Committee.

I will turn now as a Member of the Assembly and as the DUP education spokesperson and say a few comments. The attempts by parties in the Assembly to understand and resolve the complexities of education structures in Northern Ireland are interesting and, sometimes, frustrating. During this and previous mandates, I have listened to individuals and parties that have promoted solutions that would deal with the issue of streamlining our structures, reduce costs, tackle social injustice and raise standards and then witnessed those same individuals and parties' growing sense of frustration that, rather than resolving the issue, they merely create a new set of problems to deal with. The motion tabled by the Alliance Party today as a result of the Drumragh judgement is another of those solutions, which, rather than resolving a problem, is in danger of creating a new set of problems for us.

At the outset, I acknowledge that there are many parents in Northern Ireland who wish to see their children educated in an integrated school. The integrated sector has been created over the past 30 years and has developed from small beginnings at Lagan College in the 1980s to a situation in which there are 62 schools in the sector educating some 21,000 pupils. However, it has to be said that there is an issue about what is a defined integrated school. Almost 50% of schools today that claim to be integrated do not meet the legal criteria and the definition of an integrated school. It would be interesting to hear what Judge Treacy had to say on that issue, given the composition of the system. We have to ask ourselves, "What is an

integrated school?". I have schools in my constituency that, while they do not have above the door the title of being an integrated school, have a greater percentage of pupils from other sectors and from across the religious divide than we find in many schools that have the title "integrated". We need to set that marker down when we come to debate the issue.

There has been a considerable achievement from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) in the way in which they, as organisations, can feel rightly proud about how they have promoted and developed their sector. I also know that the sector is ambitious at times and feels that the Department of Education does little to promote its cause, and thus we have the situation that has arisen, which has now resulted in the current legal challenge.

The reality of what we are dealing with is somewhat different when we look at the complexities of our education system. The integrated sector represents only 7% of the school population. There are many others in the system who promote a different view of education and other solutions to the future that do not necessarily concur with the concept promoted in the motion. During my time as Chair of the Education Committee, representatives of the Catholic bishops have attended and resolutely defended their rights in promoting their ethos and identity. I have heard similar views from other sectors such as the Irish-medium sector, and, in more recent times, the controlled sector has found its voice and is much more strident in promoting its brand of state education. Indeed, some have argued that, as all schools are now state-funded, all should become controlled or state schools, and many of the problems that we now face, especially in the light of the recent judgement, would be irrelevant. I think that that would be a very simple, straightforward situation for us all to be in.

Let me make our position very clear. We have always opposed the 1989 Order because it does not give a level playing field to the other sectors in our education system. Here we have a situation where we find ourselves today debating a judgement that has been ruled on in the court, which is to the advantage of one element of our sector in education, but I have to say that there are other elements —

Mr Lunn: Thank you for giving way. Does the Member agree that the 1989 Order was clearly meant to provide positive discrimination towards the integrated sector because that is what it needed? It certainly is not the first

example of positive discrimination across various fields.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Storey: The Member knows that we would not accept that. The discrimination relating to numbers in the RUC or the PSNI was wrong and should never have happened. We should not find ourselves in a situation in which we have to have positive discrimination and the Minister and his party opposite justify the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, which clearly discriminates against the ability of Protestant teachers to educate in Catholic schools. The deputy First Minister said that the Order should not be dismantled, so there is no fairness in the system when it comes to treating schools equitably. Here we have a classic example of legislation —

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

Mr Storey: — that is in place but should not be in place because it gives preferential treatment. Therefore, despite the judgement on Drumragh, we, unfortunately, will not support the motion.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Justice Treacy's ruling in the judicial review sought by Drumragh college is very clear. It reaffirms the Minister's statutory obligation under article 64 of the Education Reform Order 1989, in so far as he has a duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education. Justice Treacy also helpfully defined what is meant in law by the term "integrated education". He said that it entails:

"integration between Protestant and Catholic pupils as opposed to integration within school of any other distinct set of pupils".

An integrated school should represent both faiths equally in all things and reflect that in its constitution. Moreover, it must provide education that is integrated throughout and not:

"education that is delivered by a partisan Board".

In my view, under the law, the Minister, in his decision-making process on integrated education, must ensure that he and his officials take account of article 64. Of course, it has already been established by the same judge that the Minister and his Department have an identical obligation under article 89 in respect of Irish-medium education.

My difficulty in all of this is with the definition of integrated education. I have no quarrel with Justice Treacy's definition, which is very clear. However, although I support, in principle, the concept of integration in our schools, it is clear that the existing model of integration is a different beast from the one that I support. I favour an all-singing, all-dancing model of integration. The idea that children from whatever background should be educated together and exposed to one another's cultural differences seems such a sensible suggestion that one wonders why it has never happened. What is wrong with Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Jews and atheist children being educated with unionists, nationalists and others, with boys and girls —

Mr Lunn: Will the Member give way?

Mr Sheehan: I will give way in a second. What is wrong with them being educated with children from affluent backgrounds or children from poor backgrounds — academically gifted or not? The integrated sector, as it stands, is a very poor second cousin of what a proper integrated system would look like.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for giving way. I was going to ask him what his ideal integrated school would look like. He seems to be adopting an Alliance Party view that proper integration would allow for the 30% from the minority community to include the minority religion and others. Is that what he means?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. My idea of integration is not about religion on its own; it is about other issues as well. I will expand on that as I go on.

Let me be clear: I have no issue with parents who want to send their children to a school with a mixed Catholic and Protestant ethos or even any other type of faith. I have an issue with those who promote that form of integration as a panacea for some, many or all the ills of the society in which we live. In fact, those who promote integrated education in that way act from a position of ignorance, because it feeds into the falsehood that the conflict and divisions were sectarian in nature when, in fact, they were about differences in national allegiance and national identity.

The recent decision by Omagh Integrated Primary School not to have the O'Neills logo on its PE kit because O'Neills is associated in

some way with the GAA reinforces the view among many nationalists that the integrated sector is, in many ways, a Trojan Horse aimed at eroding anything associated with Irishness. What hope is there of having a Gaelic football or hurling team in Omagh Integrated Primary School?

It seems that, while we have a view of integrated education, we also want parental choice. It seems that the shared education strategy is a much more sensible way forward, where schools can share resources and experience without compromising on the ethos or identity of the schools involved.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for giving way. What on earth makes the Member think that two shared schools would share sports and that the controlled school in the sharing situation would suddenly start to play Gaelic or hurling, or vice versa? Integrated schools provide all sports.

Mr Sheehan: I would be interested to hear how many integrated schools have hurling teams. My son picked the post-primary school he goes to because of the sports it caters for. It was not the school I wanted him to go to, but it was where he wanted to go. The difficulty in all this is a bit like when we were in prison. We were not allowed to play Gaelic football; we were told that we had to play a sport common to all the prisoners. So, we went to the lowest common denominator: everybody could play soccer. I see a similar type of ethos in the integrated sector. That is the difficulty.

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

Mr Sheehan: It is not integrated in the full sense. Schools on shared education campuses can play whatever sport they want in their own school. If they want to share, they can do that as well. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Rogers: We acknowledge the recent judgement of Justice Treacy in the High Court following the judicial review proceedings brought by Drumragh Integrated College. The judgement endorsed and reaffirmed article 64 of the Education Reform Order 1989, which placed a statutory duty on the Department to "encourage and facilitate" the development of integrated education. That duty has practical consequences and legislative significance, including taking positive steps or removing obstacles that inhibit the statutory objective. That is correct and proper.

We in the SDLP were disappointed that our amendment was not accepted. We felt that it would have added to the motion, because it acknowledged the contribution that faith-based schools make to not only education but shared education across the North. The need to encourage and facilitate integrated education is already recognised in the area planning process. The terms of reference for the area planning work state that it should take account of the Good Friday Agreement and article 64. They also include the explicit objective to identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross-sectoral basis.

The integrated education sector has seen considerable growth. Since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, the number of pupils availing themselves of integrated education has increased from over 11,000 to over 20,000, according to the latest school census figures. The SDLP recognises the valuable contribution the integrated sector, together with all the other sectors, makes to helping to build a peaceful and stable future for all our children.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he, along with me, also be very clear in acknowledging and commending the contribution made, during very difficult times, by faith-based primary, post-primary and third-level institutions in Northern Ireland?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Member for that intervention. I fully and wholeheartedly agree.

This House has frequently debated integrated education. We can all agree on the fact that there are many excellent integrated schools. However, we must be careful to give support to not just integrated education but a broad spectrum of schools that parents elect to send their children to. Our priority must be to ensure that all our children have access to good schools that help them to become well-rounded and happy members of our community.

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

5.00 pm

There is already a wide range of schools that adopt a shared system for learning. These, along with some very high-quality integrated schools, are a real asset to our education

system. The SDLP firmly believes that parental choice is a cornerstone of our education system. The real future for that system is to build on opportunities for the variety of school types, including shared faith schools. Building a truly shared future must include a sense of respect for the rights and choices of parents and young people.

Our real priority is to ensure that our schools are of high standard and help our young people to achieve their full potential. The SDLP envisages an education system that is focused not just on exams but on a rounded, holistic education for all our children, and one that provides parental choice of integrated, Irish-medium, state- or faith-based education through the provision of appropriate access for all our pupils.

The current curriculum presents many opportunities for pupils of different schools to share subjects, projects and other activities. It is extremely heartening to see so many pupils from a variety of schools coming together to study. The area learning communities are testament to this.

In a modern society that is becoming more confident and comfortable with itself, there is no reason why parents and pupils should not be able to exercise their own choice when it comes to the kind of school that they wish to be educated in. The Minister should continue to encourage and facilitate integrated education while acknowledging the contribution of faith-based schools to ensure that our young people have an excellent education experience.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the chance to speak on the motion as it highlights one of the major flaws in our education system. However, the Ulster Unionist Party feels that, sadly, this motion will only perpetuate that very flaw. As we have already heard, the motion wants to place article 64 at the heart of educational planning. I want to support integrated education with every breath in my body, but this motion is poorly crafted. We feel that it will cause only division, especially between our education sectors. It will not help us to improve education or society.

I am most concerned by the assumption that seems to be in it that a state-controlled school has a Protestant ethos. That is just plain wrong. A board of governors may include a Presbyterian or Church of Ireland minister, but that does not make it a Protestant school. We cannot support the motion.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: I am happy to give way.

Mr Storey: Would you also recognise that, since the inception of the transformation process, the only sector that has gone down the integrated route is the controlled sector? It is obvious that only those in the state system are really interested in integrated education. Other sectors have a long, long, long way to go to catch up.

Mr Kinahan: You are partially right. When you move to other sectors, it is different for each patch regarding the degree of integration.

The Ulster Unionist Party fully supports integrated education. As we have said many times, we see shared education, with integrated education at its very heart, as the way forward. The Treacy judgement, if misused —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No. I want to carry on, but thank you. I will come to you if I get a chance at the end.

The Treacy judgement, if misused, will only send us backwards as it pits sector against sector rather than pulling or coaxing our education system towards working together. Our education system is a mess, especially as the two main parties refuse to work together on it. At the last debate on shared education, the Chair attacked me for wishing always to have people sitting round a table. I will continue to push for that, but it is sitting down round a table, discussing and actually coming to a joint solution. That is consensus, and that is where we should be going.

To go back to the debate, I had a call from a primary school on Friday that is thriving and which has a good number of applications; it is in an area where there is no pressure on school places. The school has been judged very good by inspectors in its achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management. It has an exemplary ethos and demonstrates all the very best values that there can be among pupils. It works incredibly hard and successfully with, and as part of, the local community. Despite its being in the controlled sector, one-third of its pupils are listed as non-Protestant. It has a very broad spread from the ethnic community and all socio-economic groups. All in all, this school sets the very best of examples as being as non-sectarian as possible. In fact, this really is an integrated school in every way. That is what shared education should be about and should be

achieving, and here we have a school that achieves it already.

Why am I using that school as an example? Because since the Treacy judgement, the nearby integrated school has embarked on expansion, on a development plan, leafletting its pupils' parents and pushing to show that it can expand, presumably because it feels that it now has the legal support of the Treacy judgement. If it succeeds, it will damage the school that rang me, stealing its pupils and teachers, and, in time, putting its very existence at risk. This, I am sure, is just one of many examples, and it will not be long before Members have their own, similar examples.

Shared education is really the only way forward. Last year, the 'Advancing Shared Education' report gave us, in its first 15 recommendations, a very sensible and considered way forward, with a statutory body and a suite of other well-considered proposals, other than the last three, that were all designed to help us achieve more sharing in our education system and, as such, to help us drive towards a shared society.

I hope that today's debate is not seen as a way of misusing Treacy. I end with a plea to the integrated sector to build on the excellent work that it has done and is doing and not to misuse the Treacy judgement. I ask that it builds up a shared and integrated education system by working with other schools and not against them.

Sadly, the Ulster Unionist Party cannot and does not support the motion.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the motion today and the wider context of Justice Treacy's verdict regarding integrated education, although I am somewhat confused as to why the Ulster Unionist Party and perhaps the DUP will be voting against the motion. I did not hear anything in what Mr Kinahan had to say that was against what the motion said, but —

Mr Kinahan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: I will give way. Go ahead.

Mr Kinahan: I have just given a five-minute speech in which I gave a clear example of how the Treacy judgement can be used to benefit one school against all others. I do not think that you need any more to understand why we cannot support the motion.

Mr Hazzard: Thanks for the intervention, although Mr Kinahan does not seem to be so confused with the stealing of pupils when it is selective grammar schools doing exactly the same thing as he has outlined today, so, again, I think that it is for show more than anything else.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, we need to start by recognising the valuable contribution to our schools and society that those activists and long-time educationalists in the integrated sector, and indeed the Irish-medium sector, has made over the decades. While I disagree with those who have sought to present the judgement as some sort of watershed for the integrated education movement against the Department, I agree that it helps to provide clarity about article 64 of the 1989 Order and the subsequent statutory requirements.

It is important to bear in mind that Justice Treacy ruled against the applicant's assertion that the area planning process was unlawful and that he concluded that the Minister's decision-making process remained unfettered. I have no doubt that the Minister is well aware of the statutory duties presented on his Department by article 64, but this court judgement, on the back of the Colm McKee judicial review in 2011, helps to illustrate the complexities in the outworkings of such legislative provisions. In light of that, I welcome the fact that the Minister subsequently announced that he would review guidance protocols around article 64 and how such guidance is disseminated throughout his Department.

It has been suggested in some quarters that the judgement calls into question the viability of the current needs model. Again, I have to disagree with that. Perhaps the Minister will outline his thoughts on the issue when he speaks to the debate later. I also think that it is important not to fall for the myth that there is an agenda against the development of integrated education across the North. Development proposals of all hues are regularly agreed or rejected. As many integrated development proposals are passed or failed as in any other sector. In my constituency lately, we have had an integrated school receive quite a considerable extension to its enrolment numbers. Over the last number of years, there have been capital build announcements where integrated schools have featured prominently.

However, the existence of article 64 and, indeed, article 89 help to outline where some of the difficulties lie and why there is a need to put the needs of those two sectors at the heart of

the process. It is a recognition that there are difficulties.

The Chair mentioned earlier that somehow the 1989 Order creates an uneven playing field. I think that is nonsense, because it helps to create equality through a recognition that not all is equal as it stands.

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

Mr Hazzard: No, I want to get through this last point. Are we suggesting, for example, that we should remove disabled access car parking because it gives preferential treatment to those in need? Absolutely not. I welcome the clarity as a result of the Treacy verdict and the Minister's announcement that he would ensure that the relevant guidance is disseminated property throughout his Department. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Agnew: I should declare at the outset that I am a director of NICIE and declare an interest in that regard. What the Justice Treacy ruling does, for me, is to say that where there is demand for integrated education it should be met. Parties across the House have said they want to move to — whether they call it greater sharing or greater integration — essentially more children being educated together, but at the same time we are being told that you cannot grow the integrated sector at the expense of the established segregated sectors.

If we genuinely believe in growing the integrated sector and, indeed, promoting and facilitating it, then unless people have more children, there is no other way to do that than by taking the demand that is there and facilitating the places in integrated schools, which will, of course, inevitably be at the expense of other schools in the area. I think that this is a policy question for the Assembly. It is a legislative requirement as things now stand, and the Treacy ruling clearly outlines that, but we have to decide on a policy.

I hear a lot of things in the Assembly about wanting to see greater sharing, greater integration etc, but I do not actually see the commitment to it; whether it is a question of votes within the constituencies or a genuine fear of taking on the established way of doing things. The fact is that we have all said at different times that, if we were to start anywhere, we would not have started from here. The question is how we move away from where we are to where we would like to be.

Promoting and facilitating integrated education has to be part of that.

The 1989 Order has been described as promoting positive discrimination, and I have no problem with that at all.

Mr Sheehan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Yes.

Mr Sheehan: I go back to the issue that I raised about Omagh Integrated Primary School and its refusal to have not the GAA crest but a company's crest on its PE kit because the same company supplies the GAA. County Tyrone is a hotbed of GAA activity. It is one of the primary sources of leisure for the nationalist community in Tyrone. Do you think that the decision by that headmaster in that integrated school has not alienated that whole population?

Mr Agnew: I am glad the Member raised it, because I wrote in my notes that I should come back to him on that point. The school did not exclude the logo. The logo was never going to be on the kit. It was not a case of exclusion. It was a school PE kit. It is still being made by O'Neill. It will still be on the label. It is not on the kit, but it was never an active decision not to have it. There was an issue raised by a parent who did not want to see the logo on it, but it was never the intention.

I think the media created an issue that was never there. I believe that the Member is genuine in his concern, and many others will have been equally concerned, but it was one of those cases of the headline in the media belying, to some extent, the reality of the situation.

I mentioned positive discrimination before I took the intervention. As I said, if we genuinely want to move away from where we are to a new place, we have to take positive actions. The PSNI was mentioned. I know that Members across the way opposed positive discrimination, but look where we are now. We have got to where we have got to, where it is absolutely normal for Catholics to join the police. We want it to be absolutely normal for Protestant and Catholic children and others to be educated together.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Sure.

Mr Storey: What made the situation of Roman Catholics joining the police normal was that the

IRA stopped murdering Roman Catholics who proposed to join the RUC.

5.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Storey: I have to say —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Take your seat. I was concerned that the debate was moving off the subject, and it mostly certainly is now well off it.

Mr Storey: Will the Member accept that positive discrimination in that case did not work because it was done for all the wrong reasons?

Mr Agnew: No, I do not accept that. I believe that it worked. I will take the Speaker's ruling.

Mr McElduff: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think that Standing Orders prohibit Members from making long and tedious speeches. Does that extend to tedious interventions from Mr Storey?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr McElduff, I am getting seriously concerned that you are challenging my job. Continue.

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will quickly make the point about the difference between an integrated school and one that has a good mix of Protestants and Catholics. I agree with what Mr Sheehan said integrated education should be, but I want to give my view of what integrated education is. It is integrated in ability, as integrated schools are non-selective. It is also integrated in social background, and I certainly see that in my constituency. My son attends an integrated school, and there is a great diversity of religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. I am absolutely passionate about that and would not support integrated education if I did not believe that it had a mixed socio-economic background.

Mr Sheehan should perhaps have objected to what I feel the integrated sector fails to do, which is to be fully inclusive, something that I push from within to change. Integrated schools are still overtly Christian assemblies and are Christian in their ethos. I speak as an MLA for the Green Party, but, as a director, I have to uphold the Christian ethos, and the assemblies are not as inclusive as they should be. That is a challenge for the integrated sector and where

we need to move to, but I believe that they are the best vehicle for getting a single —

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

Mr Agnew: — and inclusive education system for Northern Ireland.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh gach deis díospóireacht a dhéanamh faoi cheistanna a bhaineann le pleanáil le haghaidh feabhsúcháin inár gcóras oideachais, agus níl aon deacracht agam glacadh le spiorad agus le prionsabal an rúin seo.

I welcome every opportunity to debate issues related to planning for improvement in our education system and have no difficulty accepting the spirit and principle of the motion.

It calls on me to place article 64 at the heart of our education planning and to publish guidance within my Department and beyond to ensure that that is the case in departmental decisions when planning for education. Of course, I already take very seriously my Department's statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. I particularly welcomed the clarity and precision that the High Court ruling brought to the duty that is set out in article 64 on the definition of integrated education.

I endorse the vital and valuable contribution that the integrated sector can make to building a peaceful and stable future for our children and young people. Therefore, I fund the Council for Integrated Education, which encourages and promotes integrated education. I have also assisted the IEF with the capital costs of new schools and continue to provide funding to assist schools that have transformed to integrated status. The funding available this year alone is in the region of £200,000.

I have been disappointed, however, by the number of schools that avail themselves of that funding. Therefore, I have made it clear that I am willing to consider further innovative approaches that will facilitate the development of integrated education and have had ongoing discussions with NICIE on ways in which that might be achieved.

In re-emphasising my commitment to encourage and facilitate integrated education, I issued guidance to my officials in December 2013 and asked them to keep reviewing and

refreshing their work. However, I do not expect that that constructive approach will equate to automatic approval of every proposal, and the Department's positive approach to our duties to integrated and Irish-medium education is set within a wider statutory framework.

There are a number of key parts in the decision-making framework, and I need to be assured that the Department balances all its obligations. For instance, under article 44 of the Education and Libraries Order 1986, I am required to avoid unreasonable expenditure when responding to parents' wishes about the education of their children. You will appreciate, therefore, that I cannot give article 64 precedence over any other statutory duties that are placed on my Department.

Members hold various views on the value of integrated education, as they are perfectly entitled to do. I only want to respond to one point made by Mr Lunn in his interpretation of my Department's use of the needs model. You will hardly be surprised that I do not agree with him. Indeed, when the Drumragh legislative counsel came before the judge on 5 May, they wanted the judge to declare the needs model illegal. The judge refused to do so and accepted that the needs model is a part of the planning process, though it has to be flexible enough to take into account the growing demand from sectors, including, in this case, the integrated sector. Also on that occasion, Drumragh legal representatives wanted the judge to declare illegal my area planning process built on the needs model, and the judge rejected that. However, the judge did make a very clear ruling:

"The court declares that Article 64 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 applies only to integrated education as a standalone concept within the confines of part VI of the 1989 Order."

I welcome that clarification.

In speaking about the judicial review, I want to stress that this was not a landmark judgement against my Department, as has been portrayed by some in the media. What it does do is provide welcome clarification in respect of the scope of the article 64 duty. As I have said, I am pleased that the court rejected the argument that the area planning process was unlawful. I also highlight the fact that the judge declared that my decision-making, in this case, had not been fettered, as has been claimed. In light of this clarification, I will as a matter of course review the internal guidance to my

officials to ensure that it is consistent with the recent judgement.

I remain confident that, while supporting all sectors to achieve excellence, my Department fully recognises its discrete responsibilities in relation to integrated and Irish-medium education. My officials are well aware that I expect any guidance, internal or external, to permeate every layer of the education system. It is no different in the case of article 64, however, none of us can ignore the fact that this is a complex and emotive issue for many stakeholders. Indeed, we have heard that in the Chamber this evening. I expect my officials to be unstinting in encouraging and facilitating the development of integrated and Irish-medium education. I can ask them to do so in as seamless a manner as possible, bringing stakeholders with us rather than being restrictive.

In conclusion, I will continue to have regard to all relevant statutory obligations, including article 64, ensuring that at the heart of our educational provision remains the needs of each and every individual child. I will do whatever it takes to plan education first and foremost for their benefit. Provision is and will be planned and in a strategic way so that every pupil, without exception, benefits from access to high-quality education.

Mr Lunn: I thank all the Members for their contributions. I will deal with what the Minister said first. I am pleased that he said, in his own words, that he accepted the spirit of the motion. I said in my initial contribution that he has often said in the past that he accepts his statutory duty. It is just that that statutory duty has been severely reinforced in the last couple of weeks. He also said that the integrated sector makes a valuable contribution to a stable future in this country, which, frankly, is at the heart of this. This is what it is about. If we cannot bring our children together at school until they are 17 or 18, where is this society going? So, I am glad to hear the Minister's comments on that.

He also said that he is willing to consider innovative ideas to try to promote the integrated sector, and he mentioned the IEF initiatives. That is good as well. As he and I know, a proposal is on the table from NICIE to try to ease the transformation process, and I hope that he will be looking hard at that. He said that he disagrees with me about the interpretation of the needs model. I am not quite sure that we do disagree. The judge said to the court that the needs model can provide an obstruction and a resistance to fair play for the integrated sector because it only assesses the needs of the controlled and the maintained sectors.

That is fairly obvious, and that has been the position up to now. Hopefully, that is one of the things that can perhaps be rectified.

The Minister also mentioned the internal guidance to his officials. Is there not a bit of a contradiction here? If this is internal guidance, are the rest of us not going to be allowed to see it? If it is internal guidance, how can you relate that to the fact that you have also said in answer to questions that the guidance was provided to the Drumragh hearing and that nobody objected to it? You cannot have it both ways; it has got to be either internal or published. We have asked for it to be published. I understand that there is an agreement that, two weeks after the end of the case — which was on 5 June, so that would be 19 June — that guidance should be published. I hope that that is the case.

I will refer to a few other things that Members said. Straight away, I go to Pat Sheehan's comments about sport in integrated schools, because I have been passed a note. I want to ask him whether he knows who the Ulster under-14s school Gaelic champions are. Well, I will tell him that it is Drumragh College, and Lagan College provides Gaelic football and camogie. I am sure that I could cite plenty of other examples of where integrated schools try to fulfil the needs and the demands of their pupils on the sports field as well as in the classroom.

Others have commented on faith schools. I hope that I made it clear, particularly to Mr Rogers and Mr Bradley, that I support faith schools. There is no contradiction in supporting faith schools and supporting integrated schools. It is about parental choice. I could relate that to Mr Storey's comments that it is only the controlled sector that shows any interest in integration. That may well be so. I can understand the Catholic bishops being resistant and wanting to protect their own sector, but there is not the evidence from Catholic parents, because, when they are polled, they are just as keen on integrated education as other faiths. Of course they are. The problem is that there are not enough schools. Who mentioned a figure of 62 right across the country out of — what is it? — 1,200 schools? There is not sufficient parental choice.

I am not sure about the term "landmark judgement", and I think that the Minister used it again. It is an important judgement. It may lead to the potential for other judgements down the road, but it really depends on how the Minister or the Department and the Assembly deal with the present situation. Frankly, the

integrated movement has been operating with one arm twisted up its back for 40 years. I will say this about the present Minister: he has relaxed that situation at times during his tenure, and particularly — I am not making a cynical point here — in the last number of months. I am thinking of Millennium and Braid schools and various others where he has treated the integrated sector with at least equality. I am sure that it had nothing to do with the pending Treacy judgement — not at all. Perish the thought.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: I think that he wants to first.

Mr Storey: Here is the difficulty: the Member said that the integrated sector has been working with one arm behind its back. How can that be the case when, in my constituency, local pupils cannot get into Slemish College, which is oversubscribed? It is an outstanding school that has done an exceptionally good job. However, because of the discriminatory nature of the transport preference that is given to integrated schools, somebody from Larne can get into a school in Ballymena more easily than a child who lives in the local area. I do not see that as being very fair.

Mr Lunn: That is partly because Larne schools are oversubscribed. I think that you will find that Judge Treacy made an important judgement — I think that it was around the Irish-medium sector, rather than the integrated sector — on transport to school. He said that it was reasonable that children should be brought from a greater distance to an Irish-medium school because of the particular needs of that sector.

I will give way to the Minister.

5.30 pm

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for giving way. I just want to clarify my recent position on the integrated sector. I do not believe that the court case was necessary. However, in preparation for the case, I accepted a number of arguments that had been prepared by the integrated sector, and we learnt from those arguments. The judge gave clarity on article 64, which I welcomed, but, in fairness to my two ministerial predecessors, I have to say that we have a consistent approach to the integrated sector and will live up to our statutory duties on it.

Mr Lunn: We will hardly agree about whether the court case was necessary, Minister. I

wonder whether you think, in retrospect, that the Department's offer to "retake" the decision on Drumragh was wise. It looked to all and sundry as though the Department was saying, "If you withdraw this judicial review application, we will have another look at that decision".

I note that the judge said that your decision was not fettered. Then, you come out and say that Lisanelly is the only show in town and that there will be no more capital development anywhere else in Omagh until it is settled. I do not want to prejudge your decision — actually, I do — and I am unsure what "to retake" a decision means, but Drumragh's case is unanswerable. It needs the extra accommodation to function properly. The college will not be allowed to move to Lisanelly, so the situation is one in which the ultimate in sharing is not being allowed to enter a shared campus, but that is by the way. The school will stay where it is, but it really needs the extra accommodation. I hope that you will work on that in the days to come.

I do not have time to cover everybody's comments, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will probably be glad to know. I picked up on Chris Hazzard saying that he could not understand the Ulster Unionist attitude. I mean no disrespect to Mr Kinahan, but I struggle with somebody saying that they want to support integrated education with every fibre of their being or every bone in their body — I forget which term he used — and then saying that they cannot support the motion because it is divisive.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: You have had one go at explaining it to Mr Hazzard, so I will not give you another. I really struggle with that. I would have thought that the Ulster Unionist Party, in its present form and even while trying to outdo the DUP in all things, would probably be generally supportive of what we are trying to achieve. I see you nodding, and that is good enough for me. I hope that that means that you will vote in the right direction. I fancy that we are coming to a vote.

I have to finish. I am glad that we had the debate, and I think that it has been useful. I heard some views that surprised me slightly and others that, frankly, did not. If we have to vote on it, so be it. Judge Treacy has, as I said, given the Department a shove in the right direction. I did not say that it was a landmark moment, but it is a major push, and I am glad that the Minister seems to have accepted that. I offer the motion to the House.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 29; Noes 40.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Dickson and Mr McCarthy

NOES

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

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Newton and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Bangor Health and Well-being Centre

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members will have approximately six minutes.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity this afternoon to speak on the need for the provision of a new health and well-being centre in Bangor. I am glad that the Health Minister has seen fit to come along this afternoon to listen to the debate. I would like to put on record our thanks for his interest in this very important subject and our thanks for his visit to the Bangor health centre last month, when he took time to visit the staff and see, at first hand, the real needs in that health centre.

5.45 pm

There is a real need, as I have said, for a purpose-built health and well-being facility in Bangor. Bangor is a huge, growing town with an ever-rising population of over 60,000. The current Bangor health centre serves over 25,000 patients, well over one third of the population of Bangor. It operates in a building that was originally built in 1975 to accommodate five GPs. Today, the same building accommodates 18 GPs. Each practice in the building employs its own practice manager, reception staff and admin staff. In addition to that, the GP practices in the health centre house many additional services, including health visiting services, dental services, paediatrics, community addictions, community treatment facilities, leg ulcer facilities and a community baby clinic. As you can appreciate, there is a severe lack of accommodation for all those services.

There are real overcrowding issues, and the quality of accommodation is very limited. Staff admit that the facilities can have an impact on the quality of care that they can provide. There are issues around the size of consulting rooms, reception areas and waiting rooms. Car parking is also a major issue, given the location of the health centre, and there is limited wheelchair access to a limited number of the rooms.

Transforming Your Care, which we are all very much engaged in and committed to, allows us an opportunity to really plan for the future and ensure that the healthcare system and its buildings are fit for the 21st century. Under Transforming Your Care, GPs are increasingly expected to be on the front line of our health service. With that in mind, it is vital that the right infrastructure is put in place for them to perform that role.

We continue to hear regularly from our constituents about the challenges that they face in making appointments with their GP. By bringing forward a multipurpose, all-in-one health centre and well-being building in Bangor, we would have an opportunity to create a modern primary and community care infrastructure that would enable greater integration and a shift of services from secondary to primary care, right at the heart of the community, which would promote patient-centred care. A central hub facility would act as a real centre for promoting health and well-being and bring real benefits to patients and staff alike. Any new facility would need to take in a range of factors, and we would need to look at a range of locations to ensure that the new centre had adequate car parking and easy-access facilities to meet the demands in the area.

I welcome the ongoing investment in the health centre which, over the last number of years, has paid for essential maintenance and minor works programmes. However, I am sure that everyone recognises that a long-term solution is required, rather than going through a patch-up job.

I thank the Minister for his ongoing work to date in improving the health service for everyone across Northern Ireland, and I have no doubt that he will continue to ensure that the patient comes first. I look forward to hearing from him directly later on, and I trust there will be a real commitment towards investment in a new well-being centre in North Down.

Mr Cree: I am pleased to support the concept that has been put before us this evening, and I welcome the Minister's presence.

I have no expertise in health matters, but I have learned a lot, like all of us do, over the years. One of the things I have learned is that good healthcare is everyone's right and should be free at the point of use, but there are many difficulties. Resources, both revenue and capital, are in short supply. We need more doctors and medical support staff. Many GP practices are old, and the buildings are not fit

for purpose. In its report published last year on access to public services, the Patient and Client Council provided several recommendations to assist and improve GP services. Again, that presupposes that the facilities themselves are up to task. Most of us recognise that more capital is required to upgrade the services that are there. However, is it more beneficial to attempt to upgrade poor infrastructure or to invest in modern health and care premises that will be fit for purpose for many years to come?

We need more GPs and medical support staff and a 21st-century approach to the problem. State-of-the-art health and care hubs make sense as anchors for large areas of population such as Bangor. Of course, it is vital to integrate the other practices, so that it all works in harmony. That would most certainly need investment in all GP surgeries and a new approach for improving customer care.

There are delays in getting prompt appointments and treatment, which runs the risk of complications and could put increased financial pressure on the health and social care system because of late diagnoses. We all want things to be done as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The Minister has a vision for the new centres. I believe that it is the right one and deserves to be supported. The resources will have to be found — I know it is easy to say that — and I urge him to do all he can to expedite the new health and care centre in Bangor.

Dr Farry: I congratulate my colleague Gordon Dunne on securing the debate. I want to follow his comments and those of Leslie Cree in supporting further intervention, through primary care in particular, at Bangor health centre. I should declare an interest, to an extent, in that I am a patient of that centre, albeit on an infrequent basis for now and, touch wood, that will remain the case.

My colleagues have set out very well the context of the local demographics, the size of Bangor and the catchment area that the current centre serves. Further to that, it is worth stressing that, perhaps more than any other constituency in Northern Ireland, North Down has an older population. Thankfully, people live much longer, but they have a set of diverse needs that need to be addressed. Obviously, we will look to our GPs to play a central role in that regard. The issue of population becomes even more acute when viewed through that lens.

We also have to take into account the evolving nature of health policy and the broad thrust of Transforming Your Care. It rightly identifies GPs as playing a central role, through the integrated care partnerships, in delivering a wide range of services and, in some ways, as the linchpin of a much wider range of services that have a much greater footprint in the community than has been the case to date. However, that future role needs to be matched by further investment at capital level through modern facilities. While making the case today for further capital money, I think it would be churlish not to accept that there has been some capital investment in that location in the recent past. That is very welcome.

We are also looking for increased revenue. The Minister is well aware of the campaign that is being run by the Royal College of General Practitioners, which looks to increase the share of our overall health budget that goes in through GP services to reflect the increased responsibility that may well be coming in the direction of GPs. On the one hand, GPs have major reservations about the implementation of Transforming Your Care, but, equally, they would be the first to recognise that, in many ways, they are the key to unlocking the full potential of that major strategic reform of the health service. So, it is important that we follow that with investment.

It is also worth stressing the important integrated aspect of future services and that more and more types of activity can be delivered through GP practices. It is important that whatever capital investment we make is sufficiently flexible to maximise the range of services that can be provided on particular sites.

Location will also be an important issue, particularly in Bangor where land can be scarce. There are difficulties, especially in the town centre, with new investments and minimising disruption. People in Abbey Street are already aware of the implications of certain water service-driven investment, and great care needs to be taken to ensure that we have a good site for the future.

This is something that should be in line with the future direction of investment wanted by the Minister and the Department, and it is important that we put forward the best case possible for Bangor and the wider North Down area.

Mr Easton: I declare an interest as the Assembly Private Secretary to the Health Minister.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in the Adjournment debate. One of the most effective ways in which to meet health and care needs is through multidisciplinary teams located in the same place where possible, such as in the centre of Bangor. The Department's primary care infrastructure development (PCID) programme is designed to put in place a care infrastructure that is fit for purpose and provides integrated, modern services. The programme's key aim is to support an increasing number of people to live independently, preferably in their own home. To facilitate that, the HSC needs to develop effective alternatives to hospital care, designed to meet people's needs for high-quality, accessible services that will reduce inappropriate hospital admissions and length of stay. Health and care centres will be located in larger towns and cities and will be of different sizes and configurations, taking into account how local needs can be best met.

Developing Better Services (DBS) signalled the need for enhanced primary and community care services, which was reinforced in the regional strategy, A Healthier Future, and the primary care strategy framework, Caring for People Beyond Tomorrow. At that time, the Department started to invest in the first health and care centre, with Hollywood Arches opening in 2005. The proposed service model for the PCID programme is based on a hub and spoke approach, with hubs providing core services for its range of spokes. Each spoke would have a defined level of services, depending on economies of scale, and draw on the services of the hub as required.

The hubs will essentially encompass the services that do not require a hospital but are too complex or specialised to be provided in a local GP surgery. The main hub will include a capacity to deliver GP and trust-led primary care services and the services that will shift left from secondary care under Transforming Your Care. The spokes will be local GP surgeries and healthcare centres that will include practitioners such as GPs, practice nurses and trust services where there is localised demand. Such centres are core to enabling the development and implementation of the new model of service necessary to deliver on the many opportunities for improvement that have been identified in Transforming Your Care.

I first called for a health and care centre for Bangor well over a year ago. I have been privileged to visit Bangor health centre twice, more recently with my colleague and the Health Minister. There appears to be an overwhelming demand for such a centre. I have also written to the Health Minister on the subject. It is

important that we look at the seven other GP practices in separate buildings across Bangor. Will they want to be included in such a centre? I have also set up a meeting with the chief executive of the South Eastern Trust to discuss what proposals it has for a future health and care centre.

It is high time that Bangor was considered for a health and care centre, given the ever-increasing size of the population, particularly, as was mentioned, the elderly population. Bangor is the third largest town in Northern Ireland, so it is vital that we provide the best range of services for health that we can provide.

A health and care centre will be determined by local need and would include a range of services coming together under one roof, such as diagnostics; imaging; district and specialist nursing; health visiting; social care for the elderly; a children's centre; dentistry; allied health professionals, including physiotherapy, podiatry, occupational therapists (OTs) and speech and language therapists (SLTs); cancer health and well-being centres; one-stop assessment; and voluntary groups. I hope that that can become a possibility in the future, as I believe that a health and care centre would take some of the pressure from our accident and emergency departments and allow people to be treated more quickly and effectively in their own town and community. Any such proposal must have the input of local GPs if it is to be right and have the support of the local community. I support the Adjournment topic.

6.00 pm

Mr Weir: I suppose that, sometimes, when you deal with local issues, it is probably fairly commonplace to declare an interest, like the last two Members who spoke did. Like others, I declare an interest: the GP practice that I go to is one of the five that are based in the health centre. Not only do I make use of it, but my family does. Like the Minister for Employment and Learning, fortunately, the number of times that I have had to use it personally has been relatively limited. I pay tribute to all those who are involved and provide an excellent service in the health centre.

I agree with everything that has been said so far about the demand that is out there. However, I will take one slight exception. Strictly speaking, since the promotion or elevation of Lisburn and Newry, I think that Bangor is the largest town in Northern Ireland. I suppose that that depends whether you count

Lisburn as a city or a town. I am sure that the Minister has particular views on that subject.

The Minister is looking at me to give way on that.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): It would not be for me to argue with Her Majesty.

Mr Weir: No, indeed. It is good to see a city with so many fields in it. Obviously, we welcome the elevation of Lisburn — or Lisburn-Newry as it is properly known.

As has been indicated, the service has a register of around 25,000 people. Roughly speaking, that is around 40% of the population of Bangor. As my colleague Alex Easton indicated, five out of the 12 GP practices in Bangor, with 18 GPs, are based in the centre. We are dealing with a very large establishment.

It is fair and important to place on the record that, while there is a clear need for new facilities — indeed for the new hub — and the new centre to be put in place, the Minister and the Department have not simply stood still. Sometimes, in terms of capital development, there would be the temptation to say that clearly something new is needed, but we would be throwing good money after bad by doing the work. However, that is not the attitude that the Department has taken. Over the last two years, the Health Department has put in place about £1 million worth of improvements. That is to be welcomed, but, as other Members who spoke said, that is not the long-term solution.

As has been indicated, it is undoubtedly the case that we are looking for four hubs for the South Eastern Trust area through the primary care investment development as part of the forward-thinking proposals under Transforming Your Care (TYC). We have seen the development of the pathfinder projects in Newry and Lisburn. As I understand it, the second tranche is due to be in Bangor. Again, we would very much welcome that.

Staff put in tremendous effort, but there is no doubt that they work under very difficult circumstances. Anybody who visits or has an appointment there is hit by the cramped conditions and the heat, which is due to a major problem with ventilation and temperature control in the building. With the best will in the world, there is a slightly worn feel to a lot of the carpets and furniture. There are quite cramped conditions even for some of the consultations that need to take place. Excellent work is being done there, but it is clear, and I think that it

would be accepted by the Department, that the centre is not fit for purpose. In moving forward, commitment to the development of a new centre for Bangor, as one of the key hubs, is vital.

It has been mentioned that another issue that needs to be tackled in any new site is parking. Even at present, with the sheer volume of people who use it, it is difficult to get parked at times. If I am visiting by myself, I have the advantage of my office being around three or four minutes' walk away. However, for many people, including me, when, for instance, taking an elderly relative there, that is not really an option. The only option is to try to get parked in the facilities. There is considerable constraint on parking. That will need to be taken ahead.

There are two barriers to overcome with regard to what is needed. First, we have the pathfinder projects at present. There will be a timescale within which to ensure that those are, if you like, the right way to go forward. That means that those pathfinder projects will effectively need to be completed before we can move on to tranche 2.

I hope that that happens soon and that the Minister can give some level of assurance on it.

There is no doubt that we cannot avoid the other elephant in the room, which is the tremendous revenue and capital pressures that health is under. If we have a situation in which further money is drained away from health because of the fines, effectively, that we have to pay because of a failure to implement welfare reform, very important projects such as this will be delayed further. That is not acceptable.

Bangor — indeed North Down — deserves and needs, particularly given the nature of the population profile in Bangor, the commitment of a new centre, which will replace something that is massively out of date and will be deeply welcomed by all people in Bangor. So, I think that there is a very positive way forward if the Minister is given the freedom to deliver that. We need to see that for the people of Bangor.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister. Sorry, I call Mr Steven Agnew.

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. As much as I enjoy coming to listen to these debates, I glad that I am able to contribute as well.

I welcome the Adjournment debate, and I congratulate Mr Dunne on securing it. I

welcome the principle of having a Bangor health and well-being centre and the principle of greater integration of services on a single site. I also welcome the efforts being made to direct people to the correct services at the correct location, so that we do not see A&Es crammed with people who could be seen by their GP, and the overall ethos of bringing services closer to the community. I suppose that I am looking for a guarantee from the Minister that that is what we will see with the proposals for health and well-being centres in Bangor and elsewhere.

A number of Members declared an interest as attendees of the current Bangor health centre. I am at Bloomfield Surgery, and I do not want to see one centralised service somehow impinge on the other services that we already have. As a Ballybeen boy who met a Ballyree girl, I am committed to Bloomfield Surgery for the long term, so I certainly want to give it a plug and to make sure that it is sustainable and continues.

The Minister will only be too well aware that health operates at different levels, and it is about getting an integrated approach across the different services. In that regard, I would like to mention Bangor Community Hospital. We have seen, for example, the operation of the minor injuries unit being reduced to five days a week and, in the past, issues with the ability to staff the diabetes clinic.

We have also seen services held in the community at the community hospital move to the Ulster Hospital either temporarily or permanently. I would like to hear the Minister's assurances on the integration of services and on services being provided in the community where possible. Yes, we absolutely need the health centre, but what I do not want to see is the community hospital being torn because of a new enhanced health and well-being centre and because services have to move most likely to the Ulster Hospital or other larger hospitals. So, I certainly support, in principle, the idea of a health and well-being centre. If that is additional to what we have, it certainly is to be welcomed.

Mr Farry highlighted the difficulty of finding a town-centre location, but finding such a location should be the Minister's first priority, because that will ensure accessibility and provide for the wider strategic interests of supporting and sustaining our town centre.

The principles of a health and well-being centre are ones that I am quite happy to support. I want more integrated services and more clarity for potential patients and clients on where they should receive which services. That can only

benefit all of us. I welcome the Adjournment debate and look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for securing the debate and providing us with an opportunity to discuss the issues relating to Bangor health and well-being centre. As you can imagine, in my role as Health Minister, I have visited a number of health and care facilities across Northern Ireland. I had the benefit of visiting Bangor Health Centre only last month and had the opportunity to see at first hand the current facilities and meet the staff and GPs working in the centre. During the visit, I had an open and frank discussion with the GPs on the issues that they believe are key in delivering the primary medical services of the future, specifically the development of a new health centre facility for Bangor aimed at providing enhanced accessibility and responsiveness, and a wider range of services for the local community.

I have often referred to my vision of seeking to ensure that the services provided by health and social care providers are fit for purpose to meet the needs of patients, clients and local communities. That means more care provided outside hospitals and in the community closer to people's homes. I want health and social care to be designed around patients and clients, with patient need and choice at the centre of decision-making.

My aim is to continue to support the development of high-quality, integrated and responsive primary and community care services that will benefit all in Northern Ireland, including those living in Bangor. The current facilities at Bangor accommodate 18 GPs across five practices. All practice staff, along with a range of trust staff, are involved in the delivery of primary and community services. It is recognised that the facility is no longer suitable to meet the demands being placed on it and that its position is similar to that of a number of other health facilities across Northern Ireland.

I was going to announce that we will develop a new centre — until Peter Weir spoke. Unfortunately, it is now at the end of the list. In case anybody reading Hansard takes that seriously, it was said in jest.

Between 2012 and March 2014, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust invested approximately £1 million in the current facilities in Bangor Health Centre. The investment covered a range of work including an ambulance pick-up zone; roof and security works; and the refurbishment of speech and

language offices, health visitors' rooms and the GP staff area.

Recognising the need to modernise the existing estate, and taking account of the necessity to reform service delivery under Transforming Your Care, I directed in early 2012 that an infrastructure investment programme be developed to focus on the accelerated delivery of a range of primary care centres. Given the constraints on the availability of capital funding, I instructed that an alternative to public capital funding should be considered. As a result, two pathfinder projects were selected for tranche 1 of the programme. The cities of Newry and Lisburn, and a third-party development procurement route, were chosen. The purpose of the two pathfinder projects is to test the viability of utilising a third-party procurement route.

Work on three other health and care centre projects, in Ballymena, Banbridge and Omagh, is under way and will continue through to 2016. They are being funded through the traditional capital funding route. It is estimated that the total capital cost of the primary care investment programme will range from £300 million to £500 million

As Members are well aware, my Department faces significant financial pressures in the continued delivery of health and social care services, restricting the level of capital projects that I can undertake. Therefore, the Health and Social Care Board has been working closely with the trusts and local commissioning groups on developing a primary care investment development programme in which developments are prioritised on the basis of need.

The South Eastern Trust's next priority, following the Lisburn pathfinder project, is to replace Bangor Health Centre. Bangor has been identified as the top priority in tranche 2 of the primary care investment development programme. It is envisaged that it will be one of four hubs across the trust locality, the others being Ards, Downpatrick and Lisburn. Unfortunately, until the budgetary position for 2015-16 and beyond becomes clearer, I am not in a position to advise when Bangor will receive the necessary funding or when the centre will be open to patients. The timescale for further projects cannot be determined.

Whilst the development of new premises is always positive, it must be emphasised that it is the people who work in health and social care services — the doctors, nurses, therapists, administrators, ancillary staff and managers —

who are the true determinant of high quality services. It is they who deliver the high quality for patients and clients.

A key issue raised by the GPs in Bangor when I met them last month centred on the workforce planning for GPs. My Department has established a regional workforce planning group. The role of that group is to take forward the TYC recommendations relating to workforce issues. A medical workforce planning subgroup has also been established to develop a suite of medical workforce plans for primary and secondary care.

My Department has also appointed an external consultant to review the medical workforce, including undergraduate intake levels and GPs. That appointment will provide contextual information and an overarching picture of how the medical workforce is evolving. It will provide information on what the big issues are for the profession and the general direction of travel. The output will be high level and will identify emerging patterns and how the service may need to look in the future. It is anticipated that an initial report will be available later this year.

I think that it was Mr Cree who raised the issue of funding. Additional funding has already been made to the general medical services contract in 2013-14 and 2014-15. That is something that we have been seeking to respond to, recognising the issues.

I am also strongly committed to the principle that health and social care services should be driven by, and responsive to, the needs of patients, clients and their carers. My vision for the future of Health and Social Care is one in which we will drive up the quality of services for patients, improve outcomes and enhance the patient experience. I want to ensure that service users are at the heart of everything that we do. Patients are entitled to receive the right care in the right place at the right time. They are at the centre of our policy developments and planning assumptions. The design and delivery of services that meet their needs and expectations is what really matters to patients.

One of my key objectives, which I have frequently highlighted, is to develop an enhanced role for primary care, working hand in hand with healthcare providers and patients in designing and delivering consistently high quality, safe and needs-based care in community settings. It is therefore important that our primary care facilities are to the standard required for the delivery of 21st

century health and social care, and that includes facilities in Bangor.

Adjourned at 6.17 pm.



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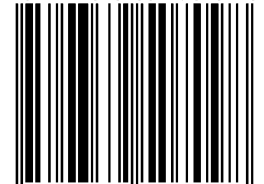
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