



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE
FOR EMPLOYMENT
AND LEARNING**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Careers Strategy: Preparing for Success

30 November 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr Chris Lyttle
Mr David McIlveen
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Mrs Nuala Kerr) Department for Employment and Learning
Mrs Judith Shaw

The Deputy Chairperson:

We welcome Nuala Kerr, director of skills and industry, and Judith Shaw, head of Careers Service policy and strategy, to give us an update on the careers strategy, Preparing for Success. Members will get information in their papers. We are glad to have you here, and we will leave it open to you to give us your presentation.

Mrs Nuala Kerr (Department for Employment and Learning):

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about the careers education, information, advice and guidance strategy. We are talking to you in interesting times, from the

perspective that the careers landscape across the UK is changing rapidly. In England, there is the National Careers Service, which is increasingly moving towards online services and away from the previous situation — from Connexions to school responsibility in this area. In Scotland, they are moving towards greater use of technology, with less emphasis on face-to-face contact with people seeking advice. In Wales, they are restructuring from six careers companies to one delivery organisation, and the status of that organisation has not yet been determined.

In Northern Ireland, we are in a much more favourable position in so far as we already have a joint careers education, information, advice and guidance strategy in place, with the emphasis on the joint between education and the information and advice services. We already have the commitment of the key Departments that are involved in that joint working, namely the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). We have a joint strategy document with DE — the one you referred to, Chair; Preparing for Success, which was launched in January 2009. We have completed almost three years of the implementation plan, and it is due for review in 2014.

Within that strategy, there are five themes. One is improving careers education, where the responsibility lies with DE. There is the theme of improving access to careers information, which lies with us. The third one is improving careers advice and guidance, and that too lies with us. DE and DEL are working jointly on the theme of improving quality. On improving professional development, again, DE and DEL have a joint responsibility. Our colleagues from DE are not attending this morning, so we are in a position to report only on the themes for which DEL has responsibility, and we can give a DEL perspective on the areas where we have joint responsibility.

In addition to the five themes that I have mentioned, there are two overarching aspects. The first is the establishment of a steering group, which has been running for some time now, and we have recently extended it to include stakeholders from the two universities, the further education (FE) colleges and schools. There is also the question of the review, which is scheduled for 2014.

We have already made considerable progress in improving access to information, but the skills strategy, ‘Success through Skills - Transforming Futures’, has highlighted the need for further work in that area. Of particular interest to us and our Minister is the issue of improved labour market intelligence, with a focus on ensuring that clients are made aware of the opportunities and

skills requirements of the local economy and on ensuring a co-ordinated approach to maximise technology in the delivery of careers services overall.

In the period of the existing careers strategy, we have improved partnerships with schools and others. We have established greater clarity on roles and the information-sharing requirements that affect the various players. We have a clear menu of services against which we deliver. We have been progressing our resource centre model. We are now testing, in Dungannon and Ballymena, the model that has been established. We have already established better signage and visibility in job centres and in jobs and benefits offices, and that complements the drive to ensure greater use of technology and the application of that for those seeking information and advice.

We are continuing to improve the provision for those vulnerable to social exclusion. We are already working with DE and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to support those with a disability or a care background, and we will be closely involved with other partners in the delivery of the strategy for those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Just yesterday, we had a professional development day for all careers advisers, and that focused on social inclusion and drew on all of the issues that I have already highlighted. The issue of social inclusion and NEETs is very high on our agenda.

We are, I should stress, an all-age service. In the past two years there has been an increased focus on adult clients. We have been working closely with our employment service to ensure that there is an effective referral system in place, and there has been a substantial increase in the number of adults we see through our advice centres and other places. In fact, the number of adults seeking our support has more than doubled between last year and the previous year.

Continuous improvement in all of this is vital to us. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has developed a framework for schools. The Careers Service has external accreditation of the matrix standard already in our resource centre in Richmond Chambers. The matrix standard itself is being revised and being made more comprehensive. On the foot of those changes to the matrix standard, we are moving to extending it throughout the Careers Service of Northern Ireland, and we hope that, in due course, all our services will be accredited to that matrix standard.

An important issue for us is determining the impact of what we do. We have already made

some inroads in recording the improvement in the activity levels with our client interventions. We have gathered better information and a better indication of where customer satisfaction lies. The next stage is to try to track clients and gather information on the personal impact of careers intervention, and we are working with UK colleagues and across the European network to try to agree economic and social impact indicators to ensure that our activity is having the best effect.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to the fact of our continuing professional development. DE is working with careers teachers to ensure that their development is in line with their expectation of their part of the delivery of this strategy. For ourselves, we place a high importance on our careers advisers. They are all members of the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG), and there is regular in-house training, including what I referred to earlier: continuing professional development for all careers advisers.

We are working in a co-ordinated way with our colleagues in the Department of Education. We are also working in a co-ordinated way with colleagues in the rest of the UK and watching the developments there and those emerging from Europe. We believe that we are moving forward and improving the service that we can give to all of our clients.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Thank you for your presentation. How do you measure the full extent of the success of your work? With the work that you are doing, it is important that you have some targets or that its success is measurable, so that you can see whether it is successful and is providing what is required.

Mrs Judith Shaw (Department for Employment and Learning):

At this stage, we are measuring activity in respect of the number of clients that we see and the types of interventions that are made. We then look at how that is broken down into different categories. We also conduct customer satisfaction surveys with young people in school and in our offices. As Nuala said, we are moving to having a tracking stage so that, with their permission, we can go back to clients three months, six months or a year after the intervention to find out whether they have taken any action as a result of the intervention. That is about looking at the impact on the individual and trying to identify whether people feel that it has made a difference to their confidence level; whether they have moved into education, training or employment; and whether they see that as having some connection with the advice and guidance

that they received. We find that guidance, particularly guidance in school, does not have an immediate impact. It may be some years down the line before that advice kicks into place. By that stage, many people do not associate the advice that they got in school with the action that they have taken. Therefore, it is hard to make a correlation. Tracking would help us to make more of a correlation.

As regards the bigger picture, it is much harder to put a finger on the social and economic impact. That is an issue that our colleagues in the UK and Europe are wrestling with. It is well nigh impossible for people to say that, because they got certain careers guidance, they took a specific action, got a job, earn so much and do not cost the Exchequer a certain amount of money. We are trying to agree a set of indicators, which are likely to be around employment levels, unemployment benefit uptake, drop-out rates in universities and colleges and completion rates in training colleges and in further and higher education.

Mr Douglas:

I thank Nuala for her presentation. I have two questions. First, the implementation report mentions working in neighbourhood renewal areas. I am thinking about hard-to-reach people, particularly young people who have dropped out of school or who are NEET. Are there mechanisms whereby we can reach organisations that work with those people? Some community organisations do an excellent job in trying to reach people who invariably would not go to a school or college for that sort of information.

Secondly, someone mentioned the power of social media to me yesterday. A situation developed in the past couple of days, and people were talking about the importance of Twitter in getting information. Do you have some sort of social media programme, particularly for contacting young people?

Mrs Shaw:

In relation to working with hard-to-reach groups, we work with a number of organisations such as Include Youth, which is mentioned in the paper. Our advisers are mostly located in job centres and jobs and benefits offices. They are based in 27 locations throughout Northern Ireland, so it is a case of small numbers at a local level. They work with the local community organisations on the ground. They also work with alternative education programmes and education and welfare officers to identify people of school age who may have gone off the radar for one reason or

another.

Part of what we are trying to introduce through our tracking system is an arrangement whereby an adviser would be responsible for working with the young person from age 14 right through to age 18. They will have a duty to make contact with that person and to know whether they have continued in education or dropped out and, if necessary, to try to re-engage them. It would not be a specific mentoring role, as that is a different type of work. It is really about ensuring that they are aware that guidance is available and that they can make that contact. That covers working with people who are hard to reach.

The social media piece that you mentioned is part of the work that we want to do through the project on the skills strategy. Over the past year, we have made a lot of progress in working with NI Direct to move the Careers Service information to the NI Direct website. NI Direct is keen to work with us to develop that social media piece, but we want to do it in a structured and strategic way rather than simply adding our information on Twitter and Facebook.

Mr Douglas:

Are you not currently on Facebook or Twitter?

Mrs Shaw:

At this point, we are not. We have used texting to a certain extent, particularly at results time, to remind people that we are there. We want to do that more strategically, and we are working with the communications people in the Department on that.

Mr D McIlveen:

Thank you for the information. I have a reasonably straightforward question. How much resource is going towards training your advisers, and how is the advice that they are giving monitored? Is the training that they receive ongoing? In my constituency, a young man went into a pretty well-staffed job centre and asked for information about Gap NI, and no one in the job centre could give him any information about the programme. I spoke to the Minister about that, because that issue needs to be addressed. I agree entirely with my colleague about getting the information out via social media, but, obviously, the primary source of contact is your advisers. How well are they supported in having the information? That information changes quite regularly, and it is important that it is being put across accurately to the people who need it.

Mrs Kerr:

Clearly, it is vital that our careers advisers know what the opportunities are. I will come back to that particular issue in a moment.

We have described the kind of things that we expect from our advisers. They are all post-graduate qualified, and they all undertake continuous professional development. Yesterday's meeting was but one example of where we are looking at a particular issue, but they have access to labour market information, which we gather together from those who have best knowledge of their individual sectors. In this case, I am talking about the sector skills councils. We have developed and made available labour market information sheets, and they are also available to our advisers. Internally, we ensure that our careers advisers know about the various programmes that are available and about what is on offer.

I am keen to investigate the particular experience that you mentioned, but, in that case, I am not sure to whom the query was directed and whether the person was talking specifically to our careers advisers. We hope that it was evident what access to careers advisers was available. As you can imagine, our advisers are out of the office a lot visiting schools, but there is always the facility to make appointments to talk to a careers adviser and get the kind of information that you are talking about. I would like to look into that case, if that is OK.

Mr D McIlveen:

Of course. As I said, I wrote to the Minister about it. He gave me assurances that the issue would be addressed, so I am confident that it will be.

Mrs Shaw:

We have around 105 full-time equivalent careers advisers, and we run four professional development days a year. Part of that covers the Department's programmes, and a newsletter goes out every couple of weeks to advisers, highlighting things that they need to investigate more themselves. It is about getting the balance between bombarding them with information and giving them enough to know what they need to know. Knowing about the Department's programmes is very high on the agenda. The query will have gone to our operational side, which will be following up on that specific instance. We are constantly aware that the quality of what we do depends on the quality of the staff.

As Nuala said, we have our continuous professional development days, and the Civil Service performance management system is used throughout the service. The managers review the advisers' performance formally twice a year. They sit in on interviews with advisers, give them feedback on the quality of what they are delivering and draw their attention to issues that they would want to address. Each adviser has a personal development plan as well as our overall plan of professional development.

The Deputy Chairperson:

OK. Where are the representatives from the Department of Education who were to be here today?

Mrs Kerr:

The Department advised us that it would not be able to make someone available because of the industrial action.

The Deputy Chairperson:

OK. We were talking earlier about the careers advice that is given to folk in schools at an early stage. Can the Careers Service go into schools without being invited, or does it have to wait to be invited by the schools?

Mrs Kerr:

We have a service level agreement with, I think, 99% of all post-primary schools. Basically, we have a contractual relationship with schools. We offer a range of services, and the school can determine which service from our menu of services it wishes to avail itself of. In the main, that works extremely well with most schools. The schools have a careers teacher or teachers as well. They are separate from our careers advisers, who come in independently and provide independent advice. They are invited under the terms of the individual service level agreement that we have with each school.

Mr Lyttle:

Thank you for your presentation. My concern is primarily the fragmentation between the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning, or, specifically, the fragmentation between schools and the Department for Employment and Learning. I have said

before in Committee that the work of the Department for Employment and Learning seems to be progressing in that regard — I am not just saying that because I am on this Committee. However, the anecdotal feedback that I get from young people in schools is that there is still work to be done. Some of the key questions have already been asked today by you, Deputy Chair. How do you measure success and track outcomes? I am probably only now at the stage where I could give substantive feedback on my experience of careers guidance, which I received some time ago. That is something that we have to look at. Some would say that the guidance that I got cannot have been good if I ended up here.

I am also interested in the need for communication. A social media strategy sounds like a no-brainer. Indeed, it was mentioned in today's briefing. In regard to the connection between schools and all-age careers guidance, you mentioned that there is a move in England towards a national careers service that will oversee the process as opposed to a process guided by schools. Will you speak a bit more about that and advise if you know what way that is moving?

Mrs Shaw:

The Minister of State at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, John Hayes, made an announcement about a year ago that England was going to move towards an all-age service. It has operated separate systems up to now. Since that announcement, there have been moves between the Department for Education there and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. They are setting up a national careers service. It will focus mainly on adults, and it will, I think, be based mainly online, with some face-to-face contact. The Connexions service, as was, which dealt mainly with young people, was funded through local government. However, because that funding has been reduced substantially, there are plans to move the responsibility for careers guidance to schools. Again, that will be through an online service rather than through face-to-face contact. Although a national careers service sounds like it will be all-encompassing, that will not necessarily be the case. There is a lot of unrest in England at the moment as they try to understand what sort of face-to-face guidance will be available for young people.

Mr Lyttle:

To be honest, that concerns rather than encourages me. I thought that a more co-ordinated approach was being proposed, but it does not sound like that is the case.

Frustratingly, a lot of the questions on this are for the Department of Education to answer. As

I said, through its work, the Department for Employment and Learning is trying to interact with schools. I am passionate about this issue. It is important for young people, and there is huge economic significance in helping young people into meaningful and employable experiences. It was indicated that the further and higher education sector and the schools sector were only invited onto the steering group in 2011. There is a lot of work to be done in this area. Progress is being made, but perhaps there should be a joint session of the Committee for Education and the Committee for Employment and Learning, or, at least, a joint briefing. This is not as joined-up as it needs to be.

Mrs Kerr:

It is probably worth saying a little bit about the steering group. It was established to deliver the strategy, and, between ourselves and our colleagues in the Department of Education, we drew in various interests. We also involved the business community, and Gordon Parkes is on the steering group to provide that perspective. There are separate careers advice streams for students in further and higher education. We recognise that, as you rightly say, there are benefits in our working together. We invited those sectors to join the steering group lately to extend its remit. We accept the points that you made. Our desire is to provide the most comprehensive and best advice to young people and the best service. We extended the steering group to ensure that all the stakeholders that we can think of are in one camp with us to help us and so that we can learn from them and benefit from their perspective.

Mr Lyttle:

I should say quickly that, in my experience, the careers advice offered in further and higher education is quite robust, so I hope that I did not seem too critical in that respect. I welcome the fact that the schools sector is involved in the steering group, because there has to be a joined-up approach.

The Deputy Chairperson:

The Committee will look at your point about having a joint meeting with the Committee for Education. Hopefully, that can be set up.

Mr Allister:

The service is shared across two Departments. You told us that there are five themes: one is within the bailiwick of the Department of Education; two are in your Department; and two are

shared. Obviously, to look at the subject, we need to hear from the Department of Education as well. You told us that there is no one present from the Department of Education today because of the strike. Just so that we are clear: are you saying that no official was available because all relevant officials are on strike, or are you saying that there was some ministerial direction from the Minister of Education that no officials should be at the Committee?

Mrs Kerr:

I cannot comment on decisions of the Department of Education. We invited them to join us here today to talk to you, and they indicated that they would be unable to do that. I cannot explain why or how that happened.

Mr Allister:

Do you know the answer to my question?

Mrs Kerr:

I do not know the answer to your question. I did not enquire. They provided me with the information that they would be unable to provide someone to come here.

Mr Allister:

It would be surprising, would it not, if there was no official across this subject who was not on strike?

Mrs Kerr:

I do not know whether that is surprising or not. The Careers Service is a DEL Careers Service. The strategy is a joint strategy, so the Department of Education has its responsibility for careers teachers. We have responsibility for the Careers Service. I have no information about the Department of Education's resources or availability, who is on strike in that Department or who is available elsewhere.

Mr Allister:

Are you satisfied that the service that you seek to provide is adequately resourced?

Mrs Kerr:

As I said, we have more than 100 full-time-equivalent careers advisers. In a perfect world, you

would have an infinite supply, but we believe we have a sufficient number to provide robust advice.

Mr Allister:

Is that a rising or falling number?

Mrs Kerr:

It has been a steady number over the past two years. We have made no attempt to reduce the resource available in that area.

Mr Allister:

Is demand rising or falling?

Mrs Kerr:

The demand is changing, and we have to adapt how we offer our service. That is one of the issues that arose. There is, I think, a greater desire for people to have instantaneous information, and that is why we need to move to a better, technology-based response. We are also moving to a much more differentiated service. The customers who arrive do not all need the same level of support. Our resource centres are intended to offer and provide the resource: some people can come and use that resource without support while others have a greater need for support. The approach is very much to allow those seeking information and advice to progress as far as they can in their own right, and we then step in to offer support. If somebody who cannot use technology comes to our offices and does not know where to start to seek the information that they want, we are there at the door to speak to them. We greet them and talk to them to see what kind of information and support they need.

So, we are trying to offer a differentiated service to meet the specific needs of individuals. That may or may not change the level of resource we need to offer people. If people are more familiar with using technology to seek the information that they want, we want to make sure that our technology-based services are as good as they can be. That is the project that we are working on.

Mr Allister:

Is that aspect adequately funded?

Mrs Kerr:

At this stage, we have not sought additional resources, but when we finally determine the manner in which we are going to proceed, we will seek money from within the Department.

Mr Allister:

Do you have any idea of how much funding that is going to take?

Mrs Kerr:

We have not scoped that at this stage.

Mr Allister:

It is not costed.

Mrs Kerr:

No, it is not costed.

Mr B McCrea:

I am caught with a tea in my hand; great.

Like Chris, I am quite passionate about getting young people the right advice. My careers advice was not wonderful, maybe partly because I ended up here. I do not think that we are really getting to it. When I talked to Invest NI, it laid out a business plan that said that we are producing too many graduates in areas such as law but are short of IT graduates. That is Invest NI's figure. Yet, I also know that there are part-time IT degrees in Jordanstown that have had really low uptake. So, where is the drive to say to people, "Look, these are the types of skills that are being sought by industry at the moment"?

Mrs Kerr:

The issue of the IT graduates is an interesting problem. The task for a careers adviser is to try to establish with the young person what their aspirations and aptitudes are and to try to show them the job opportunities in a particular sector. That must also be matched by individual sectors communicating with young people when they are at school and at different stages in their careers, so that they understand what the career opportunities are in, for example, the ICT sector. Some

work is being done on that, as you know. John mentioned the funding for the Bring IT On campaign that we are working on with Invest NI to allow industry in that sector to tell young people what it needs.

There is a third strand: the subjects that young people chose to study. I think that many of them choose an ICT qualification that does not necessarily provide them with the academic basis to do, for example, software engineering. They may not have the robust maths background for that. There are a number of issues there, and they impact on the dropout rate during the degree process, and so on. So, a lot of themes are involved. However, our job is to show the young person that there are interesting and rewarding jobs with good prospects. We need the industry to say that as well.

Mr B McCrea:

As with all things in this Committee, the more you learn, the more you understand the nuances of what people say. Colleagues here might not get it. I take it from what you say that ICT is a broad terminology, but we need only so many web designers. We really need core software engineers, or, potentially, I suppose, network and infrastructure engineers. That is the message that is not getting across to people.

A report from the University of Ulster showed that parents' perceptions of ICT were quite uninformed and fairly negative. I use that only as an example, but, if parents' perceptions play an important part in people deciding where they should be going, we need to do something about it.

My challenge, Nuala, is that we must do more than just show people what is available. We have to be a wee bit more proactive than that. Tom will have mentioned that, when we were in Europe, we learned that the Germans were much more into early interaction. They would say to young people, "Do you know what? This is what you would be good at. If I were you, I would do this." The German approach was less laissez-faire, shall we say, and more, "This is what we must do". We have to look after the economy as well as young people.

Mrs Kerr:

You are quite right. Parents are a key influence on young people. If they do not understand what an ICT job represents, it is hard for them to espouse that and show the young person that that is the direction in which they ought to go. Our task is to encourage young people, but we cannot

deliver them — we cannot channel them into a particular career; that is where we sit. Aside from the Careers Service, we, as a Department, work with, for example, the ICT sector in order to be able to tell parents what a job in the ICT sector represents. I do not know whether members remember the work that was done on the Future Skills Action Group. It brought the main ICT employers together, and a number of actions were taken. Following on from that, and funded by the employers themselves, a pull-out was issued in the ‘Belfast Telegraph’ that did exactly what you said; it described different types of job and showed the pathways, with some going into a job as a graduate, others as an apprentice and others as a PhD student. It showed how those people got into their job, what career path they followed and how much they earned. To me, those are critical factors.

Parents are, by nature, conservative when it comes to what they encourage young people to be. There is a history to the ICT sector. Many parents remember the problems in the sector, and that influences them greatly. Our job is to try to make it clear that the sector is stable and experiencing growth — unlike many other parts of industry and business — and that there are well-paid and attractive jobs out there for many people. It is a challenge for us. Our careers advisers understand what the opportunities are. It is a case of presenting to young people, when the opportunity allows, to encourage them to keep their options open as long as possible and not to give up on studying maths, and so on. In that way, they can maintain their range of choices rather than close them down.

Mr B McCrea:

I will close on this question. We have to come back to this issue. We are in danger of being a little bit too nice about everything — encouraging, offering opportunities and so forth. There is a really tough world out there. This is not about, “I wonder what I will be; I might be this or I might be that”. It is about the skills that you need to get a job.

Mrs Kerr:

Absolutely.

Mr B McCrea:

There is a problem. It is a hard thing to say, but there are people doing degrees that are not going to get them a job. It sounds good on paper; there are people doing computing-type degrees and they think that it is great because they have an interest in them. However, when they go for a job,

the answer is no, because they do not have the skills. That is misleading the young people, and we have to tell them. It is not just in IT; it happens in everything. We have to be a wee bit harsher.

Mrs Shaw:

That is the focus of the project that we are planning under the skills strategy. It will involve harnessing labour market information. At the moment, it is the careers adviser's role to challenge young people's thinking about what they are going to do. There will be those who have no notion and those who are planning to do medicine or law because that is what their parents did. We try to get them to broaden their thinking about what the other opportunities may be. The focus of the project that we are looking at is how we specifically bring the local labour market information to people when they are making that choice. The choice will always be the individual's choice, but we are trying to make sure that it is an informed choice. We want them to see what the outcomes of their potential decisions will be.

Mr Lyttle:

The way in which information is communicated is important. I take on board what you are saying, Basil, but you need to retain choice. I am loathe to tell a young person that they cannot do something, because, first, that is probably a sure-fire way of making them decide that they will do it, and, secondly, we should never limit people's aspirations. However, I absolutely take on board that we need to bring specific, detailed, industry-related information to bear at early stages of the decision-making process.

Mr B McCrea:

I want to respond to that; I will not take too long. It bears further investigation. All I can tell you, Chris, is that what I hear from industry is that they cannot get enough software engineers. I also hear that there are other computer science courses for which too many or not enough people apply. There is a mismatch, and the market is not working.

Mr Lyttle:

I agree.

Mr B McCrea:

All I really want to do is to say to young people that they are moving from being a young person

to being an adult and that, as an adult, it is about having the necessary skills to earn a living. Sometimes, we just need to be a little firmer. However, we are passionate about the same things.

Mr Lyttle:

I do not disagree.

Mr Ross:

I will be very brief. My personal experience of careers advice is similar to that of others; it was, perhaps, not overly useful. It would be more beneficial if we had people from DE here, but they are not here. I have heard criticism from others of careers advice in schools, particularly in grammar schools. My experience was that it was focused on one class a week, and we were presented with a number of university prospectuses and told to pick which one we wanted to go to. I encourage the aspiration of young people to go to university, but not just for the sake of going to university. At the risk of sounding like I agree with Basil, I will say that he is absolutely right to say that we need to have people coming to schools and saying where the careers opportunities are, where the shortages are and which course or pathway young people need to choose to get there. That should be the approach rather than simply having 30 minutes a week to pick your university course without any thought being given to where you will end up after you do your degree. So, that is where we need to get to and that is where the issue is, but it is probably more pertinent to the Department of Education than to DEL. That is certainly one of my criticisms of careers guidance at that age.

The Deputy Chairperson:

The issue will require more discussion, and we will have to come back to it. My son was pushed by the careers officer to go to university, but he did not want to do that. All he wanted to do was to be a motor mechanic, so we did not push him. We let him go in that direction. He did his training, got his qualifications, is now in employment as a fully qualified motor mechanic and is looking to set up a small business of his own. So, it is a two-way process. There is advice from careers officers, but there is also support from the family. Parents must make sure that they guide their children in the right direction. However, that is a debate for another day. We thank you for coming along to make the presentation and to answer questions.