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Assembly Business

Dr McDonnell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is with great sadness that I have to raise a point of order with you, but, during recent weeks, the Minister for Social Development's reactions to events in north Belfast have brought the House into serious disrepute. The Minister failed to give full support to the upholding of law and order. To my mind, Minister Nelson McCausland has clearly breached articles 1.4 and 1.5 of the ministerial Pledge of Office. Mr Speaker, is there any way in which you can take some action and sort this situation out?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. As he will know, as Speaker, I have no role in deciding whether the Pledge of Office, including even the ministerial code, has been breached by any Minister. The Member will know that these are complex and difficult issues. As Speaker, I have no role whatsoever in that. However, I will be keen to talk to the Member outside the Chamber about the complex issues to do with whether a Minister has broken the Pledge of Office or with his role as a Minister.

Dr McDonnell: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, I have discussed this issue with some of my colleagues, and we feel that this breach is very serious for the House. You rightly suggested that you do not have the authority on that matter, and we accept your wisdom on that. In that event, and because of the behaviour, we may have no option but to bring a motion of censure to the Floor.

Mr Speaker: Order. I listened intently to the Member, but, once again, I will say that these are complex matters. I say to all Members that, as Speaker, I have no role whatsoever in this issue. However, I am always keen to talk to Members outside the House on these issues, because they are complex.

Order. Before we proceed to today's business, I welcome Members back after the summer recess. As Members will know, I am so glad to see them in the Chamber this afternoon, and I also have a few announcements.

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I wish to inform the House that the Budget (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2012 has received Royal Assent and became law on 20 July 2012.

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: I have received the resignations of Mr Alban Maginness as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and of Mr Joe Byrne as Deputy Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee. Mr Patsy McGlone was nominated as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Mr John Dallat was nominated as Deputy Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, both with effect from 7 September 2012. Mr McGlone and Mr Dallat accepted the nominations. I am satisfied that the requirements of Standing Orders have been met and, therefore, confirm that the appointments took effect from 7 September 2012.

Matter of the Day

Michael McKillop

Mr Speaker: Mr Alban Maginness has been given leave to make a statement on the award given to Michael McKillop by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I recognise the huge success of many athletes from right across Northern Ireland who attended the Paralympic Games. I will be reasonably relaxed if Members want to widen the issue slightly, because I understand that there is a wider issue.

Members will be aware that I wrote to them on 3 July about changes to the arrangements for calling them to speak on matters of the day. I do not intend to revisit all the details of my ruling in the Chamber this afternoon. However, I remind the House that there will no longer be a speaking list at the Table. If other Members wish to speak, they should clearly indicate to me that they wish to be called by rising in their place and continuing to do so until they are called, as happens at Question Time. All decisions on who is called will be at my discretion. I will take a number of factors into account, as I always do. I do not expect most matters of the day to take much longer than they did before, but I have ruled that there will be a maximum time limit of 30 minutes.

Before I call Mr Maginness, I remind other Members who wish to be called that they should rise clearly in their place and continue to do so. All Members will have up to three minutes to speak. As I said, on this occasion, I will allow Members more latitude, within reason, to refer to the success of other Olympians. I will not take any points of order until the end. If that is clear, we shall proceed. The changes have come about because Members from various parties raised issues about getting the balance of business and party contributions right in the House. They have been made to streamline the business of the House as we enter the new session.

Mr A Maginness: I rise to speak about Michael McKillop and his extraordinary success at the Paralympics. I am also mindful of the many others from Northern Ireland who engaged in the Paralympics and, indeed, the Olympics. I have to say that they have done us proud. Their extraordinary efforts should be appreciated by all in the House. The courage and skill demonstrated and the entertainment and thrills that they provided us with are a matter of great celebration for all the people in Northern Ireland and in the House. I refer to not only Michael McKillop but to Jason Smyth, Bethany Firth and all those who won medals and participated in the Paralympics.

Michael McKillop is a lucky man: lucky because he lives in North Belfast and is one of my constituents. I know that Mr Ford has tried to claim him, but he has 200 metres of North Belfast to claim into South Antrim. North Belfast is a wonderful place, as we all know, because we have seen such extraordinary achievement from Michael McKillop — and, indeed, from Paddy Barnes, I hasten to add. It is a great honour for me, as a representative of North Belfast, to applaud the fact that Michael McKillop not only won two gold medals — he won both the T37 1,500 metres and 800 metres — but established himself as the world's greatest Paralympic middle-distance runner. Indeed, he had the honour of being presented with one of the gold medals by his mother, Catherine, and, of course, his father Paddy has been a wonderful coach in his athletic endeavours.

Michael is an extraordinary person, and the extraordinary zeal that he has shown for the Paralympic movement has been recognised by the International Paralympic Committee, and he was rightly honoured last night in London. The London Olympics and Paralympics have been a wonderful success.

Mr Speaker: I remind the Member of the time.

Mr A Maginness: The House should congratulate Michael on the honour that he has bestowed on all the people in Northern Ireland and in Belfast.

Mr Campbell: On behalf of my party and, I am sure, the rest of the House, I join the honourable Member for North Belfast in paying tribute to Michael McKillop, who was an outstanding Paralympian, and the other athletes. We do not want to go round the houses to say how tremendous each constituency is. Having said that, it would be remiss of me to ignore the Chambers brothers and Alan Campbell, who were absolutely magnificent in the Olympics, as were Jason Smyth and Sally Brown in the Paralympics. We undoubtedly have much to be proud of. We all sat and watched with awe as the

inspiring efforts of our Olympians and Paralympians brought success back to Northern Ireland. I understand that recognition for the athletes will be forthcoming, and that is right and proper.

Only a couple of days ago, the manager of the Russian football team, who was formerly a failed manager of England, Fabio Capello, when talking about the forthcoming match against Northern Ireland, said:

"Sure it is only Northern Ireland".

Well, it is only Northern Ireland that has the best Paralympian in the world in Jason Smyth, and it is only Northern Ireland that has the greatest boxers, rowers and other athletes from across the Province. We pay tribute to them, and we are exceptionally proud of them all.

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to continually rise in their places. There is a keen interest in this subject, and if Members continually rise, we will try to get all Members in.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I concur with what the previous Members have said and congratulate Michael McKillop on winning the Whang Youn Dai achievement award for the most outstanding Paralympic athlete of the games. Yesterday's all-Ireland hurling final brought together a wonderful summer of sporting achievement right across the island. It was a remarkable achievement for Team Ireland to win eight gold, three silver and five bronze medals. I think of Jason Smyth from my own neck of the woods who, of course, won double gold to follow the two that he had from Beijing.

I commend the Minister for putting together a reception this week. I wish her well after her recent hospitalisation and hope that she will make it on Thursday. I hope that Members here will attend the event in the Building on Thursday evening to mark the achievements of all the Olympians right across the board.

12.15 pm

There are also many who took part and did not win gold, and I congratulate them for their achievements. I think particularly of Sally Brown from Ballykelly. Last week was a very historic week for Ballykelly. Sally, of course, is the granddaughter of Brian Brown, who was a councillor of ours in Limavady Borough Council.

In fairness, perhaps this summer has changed people's attitude to sport. Particularly, and I heard this repeated on the radio this morning, it has changed people's attitude to disabilities. People have seen remarkable disabled athletes achieve goals that, a few short years ago, would have been beyond their reach. The House should join together and congratulate those people and mark that this week.

Mr Swann: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I congratulate all our Paralympic and Olympic medal winners. I had the privilege to meet Michael McKillop at the LOCOG Inspire event held here in the Northern Ireland Assembly earlier in the year, and I had the chance to speak to him about his commitment to the positive promotion of Paralympic sports. He carries that to schools and community organisations throughout Northern Ireland. What I found especially significant with Michael was his unassuming, humble approach to his achievements. That night, he could not understand why he had even been invited here, never mind being on the stage. When Michael reflects this morning, he can look back at his two gold medals — a T37 1,500 metres gold medal and the world record and a T37 800 metres gold — and the fact that he was given the special award for male athlete who best exemplified the spirit of the Paralympics at the games in London. Having met Michael, I am under no illusion that he is well deserving of all those medals and the accolades.

Like Members who spoke previously, I add my congratulations to all the competitors who took part in the Paralympic and the Olympic Games. I also commend the game makers from Northern Ireland who went across to London and volunteered in various capacities to make the event the success that it was. There was a large commitment in dedication and time from people from Northern Ireland to make the Olympics the true success that we have seen.

Mr Ford: I join in the congratulations to Michael and to all our Paralympians and Olympians. I echo the words that were said by nearly every Member of the House, apart from the nasty border war that

Alban Maginness was attempting to wage with me. The key thing, and why he quite correctly highlighted Michael McKillop, is not just the issue of the medals or taking part, but the fact that Michael was recognised as truly embodying the Paralympian spirit, and that is a very significant statement for this society as a whole, not just for him. I remind Alban Maginness that, although the Sandyknowes area of Newtownabbey may currently be in North Belfast, he acknowledged that it is by only 200 metres, and we all know how quickly Michael McKillop could cover that if he wanted back into South Antrim.

On a serious point, as somebody who, in a past life, was a senior social worker in Newtownabbey and worked with groups assisting people with disabilities, it is a huge statement that one of ours achieved that award for embodying the spirit. It is recognition not just of what Michael and his family have done, which is clearly significant, it is also something in which all those involved in working to assist people with disabilities across Northern Ireland can take pride, especially those in Newtownabbey. Although we should recognise that the achievement of that special award is a victory for all of us, it is clearly a victory most particularly for Michael and his family, and it is something that we should all take pride in.

Last night, Lord Coe said that the Paralympic Games had changed the way in which we relate to disability. If that is the lasting legacy for all of us, that is something that will be truly worthwhile.

Ms P Bradley: I congratulate all the Olympians and Paralympians from Northern Ireland. From the very moment when we stood out on the steps on the Sunday morning when the torch came up to Stormont right through until the closing ceremony of the Paralympics last night, I was drawn in and truly addicted to it over those wet, horrible weeks in August. I especially want to speak as a Member for North Belfast and as someone who grew up in Glengormley, someone who represents Glengormley, someone who lives in Glengormley and someone who was the mayor of Newtownabbey and met Michael on several occasions. What a wonderful young man and what a wonderful ambassador for Paralympic sport in Northern Ireland and, of course, Newtownabbey. I offer him my wholehearted congratulations. I look forward to the homecoming party that he deserves when he arrives back in Glengormley.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Member for North Belfast for bringing the matter to us. What a way to start our new session, all together as we should be. Is it not wonderful how sport is the equaliser that brings us together?

I want to mention a couple of things. Having watched the faces of the athletes — just to be on the track; just to be in the auditorium; just to be doing whatever they were there to do — I can tell you that, for me, their expressions sold everything. In fact, at times, they really put me to shame, in that I did not recognise the disability that they had and how they were overcoming that. When I watched people play football, with a bell to direct them towards the goal, I said, "That is just astounding." We saw how people have overcome their disability to the best of their abilities and made the best out of them.

I will touch on the legacy. Much has been said about the legacy that the games will bring. Northern Ireland, on top of its victorious achievements, should now be laying claims for that legacy to make sure that we get a part of it and that funding is assured for the future. We end the games by looking forward to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

Finally, I say that we are a great country, Northern Ireland. We bump into people all over the world, holding positions in many, many spheres, who we can relate to because they come from a village or town or city that we were born in or know well. We have done well in these sports, at international and national level. I am very proud of all who took part and hope that they get the welcome they deserve. I hope that we remember what they have laid down for the young people coming after them. We have so much to look forward to.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing the matter to be heard today.

Miss M McIlveen: Like other Members, I thank the Member for bringing forward the matter on the achievements of Michael McKillop. Those of us who were gripped by the Paralympics over the past couple of weeks were no doubt amazed at the victory over adversity that those who took part displayed. The efforts and achievements of Michael are certainly deserved in earning him the accolade of male athlete who best exemplified the spirit of the games. Michael utterly dominated both his races, but in his post-race interviews was truly magnanimous and gracious in victory, paying tribute to his fellow racers.

Although the Matter of the Day concerns the award conferred upon the Glengormley resident, I pay tribute to all the athletes from Northern Ireland who played a full and determined part in what was probably the best Olympic and Paralympic Games that I have ever seen. I thank James Brown, Sally Brown, Eilish Byrne, Bethany Firth, Laurence McGivern, Jason Smyth, Sharon Vennard, Paddy Barnes, Michael Conlon, Hannah Craig, Martyn Irvine, David McCann, Iain Lewers, Lisa Kearney, Alan Campbell, Richard and Peter Chambers, Ryan Seaton, Matt McGovern, James Espey, Sycerika McMahon, Melanie Nocher, Na Liu, Aileen Morrison and Gavin Noble for entertaining and inspiring all of us. They were all ambassadors for Northern Ireland on a world stage.

From the opening ceremony of the Olympics, when the Phil Kids' Choir sang on the Giant's Causeway, to Sir Kenneth Branagh's portrayal of Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Dame Mary Peters passing the torch to Katie Kirk to light the cauldron while Alex Trimble sang, through to the presentation of Michael McKillop's award, Northern Ireland was front and centre at the beginning, middle and end of both games. I pay tribute to the coaches, volunteers, schoolchildren, games makers and others from Northern Ireland who contributed to the outstanding success of London 2012, and, of course, all who made these the greatest Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Mr Speaker, I realise that the further achievement this weekend of Rory McIlroy should not go unmentioned and unrecognised. Yet again, he has made sure that Northern Ireland is at the centre stage of sporting success.

Mr McClarty: All of us have something in common this morning — all of us are back to school. However, we are also suffering from withdrawal symptoms from the Olympics and, latterly, the Paralympics. There were fantastic events on the world stage, and the Northern Ireland athletes proved themselves equal, if not more than equal, to others from around the world. I am talking not only about the medallists from Northern Ireland, but all the competitors, because even to achieve Olympic standard is a tremendous achievement for any athlete. Of course, I particularly think of the athletes from my own constituency. I remember particularly well standing in a church hall with the MP for the area and then at the Diamond watching our rowers bring honour and glory. They showed the real Olympic spirit. I think particularly of Alan Campbell who was on the point of exhaustion and was willing and able to give his very last to achieve his bronze medal.

I want to pay tribute to not only the athletes, Mr Speaker, but to their parents and families. They have made tremendous sacrifices over the years for their sons, daughters or whomever. Those people are not used to the limelight, but they had microphones thrust under their nose, and they represented Northern Ireland to the very best when they had to comment on national television.

Assembly Business

Extension of Sitting

Mr Speaker: I have been given notice by members of the Business Committee of a motion to extend today's business beyond 7.00 pm. Under Standing Order 10(3A), the Question on the motion will be put without debate.

Lord Morrow: I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 10 September 2012 be extended to no later than 7.30pm.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 10 September 2012 be extended to no later than 7.30pm.

Committee Business

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: As with similar motions, this will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Declan McAleer replace Ms Michaela Boyle as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development; that Ms Rosie McCorley replace Mr Pat Sheehan as a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure; that Mr Chris Hazzard and Mr Pat Sheehan replace Mr Phil Flanagan and Mr Daithí McKay as members of the Committee for Education; that Ms Sue Ramsey replace Ms Jennifer McCann, and that Ms Maeve McLaughlin be appointed, as members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Mr Barry McElduff replace Mr Chris Hazzard as a member of the Committee for the Environment; that Ms Megan Fearon be appointed as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel; that Ms Maeve McLaughlin be appointed as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; that Ms Rosie McCorley replace Ms Jennifer McCann as a member of the Committee for Justice; that Ms Megan Fearon and Ms Bronwyn McGahan replace Mr Francie Molloy and Ms Caitriona Ruane as members of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; that Mr Declan McAleer be appointed as a member of the Committee for Regional Development; that Mr Phil Flanagan be appointed as a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning; that Ms Caitriona Ruane be appointed as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee; that Mr Francie Molloy replace Mr Alex Maskey as a member of the Committee for Standards and Privileges; that Mr Phil Flanagan replace Ms Sue Ramsey as a member of the Committee on Procedures; that Mr Daithí McKay be appointed as a member of the Public Accounts Committee; and that Mr Gerry Kelly be appointed as a member of the Business Committee. — [Mr McCartney.]

Mr Speaker: We now move to the second motion on Committee membership. Again, this will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Sean Rogers be appointed as a member of the Public Accounts Committee; and that Mr Alban Maginness be appointed as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Mr Speaker: I know that this is the first day back, but the "ayes" need to be a wee bit louder.

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council Misuse of Drugs Sectoral Format

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Mr Speaker, in accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on the eighth British-Irish Council ministerial meeting on the misuse of drugs, which was held in St Helier, Jersey on Friday 29 June 2012. Junior Minister Jennifer McCann MLA and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting.

12.30 pm

Deputy Anne Pryke, Jersey's Minister for Health and Social Services, hosted the meeting. Jersey was also represented by the Minister for Home Affairs, Senator Ian Le Marquand, and the Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services, Constable John Refault. The Irish Government were represented by the Minister of State with responsibility for primary care, Ms Róisín Shortall TD, who chaired the meeting. Lord Henley, Minister of State for Crime Prevention and Antisocial Behaviour Reduction, represented the UK Government. Guernsey was represented by the Minister of Home Department, Mr Jonathan Le Tocq. The Isle of Man was represented by Honourable Juan Watterson MHK, Minister for Home Affairs. Ms Roseanna Cunningham, Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, represented the Scottish Government. Finally, the Welsh Government were represented by Ms Joanna Jordan, director of corporate services and partnerships at the Health, Social Services and Children Department.

The main thematic discussion at the meeting focused on 'Young people and drugs — breaking the cycle'. During the discussion, Ministers shared evidence in relation to the trends in drug use among young people, and it was agreed that there is a need for an improved understanding of how the attitudes and behaviours of young people change and develop, as that is important in optimising the success of any interventions. Ministers agreed that the promotion of healthier lifestyle choices for young people through an improved focus on personal development and life skills is the key to breaking the cycle of substance use.

A graduated approach to prevention and education measures was favoured, ranging from universal approaches aimed at the general population, such as consistent education in the school setting and public information, to taking more targeted approaches, such as brief interventions and assertive outreach, aimed at those who are at greater risk. The importance of providing timely, age-appropriate treatment and support to young people who use drugs was discussed, together with alternative options other than incarceration for dealing with young offenders.

Discussions also focused particularly on how drug misuse can affect families and especially on addressing the increased risks for children in families that are experiencing problem substance use. The need for referral procedures across all service providers to ensure early and appropriate interventions for members of such families was also highlighted.

Concluding this section of discussion, the Council agreed on the importance of endeavouring to provide opportunities and experiences for young people that would lessen the likelihood of their becoming involved in drug use, as well as dealing with such issues for this age group in a way that increases the chances for long-term drug-free living.

During the meeting, Ministers also took the opportunity to discuss the use and misuse of alcohol in their jurisdictions. We exchanged information on the extent of problems relating to alcohol and the various approaches that are being taken to address the issues, including through legislative measures being explored in a number of member Administrations. Following the discussion, Ministers agreed that the use and misuse of alcohol should be included in the work of the British-Irish Council. Given the nature of alcohol use across the jurisdictions, we consider that this is a very positive and useful development.

We also reviewed the recent work carried out by the British-Irish Council in the area of the misuse of drugs. This included the summit meeting that took place in Dublin in January this year, where heads of Administrations and Ministers discussed 'Recovery from problem drug use' and agreed to encourage a renewed focus on recovery and to share successful approaches in that regard.

The 2012 programme also covered issues such as developing methods of assessing the progress of local drugs programmes to inform what is a wider policy development; the development and implementation of naloxone programmes to reduce deaths from opiate overdoses; and issues around the misuse of prescription drugs, in particular benzodiazepines.

It was agreed by Ministers that the meetings had provided a useful forum for sharing the detailed expertise and knowledge of those involved in the drugs sector across the British-Irish Council area. It was also noted that, in addition to exploring specific themes in depth, each meeting had facilitated the exchange of information on wider policy developments and initiatives.

We agreed that the work programme for 2013 would include sectoral group meetings on the misuse of drugs in Scotland, the United Kingdom, Guernsey and Ireland. That will help to continue the development of the formal and informal links that have built up between the Administrations to the benefit of the effort against drug misuse in all jurisdictions.

It was agreed that the next ministerial meeting of the work stream would be in late 2013.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the junior Minister for his update on this important work. I go back to paragraph 11: did the junior Minister sense a meeting of minds from delegates on the issue of alternatives to incarceration? I have the impression, for example, that the tradition on the Isle of Man is what we might call a rather punitive physical intervention regime.

Mr Bell: In the criminal justice system, the 'New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs: Phase 2' outlines all the actions that we will take to reduce the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse, and the Northern Ireland Department of Justice has significant input to addressing alcohol- and drug-related offending. Through the 'New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs: Phase 2', a number of planned actions will assist offenders to overcome drug and substance misuse. They will include substance misuse programmes for those who are on probation and those in prison. It involves local policing and community safety partnerships working closely with drug and alcohol co-ordination teams to address substance misuse behaviour in communities. It includes the roll-out of a regional initial assessment tool into other sectors and the development of that tool as the first point of contact for all our agencies that work with young people so that they can identify, intervene early and signpost to the appropriate agencies so that young people can get the help that they need. It involves community organisations working in prisons to deliver psychological and educational programmes to all offenders, and it ensures that there is a continuum of treatment and support for those who are leaving prison and returning to the community and access to addiction services in the three custody suites. Those are the targeted measures that we will use to help young people to come through drug dependency and, in many cases, alcohol and drug dependency.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the junior Minister for his statement. He is quite right that early intervention is the key to this, and I agree entirely with him. The Minister will be aware that today is world suicide prevention day. He has visited my constituency of North Belfast and met those involved in trying to prevent the spread of the awful scourge of suicide, so he will know that a joined-up approach is —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to come to his question.

Mr Humphrey: The connection between drugs, drink and suicide is well known. Does the Minister agree with me that the work of organisations such as FASA and church youth organisations is key to a resolution and that, as the Health Minister said this morning, a joined-up approach is absolutely essential.

Mr Bell: The Member raises two key points: joined-up working and early intervention. I am more than happy to place on record our thanks to the people in his constituency and to the churches and youth and community organisations, many of which work on an entirely voluntary basis, who work hard to give young people the opportunity, through, first of all, prevention and, secondly, early intervention, to receive the help that they need. It is important that we have targeted initiatives for those most at risk, including reaching out to the children and young people in North Belfast, Strangford and, I am sure, in all our constituencies who are not in education, employment or training. I pay tribute to those organisations and to all the organisations working across the constituencies, including my constituency of Strangford, where we have North Down Community Assistance, Scrabo Residents

Association and Ards Community Network, which worked in the Bowtown estate to transform murals and to ensure that young people got a positive message about abstaining from drug use. All those organisations deserve tremendous credit.

As I said in my statement, the important thing, in my view, is that the health and social care family has developed a regional initial assessment tool. That allows all those non-specialist workers to screen and assess a young person's drug and alcohol misuse, provide an initial intervention and signpost him or her to the correct service. That tool has been piloted and evaluated in the youth justice sector, and work is under way to roll it out across all the sectors: social services, education and the police. Over the past two years, the Public Health Agency has piloted the one-stop shop initiative to support young people around substance misuse.

As the Member for North Belfast pointed out, in his constituency, which is, in many ways, no different from all our constituencies, not only do young people have issues with substance misuse but there is the very serious issue of suicide. That is a priority for Jennifer McCann and me. Those of us who have worked with young people and lost some of them in our previous careers in social services know the impact that suicide has on social workers, the family, the loved ones and the surrounding families. However, there are also the issues of self-harm and mental health and well-being, and different pilot sites have been established in rural and urban areas. Each has taken a slightly different approach, but the initiative will be rolled out across Northern Ireland, and it will recognise that the misuse of drugs is often linked to the misuse of alcohol, self-harm and poor sexual and mental health.

Also as part of phase 2 of the new strategic direction, a range of local low-threshold counselling and mentoring services for children and young people is being commissioned and made available across Northern Ireland. Prevention is key, but it is key not only that we invest in services to prevent young people from engaging in substance misuse but that there is early intervention and a treatment and support service. I pay tribute to the local low-threshold counselling services, which are often the very first point of contact in the health service for children and young people with substance misuse issues.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement and answers so far. Given that the meeting focused on the issue of young people and drugs and breaking the cycle, what steps are the Executive taking to ensure not only that there is early intervention but that the signs of drugs misuse that the general public, schoolteachers and others can pick up on are reacted to? There should be a process that young people, particularly those at school, can go through to get support and intervention without being criminalised.

Mr Bell: The Member raises some important issues. There is a co-ordinated approach, initially with the Department of Education but also involving the Department of Health and the Department for Social Development. The key strategy that runs through all of this is the new strategic direction. As the Member states, it is important — the Executive are focused on recognising this — to realise that children and young people can be susceptible to the harm related not just to their own substance misuse but to that of others. We have to realise that a number of our young people have carers and parents who live with substance and alcohol misuse. It must be recognised that each individual has their own needs and will require a different approach from that taken with adults to address those needs.

12.45 pm

Therefore, two themes are being taken forward through the Executive: one is the theme of adults and the general public, and the second is that of children, young people and their families. As the Member alluded to in his question, the age of initiation can be critical. There is evidence that, sometimes, the earlier the young person starts drinking, the more likely they are to have serious alcohol problems later in life. Therefore, the focus on prevention work is being carried out to target a range of groups and through a wide spectrum of organisations, including not only the schools but the Youth Service and the wide body of community organisations that exist. However, a significant proportion of it is being taken forward in education settings. There is also a new focus on increasing the emphasis on developing and promoting prevention work in community settings, particularly for groups that are termed "hard-to-reach" and areas that are described as "disadvantaged".

The Member asked for specific initiatives. The key initiatives include the roll-out of the adapted school health and alcohol harm reduction project, which many Members will know as SHAHRP, in Northern Ireland. That project has already shown effectiveness in reducing alcohol-related harm among

schoolchildren in Northern Ireland, and alcohol and drug misuse remain mandatory elements of the school curriculum in Northern Ireland, as part of the wider personal and social development agenda.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the junior Minister for his statement. Has he or his Executive colleagues given any more thought to minimum pricing for alcohol?

Mr Bell: Yes. Minimum pricing for alcohol remains a very live subject that is under discussion. That is because of the significance of alcohol misuse to us in Northern Ireland. The research that we are looking at has shown that it costs up to £900 million a year and is a much bigger issue than drug misuse. I repeat: the cost of alcohol misuse is £900 million a year in Northern Ireland. The issues of particular concern are, as the Member says, first, how the alcohol is priced and, secondly, how it is promoted. Research has shown that alcohol is 62% more affordable today than it was more than 30 years ago in 1980 and that, as the relative price of alcohol falls, its consumption and misuse increase. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Social Development have been following developments in this area. In 2011, the Departments issued a joint consultation on the principle of introducing a minimum unit price in Northern Ireland, and they continue to work together on the issue. They are keen to assess and establish the impact that minimum unit pricing is likely to have in Northern Ireland. They are commissioning research to model the likely effect of minimum unit pricing in Northern Ireland, and that will help to inform the future decision in that area. I understand that we are also looking at the issues with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the junior Minister for his update on the work that is being undertaken. What is his assessment of the extent and type of drug and alcohol misuse among young people and others in Northern Ireland? What practical and legislative measures are being explored in other British and Irish Administrations to address the misuse of alcohol in particular?

Mr Bell: It is important to note that, in Northern Ireland, the majority of our young people do not take drugs and that most of those who take those substances have done so recreationally. I do not like to use that term, as it can be misleading and lead to a false impression. In my view, any time that you take drugs, there is potential for harm. However, many of the young people who have experimented have not gone on to develop addiction or suffer significant harm. That having been said, as I know from my social work experience, there are many cases where young people have been at the very onset of starting to take drugs and have suffered severe health effects as a result. The message should go out to young people that there is no harm-free option in experimenting with drugs.

As the Member knows, drug misuse is only one issue that faces many of our young people. Alcohol misuse, obesity, sexual health, mental health, peer pressure and bullying all have an impact on our young people. However, research from surveys that have been carried out shows that Northern Ireland seems to be reaching something of a plateau in levels of drug misuse. We have real concerns about more young people involving themselves in drug use with the emergence of what are sometimes known as "new psychoactive substances" and sometimes mislabelled as "legal highs". I say that they are mislabelled as "legal highs", and I refer anybody who uses that term to the Medicines Act, which shows that it is illegal to provide drugs of that nature for human consumption. We need to avoid using the term "legal highs" or even dressing them up as "new psychoactive substances". These are drugs that are harmful, and young people appear to be using them, but, to answer the Member's question directly, overall drug misuse seems to be reaching something of a plateau. In my assessment, cannabis remains the main drug of misuse for our young people. Some 69% of the under-18s in treatment recorded cannabis as their main drug. Mephedrone is having an impact, with 17% recording that as their drug of misuse. Thankfully, we have very low numbers of under-18s either reporting the use of or seeking treatment for the use of heroin and cocaine. In addition, we see very low numbers of under-18s who are injecting any drugs.

As has been said by a number of Members, alcohol misuse among our young people remains the most prevalent issue for us to deal with. Some 46% of pupils report having taken an alcoholic drink, and of those who have had an alcoholic drink, 49% were aged 13 or under when they had their first drink. However, I am pleased to report that some progress is being made on reducing the percentage of young people who get drunk, which has fallen from 33% in 2003 to 23% in the last figures that I looked at, which are for 2010.

Overall, it is important that we do not overplay the figures or underplay the issue. Many young people will suffer real and lasting harm from drug use. There is no room for complacency. We need to

provide a range of services from prevention through to intervention and treatment services to support our young people not to use drugs in the first place and to assist them in their recovery when they do.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the junior Minister for his statement. Will he outline whether any proposals were made to ensure that local police forces work closely together to combat drug trafficking in the United Kingdom?

Mr Speaker: That is an example of a very focused question.

Mr Bell: Essentially, what has been done in police forces right across the jurisdictions is to focus on sharing good practice. Secondly, there is a focus on the fact that, as I said, it is not an issue for the police and the criminal justice system alone, although, when young people go on probation or are incarcerated as a result of a sentence, there is a co-ordinated approach to ensure that the cycle of addiction is broken, not only while they are in prison but when they are out of prison, through a continuum of progress. The focus was on multidisciplinary working, and that included the police services.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the junior Minister for his statement, which is on a hugely important matter. I remind him that, in what he is saying, there is too much on strategy, research, developing methods and informing wider policy, and there is a danger of referring to it as waffle again. We want to see actions, timelines and targets.

I will get to my question. Page 3 of the statement mentions legislative measures being explored in other Administrations. I think that that is also what Mr Lyttle was asking about and did not get an answer to. What other legislative measures are there or have been mentioned?

Mr Bell: Nothing was specifically identified as new legislation, as I recall. I will avoid point scoring because I think I have shown the clear and new processes that are taking place in dealing with young people. You may regard the work that is done on the school health and alcohol harm reduction project that I outlined as waffle, but I can assure you that, if you were to listen to the young people and schools in south Antrim, they would tell you, as they are telling me in Strangford and across Northern Ireland, that the school health and alcohol harm reduction project has already been shown to be effective in reducing alcohol-related harm in schoolchildren in Northern Ireland. If you had been listening, you would have heard that alcohol and drug misuse remain mandatory elements of the school curriculum in that part of Northern Ireland. If you had been listening, you would have heard the targeted initiatives that reach out to young people not in education, employment or training. If you had been listening, you would have heard the specific information on the regional assessment tool, which gives the non-specialist workers the opportunity of interventions and signposting to the correct service, and that that tool had already been piloted and rolled out across other key sectors like social services, education and the police. If you had been listening, you would have heard that the Public Health Agency has been piloting the one-stop shop initiative, which helps young people around substance misuse. If you had been listening, you would also have heard that it was helping with suicide, self-harm, mental health, sexual health, relationship issues, resilience and coping skills. You would also have heard, had you been listening, of the low-threshold counselling that has been rolled out across Northern Ireland. It is important that people, even those in their castles, do not refer to waffle when they look down but think for a second of the poor man at the gate dealing with families and children, and, instead of party political point scoring, focus on what has already delivered success to young people in Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister: I was listening, and I heard the Minister dodge the essence of the question from Mr Nesbitt, so can I take him back to that matter? What are these alternatives to incarceration? Fuzzy, liberal talk about alternatives to incarceration comes very easily, but what are the alternatives that have been discussed? Do they involve any element that is punitive, so necessary for deterrence? The Minister likes to cultivate a persona of being tough on crime, so let us hear from him. What are the alternatives to imprisonment for young offenders that he is thinking of?

Mr Nesbitt: Hear, hear.

Mr Bell: Mr Nesbitt said "Hear, hear"; I do not know whether he is proposing the model of flogging people. The TUV leader seems to act as the plenipotentiary for the absent Ulster Unionist leader on so many occasions. I do not know whether they are talking about bringing people out and flogging

them. The Ulster Unionist leader was talking about the Isle of Man: I am not sure what those initiatives were. Certainly, I spoke to people on the Isle of Man at the weekend about the initiatives that have taken place there, but, if it is now the TUV/Ulster Unionist policy to want people to be brought out and publicly flogged, it is up to them to defend that argument. I am interested —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Bell: If the TUV and Ulster Unionists want to go out and advocate public flogging, I think they will find themselves as embarrassed as they are now, which means they are trying to get out from their sedentary positions — [*Interruption.*] Look: those who are serious — and I mean serious — about helping young people avoid harm know that we have to do a number of things. First, we had to establish the regional assessment tool. We had to make sure that, whether you live in Dungannon or Ballyhalbert, when you come forward to the health service you can have a proper assessment, and that assessment could often direct you to counselling services that would prevent you going into a criminal career of drug misuse. That is the key.

The second initiative, if you had been listening —

1.00 pm

Mr Allister: Drug misuse —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Bell: You and Mike can go and argue all you like that you want people publicly flogged in the streets — [*Interruption.*] He will be more embarrassed than you are, and that might be hard —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Bell: The initiatives are not about scoring points, Mike. They are not about flogging people in the centre of Newtownards. The initiatives are about a one-stop shop: young people getting the help where they need it; getting the pressure taken off them that has led many of them to attempt suicide and self-harm; getting help for their mental health and well-being and for the threat to their sexual health; and assistance with their relationships, resilience and coping skills.

I may not have spoken to them all, but I have spoken to many across Newtownards and right across the north, south, east and west of this Province. It may disappoint Mike Nesbitt and Jim Allister, but the focus of the Northern Ireland people is to assist young people, to intervene early, to give them the treatment that they need, to get them help when they fall into the criminal justice system and to ensure that they get help on a continuing basis when they come through the criminal justice system and out the other end, so that they can maintain their treatment and prevent recidivism. There is not a single person anywhere that I have travelled who goes for the Allister/Nesbitt approach of hang them and flog them in public.

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: A point of order from Mr Nesbitt, before we move on.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Speaker go back over Hansard and contrast the words of the junior Minister to my words? He is making a connection that does not exist.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order —

Mr Speaker: Let me deal with that point of order first. As the Member will know and I have said in the House on many occasions, I do not sit as an arbitrator in how a Minister might answer a question, but I am happy to look at Hansard for you. I call Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: I am obliged, Mr Speaker, and I am sure that you are anxious that no one is misrepresented. The Minister was asked a very simple question: what is he advocating as an alternative to imprisonment? We listened, and we heard no answer, because he has no answer. Instead, he seeks to misrepresent what I said, which was not "Let's flog them"; it was "What is your alternative to imprisonment?".

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us move on. Once again, as in a lot of these debates, I see it as the cut and thrust of debate. Members need to be continually reminded to be of good temper and show moderation in the Chamber. That goes for Ministers as well. Let us move on.

Mr Bell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can we also hear from the Ulster Unionist leader what he referred to when he talked about the excessive physical punishment on the Isle of Man?

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not prepared to open the debate again. Let us move on, but I will look at Hansard and come back to the Member directly.

North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the 1998 Act, regarding the seventeenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in agriculture sectoral format, held in Armagh on Wednesday 25 July 2012.

The Executive were represented by Minister Sammy Wilson MP MLA and me. The Dublin Government were represented by Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Phil Hogan TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. Minister Coveney chaired the meeting. This statement has been agreed with Minister Wilson, and I make the statement on behalf of us both.

The Council discussed recent developments and next steps in the CAP reform process and noted the possibility that an EU agreement may be reached during the Irish EU presidency in the first half of 2013. The Council further noted the strong commonality between Agriculture Departments on the main issues. Ministers discussed the need for a sufficient period of transition towards flat-rate area payments and the importance of regional flexibility in implementing CAP proposals. It was also agreed that Ministers should host a joint CAP-themed event at the national ploughing championships. As the process develops, Ministers and officials will maintain close contact, with a view to maximising benefits for farmers and rural communities right across the island.

The Council noted that on 12 June the EU Council of Ministers agreed a general approach on proposals for a basic common fisheries policy (CFP) regulation and the Common Market organisation regulation. The Danish Presidency has also submitted a progress report for the EU Council to note on a proposal for a European maritime and fisheries fund regulation. The EU Council's agreed proposals for reform of the common fisheries policy will be considered by the European Parliament, and a final CFP reform package is likely to be agreed during the Irish Government's presidency in 2013.

Ministers agreed that officials from the two Agriculture Departments will remain in close contact to ensure that shared aims for fisheries reform are represented to the greatest extent possible in the final agreement.

Ministers discussed recent developments and opportunities in international trade, including the agrifood industry's strong record of export-led growth making the sector well placed to exploit opportunities for increased global trade. Ministers also discussed prospects for developing agrifood links between China and Ireland in areas such as animal health, equine studies and research and trade.

The Council welcomed progress on the delivery of the all-island animal health and welfare strategy action plan, including the submission to the EU by both Agriculture Departments of the applications for Aujeszky's disease-free status, with the aim of having both applications considered at the EU Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health meeting; the hosting of an international vaccination experts' scientific symposium in May 2012 in Belfast, which considered the potential that vaccination could play in the eradication of bovine TB; further liaison between officials during discussions on the

proposed new EU animal health law; and a successful joint cross-border mapping exercise called Exercise Mirrormap, which took place on 29 February 2012. Ministers also looked forward to receiving a further progress report at their next meeting.

The Council noted a progress report provided by the plant health and pesticides steering group on the implementation of its work programme, including an informal meeting in February 2012 to discuss potato and ornamental pests, surveys and the review of EU plant health legislation and two forestry meetings held in March 2012; facilitation, under the research agendas of the two Agriculture Departments, of a number of research projects, including projects on potato blight, blackleg and phytophthora ramorum, and the collaboration on the EUPHRESKO project on current and emerging phytophthora — I probably said that wrong — species; preparations for a trilateral meeting with the Food and Environment Research Agency to discuss areas of mutual concern, particularly the EU reform of plant health legislation; and agreement to establish an early incident warning protocol in relation to measures to control pesticide use.

The Council also welcomed the significant and ongoing cross-border co-operation to deal with the challenges posed by outbreaks of phytophthora diseases in forests. Ministers welcomed ongoing co-operation on rural development programme issues, specifically in relation to the support of cross-border engagement by local action groups. We also welcomed the progress of the €10 million INTERREG IVA funding for six strategic, cross-border rural development projects and the recent launch of projects such as harnessing natural resources, the Castleblayney and South Armagh rural investment initiative, and the river links and Clones Erne East Blackwater rural regeneration.

The Council also approved the InterTradeIreland 2012 business plan, recommended the budget and noted the Tourism Ireland annual report and draft accounts 2011. The Council agreed to hold the next agriculture sectoral meeting on 31 October 2012. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank the Minister for her statement. She noted that there were discussions on the CAP reform and on the progress, or indeed lack of progress, on the negotiations. There were discussions on the need for a sufficient period of transition towards flat area payments and the importance of regional flexibility within that. As well as discussions in the North/South Ministerial Council, can the Minister tell us what discussions she has had in Europe on those two issues and when she will be meeting the new Minister, Owen Paterson, on the issue of CAP reform?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, a lot of focus at the minute is on CAP reform. I take every opportunity. I have had meetings with the agricultural cabinet in Europe. I have also had meetings with Dacian Cioloș, the European Commissioner, and I will be meeting him over the next number of days to discuss further our proposals.

Obviously, for us, the most important thing was maintaining a decent budget as well as flexibility and simplification. They remain the three key tenets of the arguments that we are taking to Europe. In order for us to move forward, we need an agreement on the budget. Unfortunately, that has not happened yet. There were some indications that that would happen this side of Christmas, but it is now widely believed by many member states that that might not happen. That will push the whole timetable back.

All the negotiations will be ongoing over the next number of months. There will be the October, November and December Council meetings, in which we will actively engage. We have the new Minister in DEFRA; Owen Paterson is taking on that position. Hopefully, he will be able to reflect at any opportunity the views of the North and the farmers here and will have a bit more insight into the type of farming that happens here, given that he was placed here for some time. I will have a phone call with him later this week, and we will have to engage with him as I did over the past 14 to 16 months with the former Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. When we go to Europe, we do not differ on the details; we differ on the overall budget and the arguments that we put to Europe. We have to continue to exploit that alliance.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for her update. Will she update us on the position of the negotiations on the common fisheries policy (CFP) reform?

Mrs O'Neill: At this stage, things seem to be slipping, but there has been a bit more progress on CFP now that a general approach has been agreed. However, there is a lot more to be done before a final

decision can be reached. The intention, according to the timetable, is that an agreement will be reached by the middle of next year. The key issue that we need to press for is the need for regionalisation. The EU needs to recognise the diversity of the fisheries in EU waters. Obviously, fisheries vary according to location, so we need the Commission to take the view that one size does not fit all, that we need regionalisation, and that we need to be able to create our own management plans, which suit the needs of the industry, deal with the science, look at future sustainability and deal with the problems that we have with disregards.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her statement. I note her emphasis on international trade, which is extremely important for the future of our local agriculture industry. Will she assure those companies and farmers who are thinking of tapping into new markets that they will not be treated by DARD in the same way as local potato producers were treated when their cargo was rejected in Morocco?

Mrs O'Neill: I am committed to making sure that our farmers reach their full potential and can exploit all the available opportunities for trade. That is why I established the Agri-Food Strategy Board along with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. We wanted to look at the challenges and barriers to growth and at how to work in partnership with industry to ensure that we reach our potential.

We have fantastic produce, which is well marketed and which people want. The clean, green image of our produce is something that people want right across Europe and further afield. I will continue to work with farmers and industry in general to make sure that we take up all those potential opportunities. One of those opportunities is the links with China, which I am keen to continue to explore.

The Member mentioned the seed potato and Morocco. I dealt with that issue in the House before and I engaged with the farmers concerned. The Chair of the Committee wrote to me on the issue and I am happy to discuss it further with the Committee if it feels it is necessary.

Mr Byrne: I, too, welcome the statement, but I am concerned about its lack of substance. On international trade, what sort of meaningful discussions are going on between the Republic and ourselves about opening up potential markets in China and Russia? Given that most of our beef and pig farmers are experiencing difficulties at the moment, all urgency needs to be applied by the Department to make sure that we have some meaningful marketing exercises.

Secondly, will the Minister assure us that the new INTERREG IVa programme will not be affected by the kind of bureaucracy that pertained in the past and which caused a lot of frustration for local groups?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said in my previous answer, I am committed to ensuring that we reach our potential and tap into the markets that exist. Our growth, and the success of the agrifood sector, has been in the export market, and we will target export-led growth in the time ahead. There are potential avenues in China and Russia, and there are many other directions in which we should be looking in order to market our produce. As I said, our produce has a fantastic clean, green image that people seek out.

I agree with the Member about our pig farmers. There are issues around getting pork products into China because of the export certificate. I am actively involved in challenging that situation, and I raised it with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister ahead of all their previous visits to China. I have raised it with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I intend to take it up when I visit China.

1.15 pm

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement this afternoon. My question is along the lines of Oliver McMullan's as regards the common fisheries policy. Will the Minister advise the House whether any joint representations have been made? We are coming up to the December meeting in Brussels concerning quotas, etc, and Northern Ireland has certainly been at the sharp end of cuts every December. I acknowledge that there has been a rise in the herring quota recently, and we thank the Minister for her efforts in that area, but can she give us any encouragement that perhaps a joint effort will see a relaxation in the quotas for our local fishing industry?

Mrs O'Neill: When I reported to the House after last year's December negotiations, I called it the "dance" in Europe, because it is an unacceptable situation that we have to go out every year and argue for our quota for the year ahead. It does not allow fishermen the opportunity to plan ahead. How can you develop a business year on year not knowing what the quota will be? This is something that I will continually argue with Europe. It is not even something that CFP will fix — it will not remove the need for the December negotiations. However, I will go to those negotiations with the interests of the industry, and I will make sure that I defend the industry and its right to fish.

We have been very positive in our engagement with the Commission. We have had gear trials, which have been very successful, and our industry is meeting the needs of the Commission with respect to dealing with discards. So, in preparation for December, I will meet with the industry and make sure that we agree our key priorities. As I said, we have to go to make our case every December, which is unfortunate; but I will continue to do so. However, alongside that, I will continue to argue with the Commission that we need longer management plans for the fishing industry in order that it can be sustainable in the future.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement so far. As regards paragraph 7 of her statement, on all-island animal health, can I ask the Minister whether, with respect to the presentation on Aujeszky's disease-free status, she can give a commitment to the House that our submission on this matter was not held back and was submitted at the same time as that of the Republic of Ireland? Also, as regards the discussions on TB, did the Minister discuss her Department's wildlife intervention programme, and was that raised at the meeting?

Mrs O'Neill: As far as Aujeszky's disease-free status is concerned, we have an EU all-island animal health and welfare strategy. The principle behind it is to facilitate trade across the island. There should be no barriers to trade on such a small island. The presentations on Aujeszky's disease being submitted at the same time makes perfect sense. If we were to go ahead, and the South did not, trade would be affected. It makes good sense for us to put our submissions in at the same time. The EU Committee that will consider the matter will be doing so later this month, and we hope to have a positive outcome. I think that we are in a very positive position as regards increasing the trading opportunities that exist and not having to put in any silly controls with respect to movement across the island.

TB and brucellosis were not topics of discussion at the last meeting in any great detail. The Member is aware of my plans. I consulted with respect to compensation and decided to move forward just with the brucellosis compensation changes at this time. I will come back to the TB issue at a later stage. From 1 September, in-contacts will be treated in the same way as reactors, and the Member will be aware of that.

I think that we are doing a lot of positive work with respect to TB and the wildlife issue. It is a very emotive issue. There is no quick fix and no simple solution to TB; if there were, I would obviously take that route. We will continue with the hard work that we are engaged in as regards tackling all the factors that could possibly contribute to TB. However, there is not enough information out there, and this is an issue that we are going to have to continue to battle. I hope that we will get to the stage where we can be in a free status.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for her statement. I note the Castleblayney and south Armagh rural investment initiative. Are any similar initiatives being drawn up or supported with respect to cross-border initiatives between the Mourne and Cooley regions? I believe that this would help to complement the strong cross-border and cross-party support for the Narrow Water bridge.

Mrs O'Neill: I am not aware of any such project at this minute, but I will be happy to make some enquiries and come back to the Member. They are beautiful regions. The mountains are lovely, and I will be climbing the Cooleys on Saturday. That is something I enjoy very much. I will look into it and come back to the Member if there are any potential projects.

Mr Allister: The statement refers grandly to promoting opportunities in international trade. Why, therefore, has the Minister persistently refused assistance to help with export costs, particularly transport costs, for our significant niche export market in pedigree pigs? Why is she not helping Northern Ireland producers with those exorbitant costs? Does that mean that all this talk about supporting international trade amounts to mere sound bites with no substance?

