

DÁIL ÉIREANN

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IRISH LANGUAGE, GAELTACHT AND THE ISLANDS

COMHCHOISTE NA GAEILGE, NA GAELTACHTA AGUS NA NOILEÁN

Dé Máirt, 20 Samhain 2018

Tuesday, 20 November 2018

The Joint Committee met at 4 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan,	Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill,
Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív,*	Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile,
Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh,	Senator Joe O'Reilly.

* In the absence of Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher.

DEPUTY CATHERINE CONNOLLY IN THE CHAIR.

Seirbhísí trí Ghaeilge: An Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige

Chairman: Cuirim fáilte roimh na baill uilig atá i láthair. Tá Ard-Rúnaí na Roinne Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige agus a chomhghleacaithe ón Roinn linn inniu. Cuirim céad míle fáilte rompu. Tá a fhios againn go bhfuil cuid acu ag streachailt leis an nGaeilge. Tuigim é sin. Is é sin an fáth go bhfuil na cluasáin ar fáil. Déanaimis ár ndícheall le chéile agus an t-ábhar thar a bheith tábhachtach seo á phlé againn. Cuirim fáilte roimh Fergal Lynch, Ard-Rúnaí na Roinne; Denis O’Sullivan, príomhoifigeach sa Roinn; Paul Fay, príomhoifigeach eile sa Roinn; agus Niamh Ní Dhómhnaill. Tá foireann mhór ón Roinn tar éis teacht go dtí an cruinniú seo agus tá fáilte rompu go léir.

I dtús báire, tá orm fógra le léamh maidir leis an Acht um Chlúmhilleadh 2009. Ba mhaith liom a chur ar aird na bhfinnéithe go bhfuil, de bhua alt 17(2)(l) den Acht um Chlúmhilleadh 2009, na finnéithe faoi chosaint ag lánphribhléid maidir leis an bhfianaise a thabharfaidh siad don choiste seo. Má ordaíonn an coiste dóibh, ámh, éirí as fianaise a thabhairt i leith ní áirithe agus má leanann siad dá tabhairt, ní bheidh siad i dteideal dá éis sin ach pribhléid cháilithe i leith a gcuid fianaise. Ordaítear dóibh gan fianaise a thabhairt ach amháin fianaise a bhaineann le hábhar na n-imeachtaí seo. Fiafraítear dóibh cleachtadh parlaiminte a urramú nár chóir, más féidir, daoine ná eintiteas a cháineadh ná líomhaintí a dhéanamh ina n-aghaidh, ina ainm, ina hainm nó ina n-ainm ar shlí a bhféadfaí iad a aithint. Ba mhaith liom na finnéithe a chur ar an eolas freisin go ndéanfar na ráitis tionscnaimh a gcuirfear faoi bhráid an choiste a fhoilsiú ar shuíomh gréasáin an choiste tar éis an chruinnithe seo. Meabhraítear do chomhaltaí an cleachtadh parlaiminte atá ann le fada nár chóir dóibh tuairimí a thabhairt maidir le duine atá taobh amuigh de na Tithe nó maidir le hoifigeach ina ainm, nó ina hainm, nó ar shlí a bhféadfaí iad a aithint. Tá mo chuid déanta. Tá sé deacair an méid sin a léamh. Iarraim ar Fergal Lynch tús a chur leis an gcur i láthair.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Go raibh maith agat. Gabh mo leithscéal, ach níl Gaeilge líofa agam.

Chairman: Fós.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Beidh orm Béarla a labhairt. The committee has received my opening statement. Rather than reading it in its entirety, I will highlight a few points from it. There are two parts to the statement, the first of which deals with support for the Irish language within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the second of which deals with Irish language services in early years settings.

I would like to begin by referring to our response to the questionnaire of February 2017. I acknowledge and apologise that our response was rather minimalist at the time and it did not offer the committee a full picture of the various measures that we were taking. We have recently submitted an updated and expanded version of the questionnaire which I hope the committee will find more informative. Since completing the original questionnaire we have undertaken a good deal of work to increase the supports and the services provided in Irish by the Department and this was informed by a review of the Department’s language scheme undertaken by an Coimisinéir Teanga in 2017.

We have acted on an Coimisinéir Teanga’s recommendations following his review of the Irish language scheme and I will summarise some of those points. Some 20% of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs’ press releases this year were provided simultaneously in Irish, compared to the 10% promised in the Irish language scheme. We launched a new website

recently and we have considerably increased the number of pages translated into Irish on same. About 52% of all the pages are in both languages.

We do not have a high level of direct contact with the general public through Irish but we are committed to supporting the availability of Irish to the public. We have six officials in the Department, ranging from service officer level to principal officer level who are fluent in Irish and can engage with the public through Irish. We have recruited-----

Chairman: Gabh mo leithscéal as cur isteach ar an bhfinné ach an bhfuil duine den seisear sin le Ghaeilge anseo inniu?

Ms Niamh Ní Dhómhnaill: Tá beirt anseo.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: We recruited those two staff members last year. We have facilitated and continue to facilitate Irish training and staff also have their own informal caife le Ghaeilge once a fortnight. We will continue our efforts to encourage and support the use of Irish in the Department, trying to encourage an Irish language friendly atmosphere throughout.

On the early years segment, we are strongly committed to supporting the provision of services in Irish to children at an early age. We fund some 228 services which identify themselves as naíonraí, both within and outside Gaeltacht areas and about €16 million was invested in same over the last four years.

At a practical level, we have an early years forum to advise the Minister on all aspects of early years and we have allocated two places for Irish language stakeholders as well as having a specific subgroup of the forum from time to time for promoting Irish medium early childhood services. We also have six staff members from Better Start, which is the quality initiative within Pobal, who are proficient in Irish. They have provided support for about 135 naíonraí in the quality context and have provided support for our access and inclusion model for children with special needs.

We are very supportive of the five year action plan for the Irish language which was produced by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and we have committed to a set of important actions under the action plan in the early years area. These include providing information and supports for parents raising children through Irish and we are about to create two new Irish language posts next year, one in non-Gaeltacht areas and one for quality under Better Start. The job specifications have been finalised and the funding is in place for 2019.

We will participate fully in the overall monitoring of the five year action plan and we will also have our own specific group, which we will lead, to monitor the specific commitments in the early years sector.

Yesterday, the Taoiseach, with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, launched a major early years strategy called First Five, which is for babies, young children and families. This is a milestone policy for early years and it contains two actions that are specifically aimed at supporting the development of the Irish language within the early years sector. One is to ensure that children in Gaeltacht areas have access to Irish-medium early learning and care and the second is to develop mechanisms to provide the Irish language supports where there are a significant number of children learning through Irish. There will be an implementation plan for all of the actions in the strategy within six months.

There are many other aspects to the supports that we can and should be providing. I hope

that my summary and the opening statement will have provided a reasonable overview to the committee of the Department's work in this area. Tá dul chun cinn réasúnta maith déanta againn ach tuigim go bhfuil tuilleadh le déanamh. Bheinn sásta ceisteanna an choiste a fhreagairt agus tuairimí na mball a chloisteáil.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: Cuirim fáilte roimh na finnéithe. Ar an iomlán, tugann an Rialtas maoiniú do 228 seirbhís a aithníonn iad féin mar naíonraí laistigh agus lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht. An bhfuil aon rialacha ag an Roinn maidir le naíonraí a aithint agus an bhfuil aon choinníollacha teanga i bhfeidhm?

Tacaíonn an scéim deontais le clubanna óige áitiúla le gníomhaíochtaí clubanna grúpa óige faoi stiúir oibríthe deonacha ar leibhéal áitiúla. An bhfuil cuid den mhaoiniú a chuireadh ar fáil don scéim seo curtha i leataobh do chlubanna atá ag feidhmiú trí mheán na Gaeilge?

Tá an t-aonad um chumarsáid agus rialachas corpoideachas sa Roinn freagrach as Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003, á chur i bhfeidhm agus monatóireacht a dhéanamh air. An bhfuil Gaeilge ag na daoine atá ag obair san aonad sin? An bhfuil aon duine fostaithe mar oifigeach Gaeilge a bhfuil freagracht ar leith maidir le seirbhísí Ghaeilge aige nó aici sa Roinn? Cén sort tuairisciú a dhéantar sa Roinn maidir le soláthar seirbhísí Ghaeilge?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: On recognition for the naíonraí, we do not have a formalised method of doing that. We fund 228 of them currently and our overall approach in the early years area so far has been to focus as much as we possibly can on supporting all early years services, whether they are in Gaeltacht areas or not, for example, or whether they are naíonraí or not, although we are anxious to support the naíonraí as much as we possibly can. Our focus to date has been on improving the services and supports throughout the country, irrespective of whether they are naíonraí or not and there is not a specific recognition mechanism currently.

I refer to youth activities in local areas. I apologise because I did not completely understand the question because I did not hear the translation sufficiently.

Chairman: Gabh mo leithscéal. Cuir an ceist arís.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: Níor fhreagair an Dr. Lynch an dara páirt den chéad cheist. An bhfuil aon coinníollacha teanga i bhfeidhm do na seirbhísí sin?

B'fhéidir gur chuir mé an dara ceist giota beag sciobtha so déanfaidh mé arís é. Tacaíonn an scéim deontais le clubanna óige áitiúla le gníomhaíochtaí clubanna grúpa óige faoi stiúir oibríthe deonacha ar leibhéal áitiúla. An bhfuil cuid den mhaoiniú a chuireadh ar fáil don scéim seo curtha i leataobh do chlubanna atá ag feidhmiú trí mheán na Gaeilge? Tá cuid de na clubanna sin thart faoin tír, go háirithe sna Gaeltachtaí ach taobh amuigh de na Gaeltachtaí chomh maith. Tá a lán áiteanna ina bhfuil an Gaeilge ag teacht aníos le spreagadh nua so an bhfuil aon bhéim air sin?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: On the youth clubs, there is not a recognised definition and a number of these youth schemes have been quite general in their criteria for granting money to them so there is no specific definition that I am aware of, but we are looking at all of these schemes currently and we are hoping to pull a number of them together into one single youth grant scheme which would operate over the next number of years. We have attempted to support local youth clubs through Irish and I am aware of some funding that has been given for that purpose. Returning to the earlier question-----

Chairman: Maidir leis an gceist, tá airgead faoi leith curtha ar leataobh nó á thabhairt amach go dtí clubanna óige. An bhfuil suim airgid faoi leith maidir le clubanna atá ag oibriú trí Ghaeilge?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Is there a particular-----

Chairman: An bhfuil airgead faoi leith ag baint le clubanna óige atá ag feidhmiú trí Ghaeilge?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: There is money for that but it is not specifically for Irish clubs, so far as I am aware. There are youth scheme grants for a number of areas including that area. Irish-speaking youth clubs have benefitted from it. I am not aware of a specific scheme solely for Irish youth clubs, if that is the question being asked.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: Céard faoin aonad um chumarsáid agus na rialacha a bhfuil an Roinn freagrach as?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: We do not have a separate unit dealing with the Irish language per se. We have at least six people who identified as proficient and fluent in the Irish language and are able to deal with the public, a number of whom are present with me here. We are a relatively small Department and do not have a separate unit as such. The extent of our contact with the public is relatively small on provision of services, particularly direct provision of services. We have people who are available to speak in Irish as required.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: Go raibh míle maith agat.

Chairman: Níor chuala mé an freagra faoi choinníollacha teanga. Ar thug an Roinn ceann?

Ms Niamh Ní Dhómhnaill: Maidir leis an gceist faoi naíonraí a bhunú sa Ghaeltacht, níl, faoi láthair. Is comhlachtaí príobháideacha cuid acu agus cuid acu eile is scoileanna pobail atá iontu.

Chairman: Tá sé deacair anois: tá Gaeilge, tá Béarla agus tá torann ann. Tá sé beagáinín osréalach arís sa choiste seo agus gabh mo leithscéal as sin. Tá sé deacair mar Chathaoirleach feidhmiú as an dá theanga. Cuireann sé in iúl cé chomh deacair is atá sé do thuismitheoirí ar an talamh agus do na clubanna éagsúla atá ag iarraidh seirbhís a fhail trí Ghaeilge. Ar a laghad tá a fhios againn cé chomh deacair is atá sé tríd an bpróiseas seo. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Seanadóir. Glaeim ar an Teachta Ó Snodaigh.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Gabhaim buíochas lenár n-aíonna as teacht os ár gcomhair agus as an méid a bhí le rá acu. Tá súil agam go dtabharfaidh siad roinnt freagraí dúinn chomh maith.

Tá ceist agam maidir le cigireacht na luathbhlianta go háirithe. Is é an scéal mór nó an ndéantar an chigireacht trí mheán na Gaeilge amháin sna naíonraí nó cad a tharlaíonn sna cásanna sin? Conas a roghnaítear an teanga? Má tá siad ag plé le naíonra, ba chóir go mbeadh siad ag plé trí Ghaeilge. An mbíonn aon chigire ag casadh go Béarla nó an mbíonn na hoidí nó na thuismitheoirí ag impí ar na cigirí casadh go Béarla nó cad a tharlaíonn?

Cé mhéad cigirí atá ann le Gaeilge agus cé mhéad cigirí i gcoitinne atá ann le Béarla nó Gaeilge, is é sin an líon atá ann a bhfuil an Ghaeilge acu?

Gabhann an cheist seo ní amháin leis an Roinn seo ach le heagrais Stáit eile. Nuair a tha-

gann siad os ár gcomhair, bíonn siad ag rá go mbeidh seo nó siúd déanta. Tá chuile ghné den Stát in ainm suíomh idirlín nó gréasáin a bheith dátheangach acu. Conas mar atá ag an Roinn? An bhfuil gach rud ar fáil trí Ghaeilge? Mar thuismitheoir nó mar pholaiteoir, an rud a tharlaíonn nuair a théann duine ar shuíomh mar seo is féidir dul chomh fada agus ansin bíonn ar an duine casadh ar an mBéarla. Ní féidir an gnó iomlán a dhéanamh ó thús deiridh trí Ghaeilge. Éiríonn an duine leisciúil agus casann an duine ar an mBéarla chun é a dhéanamh. Ní cóir go mbeadh sé sin ann. Má éiríonn mise leisciúil, smaoinigh ar thuismitheoirí i gcrúachas nó a leithéid. B'shin an brú a tharlaíonn nuair nach mbíonn na foirmeacha, an suíomh gréasáin, nó a leithéid ar fáil, beagnach uathoibríoch, as Gaeilge.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Responding to those two questions, first within the Pobal system of inspections, there are 47 inspectors throughout. I cannot give a precise figure of those who are fluent in Irish but I know their policy and practice is to use the inspectors who have fluent or sufficiently good Irish in the Gaeltacht areas or areas of Irish speaking. They do their very best to carry out their inspections in Irish to the greatest possible extent. They produce the inspection reports in Irish. In addition, the agreement is even if their own Irish is not particularly good, they make every possible effort to speak to the children in Irish. I do not have a specific number but I am aware that Pobal has laid a good emphasis on trying to match Irish speaking inspectors with areas where the services are being carried out in Irish.

On the website, as referred to in my opening statement, we recently launched a new website. Approximately 52% of everything on it is in Irish. If one is looking specifically at the early years area, which I appreciate is one of particular interest to parents, we have made good progress. There is a very high proportion of the materials in Irish, including the leaflets, the posters, the explanations and the descriptions of the schemes etc. We are launching the new affordable childcare scheme next year. The IT system and the website is being built for that currently and a specific requirement is that this website will be available in Irish at the touch of a button, literally, from the home page.

We have made good progress in other areas in that regard. We have run into some difficulties with one of the older websites which is just about to be replaced, which it has not been easy to build in a complete Irish configuration. For those people using the website, I am not saying it is perfect, but certainly in the early years context and that of the Department website overall, tangible progress has been made over the last number of years, particularly recently.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Ag teacht ar ais ar an gcéad cheist ar an gcigireacht, sin ceann de na príomháiteanna ar cóir a dhíriú isteach air. Mura bhfuil an teanga Gaeilge líofa ag cigire tá sé an-deacair ar pháiste atá tógtha le Gaeilge a bheith ag casadh ar Bhéarla, áit nach bhfuil na focail acu. Tógadh mise sa chathair seo agus Béarla a bhí timpeall orm agus is í an Ghaeilge an chéad teanga a bhí agam. Is cuimhin liom fós a bheith i siopa sa chathair seo ag aois seacht mbliana agus gan na focail Bhéarla a bheith agam chun rudaí a cheannach sa siopa sin. B'shin san ardchathair. Níor tógadh sa Ghaeltacht mé, áit a mbeadh gach uile rud ag tarlú timpeall orm trí Ghaeilge. Ní raibh ach mo chlann féin le Gaeilge. Bhí mé ar scoil Gaeilge agus gach rud eile. Mura raibh na focail ag an duine bhí sé deacair. Bhí mé istigh i siopa, mar is cuimhin liom, ag lorg claíomh agus bhí úinéir an tsiopa ag féachaint orm ag rá: “What are you on about, son, what do you want?” Dúirt mé go raibh mé ag lorg an claímh: “I want the sword” a dúirt mé i ndeireadh thiar, ach ní raibh an focal agam. Claíomh a thug mé air. Nuair atá duine ag déileáil le ceisteanna chomh deacair is atá sa chás seo, baineann sé le cosaint agus le forbairt páistí. Bíonn sé deacair ar pháistí uaireanta déileáil leis na ceisteanna teibí seo in aon teanga ach má tá orthu athrú go dtí teanga nach bhfuil go hiomlán ar a gcumas, déanann sé é

níos deacra. Impím ar an Roinn díriú isteach ar an gcigireacht ach go háirithe mar muna bhfuil sé sin i gceart déanfaidh sé é i bhfad níos deacra ar ár bpáistí amach anseo.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I take that point and I want to correct something that I said earlier because I was referring to Pobal inspections when I should have referred to Tusla inspections and I apologise for that.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Gabhaim buíochas do na finnétithe as teacht agus as an gcur i láthair. Tá roinnt ábhair gur mhaith liom a phlé leo. Ar dtús, díreoimid isteach ar an dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir le na preasráitis éagsúla. Tá ardú ó 10% go dtí thart ar 20% agus is maith an rud é go bhfuil an feabhas sin ann. Conas a roghnaíonn an Roinn na preasráitis a bheidh á scaoileadh go dhátheangach? An iad na preasráitis a bhaineann le chúrsaí Gaolainne agus Gaeltachta nó an iad na cinn mór le rá?

Chonaiceamar inné go raibh fógra mór á dhéanamh mar gheall ar chúrsaí cúram leanaí. De réir an Aire, ceann de na hathruithe is mó le blianta a bhí ann. An raibh an preasráiteas sin dhátheangach? Ar leag an plean aon bhéim faoi leith ar an nGaolainn amach anseo?

Tagraím do oifigigh Gaolainne. An bhfuil oifigeach Gaolainne sa Roinn agus má tá, cé chomh sinsear nó sóisear a bhfuil an post sin? An duine den fhoireann sinsearach atá i gceist mar cheannaire atá ag stiúradh cúrsaí Gaolainne sa Roinn nó an bhfuil an post roinnte? An bhfuil sé tarraingthe anonn agus anall le hábhair eile nó an bhfuil sé dírithe ar chúrsaí Gaolainne?

Tá roinnt plé déanta cheana mar gheall ar an gcigireacht, na hionaid chúram leanaí agus na naíonraí ach teastaíonn uaim díriú isteach anseo chomh maith mar luadh go raibh thart ar 57 cigire ann. Leis an ábhar seo go háirithe, nuair a thagann an cigire go dtí an naíonra, seo na húdaráis ag teacht isteach agus aithníonn na páistí é sin nuair a fheiceann siad duine ag teacht ón taobh amuigh. B'fhéidir go bhfuil sé ag déanamh a ghnó as Béarla agus seolann sé sin teachtaireacht an-láidir chuig na páistí sa naíonra. Deireann sé leo go soiléir go bhfuil tuairim eile ar fad ag na húdaráis. Mar sin, tá sé an-tábhachtach ar fad go mbeadh na cigirí ábalta a ghnó san iomlán a dhéanamh trí Ghaolainn nuair a bhfuil siad ag teacht agus ag plé leis na páistí nó leis an bhfoireann san ionad. Deirtear linn go bhfuil thart ar 57 cigirí ar fáil chuige sin, ach níl sé soiléir cé mhéad de na cigirí sin atá ag obair trí Ghaolainn. An é nach bhfuil an Roinn ag bailiú an eolais sin nó an é nach bhfuil sé ar fáil inniu agus go mbeidh an Roinn ábalta é a chur ar fáil dúinn amach anseo? Ba mhaith liom a fháil amach go díreach cé mhéad de na cigirí sin atá ag obair trí Ghaolainn agus trí Bhéarla.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: On the press statements, I agree and we are pleased that we have gotten up to 20%. The sort of criteria we use are particularly focused on the level of interest to the public, with a particular focus on service users and therefore, all of our early years press releases are done simultaneously in Irish. For example, the press release and the strategy document for First Five, which is the major strategy I was referring to earlier that was launched yesterday, were both published as Gaeilge and we placed a significant emphasis on that. In fact, the Government approved the strategy a number of weeks ago and one of the reasons we delayed publishing it was to make sure that it was translated into Irish and could be available at the same time as the English version.

On Irish language officers, the Department does not have a specific Irish language officer but my colleague Mr. Denis O'Sullivan was recently asked to take on the co-ordination function across the Department and he is a principal officer. He is not a native Irish speaker but one of his colleagues in the unit is and therefore we have a good deal of support within the Department

for the level of Irish that is required.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: An post é sin atá roinnte? An bhfuil gnó eile ag an oifigeach sin?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Yes, it must be said that Mr. O’Sullivan has a good deal of other responsibilities as well in corporate governance and communications but I do not limit the importance of the role in any way by saying that the demand for Irish in our services, given the nature of what we do, is not very high so it is not one that would require a full time role.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Má tá roinnt ghnó eile ar siúl aige, an bhféadfaimis tomhas a dhéanamh go gcaitheann sé leath an am mar oifigeach Gaolainne nó 5% den am mar oifigeach Gaolainne? Cé chomh mór nó beag agus atá ról an oifigigh Gaolainne laistigh den Roinn?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I ask Mr. O’Sullivan to deal with that question.

Mr. Denis O’Sullivan: I would expect to discharge a co-ordination function across the Department, centring on a number of areas, one of which is our compliance with the existing language scheme. Dr. Lynch has referenced a number of significant elements of that scheme that we have been working on.

Colleagues in other parts of the Department, such as in the area of early years, have their own dedicated team and have native speakers so they will manage the Department’s requirements in that area from within their team but I keep a watching eye on what they do. In addition, we will take back any recommendations that we can put in place that emerge from this discussion.

I expect to be reporting to the management board biannually, as part of our business planning process, which I co-ordinate for the Department so I expect that we will be having a formal conversation in January and mid-year on our compliance with our obligations. It is a co-ordination function which is just one small part of the responsibilities that I have, but I am in a position to designate at least one member of our team who is fluent in Irish to do some of the spade work on this for me.

The structures that I have outlined should be sufficient to keep an appropriate eye and watch on our obligations in terms of the findings, the content of our scheme, the review of our scheme in 2017 by the Language Commissioner and anything else that might emerge today or subsequently.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I will deal with the inspections question. I confirm that there are 47 inspectors in the Tusla inspection system. I absolutely agree that it is not desirable to have them doing their business in English if at all possible and I accept the importance of them carrying out that function in Irish. I understand that they do that to the best of their ability. I do not have a precise number but I will check with Tusla to see if we can get a precise number but my clear understanding is that they are delivering those inspections as Gaeilge as appropriate.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Fillim ar an bplean sin a d’fhoilsíodh inné. Ar leagadh aon bhéim faoi leith sa phlean ar chúrsaí Gaolainne agus an raibh na finnétithe ag stiúradh é sin?

Maidir leis an gceist faoi chúram leanaí agus an chigireacht, an é nach bhfuil an t-eolas ar fáil inniu nó an é nach bhfuil sé á bhailiú in aon chor? Má tá sé á bhailiú, an féidir é a chur ar fáil arís?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: To take the second of the Deputy's questions first, I am sure we can get that information for him, although I do not think that it is routinely collected. My understanding is that the inspections are routinely done in Irish.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Mura bhfuil an t-eolas á bhailiú, ní féidir a rá go cinnte go bhfuil an chigireacht á déanamh, as Gaeilge nó Béarla nó nach bhfuil. Is é an taithí agus an tuairisc a chloisim féin ná nach bhfuil sé go hiomlán as Gaeilge agus b'fhéidir go bhfuil roinnt mhaith de i mBéarla. Pé scéal é, mura bhfuil an t-eolas á bhailiú, ní féidir a rá go cinnte.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I can certainly come back to the Deputy with the details from Tusla inspections.

On the strategy that was launched yesterday, there are two critical actions in it that deal specifically with Irish. The first is to introduce measures to ensure that children in Gaeltacht areas have access to Irish medium early learning and care provision. That is being led by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The second is to develop mechanisms to provide Irish language supports in this area where there are high proportions of children who are learning through the medium of Irish. The strategy itself was made available in Irish. There is a commitment within the strategy for an implementation plan within six months. All of the actions in the strategy, including these two, will be specified in terms of how we hope to achieve that. I mentioned earlier the five-year action plan, and my colleague, Mr. Fay, is part of the monitoring committee and is taking a considerable interest in that. That committee plus the work being done under this new strategy will be important in delivering those actions. We are anxious to do whatever we possibly can to help children in Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas who are using Irish to be able to have their service provided to them through Irish to enable them to speak Irish in that context.

Chairman: Gabhaim buíochas as an bhfreagra sin.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tiocfaidh mé isteach nuair a bheidh an Cathaoirleach réidh. Níl aon deifir orm.

Chairman: An bhfuil aon duine eile?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tháinig na daoine eile.

Chairman: Tá ceist bhreise ag an Teachta Ó Snodaigh.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: An gcuireann an Roinn an pobal, na hoidí agus na paistí ar an eolas go bhfuil Gaeilge ag na cigirí nó ag an gcóras i gcoitinne? Má dhéantar sin, cothóidh sé sin éileamh. Tá seanchleachtas ann go nglacann an pobal nach féidir leo seirbhís a fháil seirbhís a fháil as Gaeilge. Casann siad nó glacann siad leis as Béarla toisc nach bhfuil siad ag súil go bhfuil sé ar fáil as Gaeilge. Má chuirtear iad ar an eolas faoi go bhfuil Gaeilge ag an gcigire nó a leithéid, casfar ar an nGaeilge sa chéad áit.

Chun teacht ar ais ar an gceist a luadh roimhe seo, luaigh an Dr. Lynch na tuairiscí atá déanta as Gaeilge má tá an comhrá as Gaeilge. Ba chóir go mbeadh sé éasca go leor fáil amach cé mhéad tuairisc atá i nGaeilge nó an ndéantar aistriú go Béarla orthu chomh maith céanna? Nuair a dhéanann na cigirí na hagallaimh agus an chigireacht trí mheán na Gaeilge, bíonn an tuairisc as Gaeilge ina dhiaidh sin. Ba chóir go mbeadh sé éasca go leor fáil amach cé mhéad tuairisc atá déanta as Gaeilge agus as Béarla. Léireoidh sé sin go bhfuil na cigirí ag úsáid na Gaeilge nó nach bhfuil siad á húsáid nó go bhfuil duine éigin ag cur brú ar dhaoine casadh go Béarla.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I take the point. The reports, if they are made available through Irish, will certainly be indicative of them having been conducted in Irish in the first place. I agree that it should be possible and not be too difficult, given that it is a relatively small number of centres involved overall. We will certainly come back to the Deputy with that figure.

The Deputy asked me about whether we let the public and teachers know that inspectors have Irish. We certainly would. The Tusla inspectorate engages with the Irish language representative organisations that operate in the sector, such as Comhairle Naíonraí na Gaeltachta, which are also part of the consultative forum that deals with wider inspections in the early years setting. That information would be made available. Comhairle Naíonraí na Gaeltachta has been helpful to us in that regard as well.

Chairman: Chun a bheith soiléir, beidh an Roinn ag teacht ar ais chuig an gcoiste leis an eolas seo ar líon na dtuairiscí trí Ghaeilge, líon na gcigirí atá ag feidhmiú trí Ghaeilge, agus an bhfuil an t-eolas sin á bhailiú ag an Roinn ar bhonn rialta. Tá trí rud i gceist mar sin, líon na dtuairiscí, líon na gcigirí agus an bhfuil an Roinn ag bailiú an t-eolas sin go rialta, ionas go mbeidh an Roinn agus muid féin ar an eolas faoi.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ba mhaith liom díriú ar mhórchéist polasaí. Sula ndíreoidh mé air sin, déarfadh mé gurb é an tuiscint atá ag teangeolaithe ná go bhfuil sé an-éasca ag gasúir óga teangacha a fhoghlaim. An gasúr a shaolaítear faoin aois dhá bhliain, bíonn teanga aige nó aici, agus i gcás go bhfuil dhá theanga timpeall orthu, bíonn dhá thugtha leo go nádúrtha. Is é nádúr an gasúr teanga a fhoghlaim. Ní nádúr duine fásta teanga a fhoghlaim. Tá dua aisteach ag baint leis dóibh agus caithfidh mé a rá go gcreidim go gcuirimid go leor am amú ag caint ar Ghaeilge a mhúineadh do dhaoine atá sa tseirbhís phoiblí cheana féin. Is fíorbheagán daoine a thugann teanga leo go beacht, go cruinn agus go líofa nuair a théimid in aois. Tá daoine ann a dhéanann é ach is mionlach iad. Tá rud amháin a dhéanann gach uile ghasúr, aird bheag agus is cuma cén áit ar domhan, agus is é sin go dtugann siad teanga leo.

Is cuimhin duine a rá liom, uair amháin, go ndeachaigh siad isteach i siopa agus bhí gasúr acu. Chuireadar ar an gcuntar é agus bhíodar ag labhairt Gaeilge leis an ngasúr. Dúirt an duine sa siopa go raibh an gasúr sin an-smarteáilte ós rud é go raibh sé in ann Gaeilge a labhairt. D'fhreagair an mháthair dá labhrófaí Sínis leis an ngasúr, labhródh sé Sínis ar ais. Is cuma cén teanga, fiú an teanga is deacra ar domhan dúinne, níl fadhb ar bith ag an ngasúr. Is bronntanas é do ghasúr teangacha a thabhairt leo.

Tá ceist atá agamsa a bhaineann leis an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge, áit a bhí go leor inti faoin luathoidéachas trí Ghaeilge. Bhí dhá mhír ann: oideachais trí mheán na Gaeilge agus luathoidéachas, mar shampla, na naíonraí. Bhí rud eile luaite ann, is é sin go mbeadh Gaeilge istigh sna naíonraí ar fad agus go dtabharfadh spreagadh, cúnaimh agus tacaíocht do gach uile naíonra sa tír a bhí ag fáil airgead Stáit agus go dtabharfaí an bronntanas seo go gasúir, mar is bronntanas atá ann, is é sin an dara teanga. An cheist atá agam ná an bhfuil polasaí ag an Roinn an bronntanas sin a bhronnadh ar ghasúir iomlána na tíre?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I thank the Deputy. I fully agree with the importance of ensuring that children from a very early age have the opportunity to learn both languages and specifically to learn Irish. As to being able to bestow that present, the best way to put it is that we have tried in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to support as much as we possibly can the provision of Irish throughout the country, with a particular focus on Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas, where they have expressed a particular interest in it. Our focus has tended to be on services as a whole, because we felt and still feel that they are, by international comparisons, poorly

supported. There has been significant investment in them over the last number of years, with some 117% increase in the investment overall in childcare services over the last four years. The strategy launched yesterday aims to double that investment over the next ten years. Our focus has been on expanding and developing the provision of early years services throughout and within that to provide as many supports for early years through the Irish language as we can. The major way we have tried to do that is through the five year action plan that was launched last year with the specific recommendations and actions set out in that, and equally the actions that I mentioned earlier in relation to First Five. We wish to support that as much as we possibly can although inevitably our focus in the Department, because early years services have been in such need of investment, has been to concentrate to a good degree in supporting all services, whether they are provided through English or Irish. This has been done through things like increased investment, increased capitation payments, programme support payments for administrative costs, capital supports and sustainability funding where services run into difficulty.

It is true to say that we have attempted to support all services, but having particular regard now to the need to develop services that wish in turn to provide those services in Irish.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An bhféadfainn dul ar ais arís? Bheifeá ag déanamh go maith dá dtiocfadh 10% den phobal ag lorg seirbhísí trí Ghaeilge, seirbhísí luathoideachais, bunoidheachais nó meánoideachais. Téann formhór an phobail chuig seirbhísí a reáchtáiltear, a bheag nó a mhór, trí Bhéarla. Go deimhin féin, fuair mise mo chuid oideachais ar fad trí Bhéarla. Buíochas le Dia, bhí tacaíocht láidir don Ghaeilge tríd an oideachas sin. Táim ag cur ceiste mar ní fheicim go bhfuil aon bhaint aici leis an méid a dúirt an Roinn faoi thacaíocht a thabhairt go ginearálta, mar táim ag iarraidh go mbeidh sé mar chuid den phacáiste mór seo. Ní gá go gcosnódh sé mórán airgid. Ní airgead atá i gceist. Is polasaí atá i gceist. Bhí gach Roinn páirteach i réiteach na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge agus thugadar geallúintí ansin, mar is geallúint agus is polasaí Rialtais é agus réitíodh é i gcomhairle le gach Roinn Stáit mar a bhí ag an am sin. Bhí Roinn nó rannóg leanaí ann ag an am. An bhfuil an Dr. Lynch ag rá go bhfuil neamhaird déanta le hocht mbliana ar an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge agus an méid a dúirt sé faoin luathoideachas? An bhfuil an Roinn, dá bharr sin, tar éis goid a dhéanamh ar chearta chuile ghasúr sa tír an Ghaeilge a shealbhú ag aois óg? Mar a dúirt mé, ní thuigeann gasúr fadhb teangacha. B'shin rud do dhaoine fásta. An rud is mó a theastaíonn ná polasaí, tacaíochtaí, fis, rannata beaga agus na rudaí sin ar fad agus go mbeidh polasaí ann ag dearbhú do lucht riartha náiolann agus naíonraí gur rud dearfach a bheadh ann go mbeadh an Ghaeilge measctha sa rud a chuirfí ar fáil. Níl mé ag caint ar na naíonraí a ritear trí Ghaeilge - tiocfaidh mé ar ais ar ball beag chucu siúd. Táim ag caint ar naíolanna agus naíonraí na tíre ar fad. Mar a deirim is goid atá i gceist gan é a bhronnadh ar na gasúir. Deir sibh go díreoidh sibh ar sheirbhísí trí Ghaeilge agus go bhfuil tábhacht ag baint leis sin. I suirbhé tar éis suirbhé taispeánann os cionn 90% den phobal go mba mhaith leo an Ghaeilge a bheith acu dá mbeadh sé éasca í a bheith acu. Ní fios domsa mórán tuismitheoirí sa tír a bheadh in aghaidh gur rud in aisce ar a gcuid gasúr é. Ní leithscéal ar bith é go bhfuil sibh ag déanamh rudaí eile; is féidir an dá rud a dhéanamh.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: If my answer was unclear I certainly did not mean to give the impression that I am de-emphasising one in favour of the other. What I was trying to say was that we place an emphasis on both. On assisting the provision of services in and through Irish, we are absolutely committed to that and specifically to the five year action plan and to the 20 year strategy that the Deputy referred to.

We have tried to be very practical in our supports through to the most basic things of communications like press releases, websites, posters and so on.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Táimid ag cur am amú ag caint faoi rud nach bhfuil mise ag caint faoi.

Chairman: Tuigim, a Theachta.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Maidir leis na naíolanna agus na naíonraí Béarla, cén spreagadh, ugach agus tacaíocht a thugann an Roinn dóibh siúd chun meascán Gaeilge a chur isteach ann mar chuid den tairiscint atá ar fáil uathu siúd?

Chairman: An dtuigeann an Dochtúir Lynch an cheist? Is dócha do bhfuil míthuiscint i gceist. Tá an Teachta ag cur ceist go soiléir ag fiafraí cén sórt plean nó gníomhaíochtaí atá ag an Roinn ar fud na tíre uile maidir le naíonraí d'fhonn na Gaeilge a normalú? An dtuigtear an cheist?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I understand the question.

What we have been trying to do is to make Irish, Irish-friendly throughout the system, irrespective of whether the area is Irish speaking, a Gaeltacht area or a non-Gaeltacht area. We are very open to that. Nothing in my responses is meant to imply otherwise. We would be more than open to supporting that in any way we can and part of that is simply making the language Irish-friendly and that is why I was referring to the most basic things like communications, the leaflets, the posters and all of that but it is wider than that.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Níl aon ghasúr trí bliana-----

Chairman: A Theachta, gabh mo leithscéal ach lig dó-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá brón orm, a Chathaoirligh, ach caithfidh mé dul isteach sa Dáil-----

Chairman: Lig dó freagra a thabhairt, agus ligfidh mé ar ais thú.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá a fhios agam.

Chairman: Lean ar aghaidh, a Dhochtúir Lynch, gabh mo leithscéal.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: What I am saying is that we are trying to create an Irish language-friendly situation, whether the service is based in English or based in Irish. We have made good progress in relation to providing some of those supports, particularly, making it the easier choice for services to deliver their services through Irish. That is why I mentioned the things that I did.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: B'fhéidir go gcuirfear chugam i scríbhinn an spreagadh agus an tacaíocht a thugann an Roinn do naíolanna agus do naíonraí atá ag feidhmiú trí Bhéarla le Gaeilge a bheith mar chuid den tairiscint atá acu. Nuair a gheobhaimid é sin beimid in ann teacht chuig an Roinn arís.

An dara ceist atá agam-----

Chairman: Chun a bheith soiléir an dtuigeann an Dochtúir Lynch an t-eolas atá i gceist agus atá á iarraidh againn?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Cheap mé go raibh sé réasúnta soiléir.

Chairman: Níl a fhios agam an bhfuil sé soiléir.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: The Deputy is referring to tenders which I was not so clear about.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: A “tairiscint” is an “offering” i mBéarla, not a tender. The word has two meanings just as in English: being very tender with somebody. The word tairiscint has two meanings and it means an offering in this case.

Is í seo an dara ceist. Tá 228 naíonraí Gaeilge ann, agus feidhmíonn siad faoi scáth na naíonraí Gaelacha nó scátheagraíochta. An dtugann an Roinn aon tacaíocht faoi leith don ea-graíocht sin agus mura dtugann an Roinn, cén fáth nach dtugann?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: We do not specifically support that organisation. Is the Deputy referring to Comhairle Naíonraí na Gaeltachta?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No, that is a different organisation.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Which organisation is the Deputy referring to?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I am talking about na naíonraí atá taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht which have their own organisation.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: No, we do not provide a specific support for those. We provide extensive support for early years services overall, but we do not provide specific additional support by reference to the Irish language.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An dtugann an Roinn tacaíocht do aon scátheagraíocht naíolanna nó naíonraí náisiúnta?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Not specifically for Irish language based ones.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No, I am saying aon scátheagraíocht, is cuma má tá sé i mBéarla, i nGaeilge, i bhFraincis, i Sínis nó in Ollainnis nó aon rud eile. An dtugann an Roinn tacaíocht do aon scátheagraíocht atá ag plé le naíolanna agus naíonraí?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: No, we provide services of the type that I described earlier in terms of capitation rates, programme support payments, capital grants and so on to all early years services. We do not single out specific ones based on language.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Don tríú huair, an dtugann an Roinn aon tacaíocht do aon scátheagraíocht atá ag plé le naíolanna agus naíonraí? Mar shampla, tugann an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna tacaíocht do scátheagraíochtaí éagsúla agus déanann Ranna Stáit é sin go ginearálta. Tugann an Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige go leor airgead do scátheagraíochtaí an Roinn Sláinte atá ag plé le nithe éigin den saol. An dtugann an Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige tacaíocht do aon scátheagraíocht atá ag plé le naíolanna agus naíonraí?

Mr. Paul Fay: Yes, we support seven national voluntary organisations, the largest of which are Early Childhood Ireland and the Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association and there are several more like that.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An-mhaith. Ag éirí as sin, cén chaoi ar roghnaíodh iad sin?

Mr. Paul Fay: At this stage, the seven organisations we fund are organisations that we have worked up a relationship with over a number of years but I would point out to the committee that we are about to embark on a review of structures across the whole early years sector. We are planning to contract this out in the early part of next year and it will look from the top down,

including at the Department and right through the Department's relationship with Pobal and into the voluntary organisations to look at how appropriate is the model of service delivery and support. Reviewing all of those structures will be a large piece of work for us next year.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Cén chaoi a bhunódh na naíonraí Gaelacha taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht an ceangal agus an gaol seo leis an Roinn le go bhfaighidís cuid den airgead mar scátheagraíocht?

Mr. Paul Fay: In the immediate future, under the five year action plan we might be unique in that we are the only sector in that plan to have its own commitment to have its own monitoring group. Under the Department, the early years sector has its own monitoring group under the five year action plan which we will be chairing and co-hosting with our colleagues on the Gaeltacht side. All of those Irish language groups such as Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta, Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta etc. are represented on that group. We already have a fairly good working relationship with most of those groups, to the point where it almost became too much contact and it became a slight problem in that there was an inconsistency in what was being asked for from the different groups. At the meeting in Killarney when we launched the action plan and I attended the first monitoring group meeting, I welcomed the fact that the action plan was bringing a new focus to allow us to have a more dedicated conversation about what was being asked for and now we can start working on that. That was welcomed by all around the table there as well.

To answer the Deputy's question, we are very well connected into that group and it will not be forgotten when we do the work on the review of structures.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Caithfidh mé imeacht mar tá Saincheist Trathúla agam sa Dáil faoi bheairicí Garda i gConamara. Beidh spéis ag an Cathaoirleach féin sa fhreagra.

Chairman: Beidh mé ag tnúth leis an bhfreagra sin.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: Tosóidh mé leis an bpointe deireanach a d'ardaigh an tUasal Fay, is é sin an fóram a rinne sé tagairt dó. Tá fochoiste ag baint le fóram na luathbhlianta seo ina bhfuil ionadaí ó Foras na Gaeilge, Gaeloideachas, Údarás na Gaeltachta agus trí Ranna Rialtais atá ceangailte leis an fhoghrúpa sin. Más sin an obair atá i gceist tá cúpla ceist agam faoi sin.

Cuirim fáilte roimh an fhothghrúpa sin agus tá a fhios agam gur bhunaigh an tAire an grúpa sin. Cá mhéad cruinniú a bhí ag an fhoghrúpa sin go dtí seo? Rinne an tUasal Fay tagairt do phlean. An dtiocfaidh an plean sin amach as obair an fhoghrúpa seo agus cad iad na príomhmholtaí atá déanta ag an fhoghrúpa sin i dtaca le luathoideachas nó seirbhís cúram leanaí trí mheán na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht?

Tagraím don méid atá ráite ag an Teachta Ó Cuív. Tá an Roinn ag cur airgead ar fáil thar cheann an Stáit do pháistí óige faoi chúig bliana d'aois. An bhfuil airgead sa bhreis ar fáil do naíonraí nó don luathoideachas go ginearálta nuair atá seirbhís trí mheán na Gaeilge á cur ar fáil ag an ionad sin? An bhfuil tacaíocht sa bhreis ar fáil sa Ghaeltacht agus taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht go sonrach? Muna bhfuil, cén fáth nach bhfuil airgead sa bhreis ar fáil?

Mr. Paul Fay: I will clarify my earlier remarks. The groups I was talking about were the monitoring group convened under the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht for the five year action plan. I was not referring to the early years forum, which is yet another structure so that monitoring group and that early years focused monitoring group are actually

new structures directed at that five year action plan under the 20 year Irish language strategy. I apologise if there was confusion about that. The strategy for that monitoring group was launched in Killarney three weeks ago and we had our first meeting on the day of the launch. The early years group will be meeting for the first time before Christmas.

The Senator is right that when Deputy Zappone became Minister, she established an early years forum to allow her to communicate with the whole early years sector and there are two Irish language groups on that. Several subgroups were set up to tease out issues in greater details and Irish was one of them and we have some detail on what came out of that group. It probably met between four and six times, as did the other subgroups. I was not actually involved with it.

We can talk the committee through the recommendations that came out but I was talking about having had meetings with Údarás na Gaeltachta, Foras na Gaeilge and all of the rest of them earlier and how there was a little bit of confusion and inconsistency around what was being asked for coming out of it. That came up in the forum subgroup and it was a very good place to tease out issues but ultimately its best benefit was that officials in my area were talking to our colleagues in the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht about the five year action plan, which became the main vehicle. The real benefit of having had the conversations in the early years forum setting was to inform our conversations around that. It is given its ultimate expression in the five year action plan and the 14 specific early years actions that are contained in the language transmission by the family section.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I note that one of the recommendations of that subgroup talked about the need for an Irish medium early years co-ordinator based in a Department. There were various other recommendations in relation to supports through development officers and so on but what has emerged from that is the fact I mentioned in my opening statement, namely that we are recruiting two early years, Irish medium officers, one of whom will be working in non-Gaeltacht areas and one of whom will be working with Better Start. The subgroup of the forum informed that particular development, for which there is funding available for these posts next year.

The other question was about the Department's funding of these services and whether there is extra money for early years when providing these services through Irish. Currently there is not. It is a question of whether we should, from a policy perspective, employ some form of positive discrimination. So far we have not done that. We have concentrated on a major issue for us, namely affordability right across the country. The second major issue is quality and making sure that whatever we fund is of a high quality. The third issue is access. We have focused on affordability, quality and access. We have not, so far at least, moved in the direction of providing additional services for particular areas such as Irish language. Who knows but this may happen in the future. I made the point earlier that we have been so far behind the curve, so to speak, by comparison to other countries, that we have been concentrating on increasing investment overall, which we have managed to do, over the last number of years. I mentioned a figure of a 117% increase in the last four years and plan to double investment in early years settings overall in the next ten years. That may be something that could be examined in the future. Currently our focus is on developing all of the early years right throughout the country, irrespective of language.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Tá cúpla ceist agam. Éiríonn an chéad cheist as ábhar na hearcaíochta agus an bheirt atá le fostú an bhliain seo chugainn. An bhfuil daoine eile á bhfostú agus an é nach bhfuil ach beirt nó an mbeidh slua mór ag teacht isteach san fhoireann an bhliain seo chugainn? Cén céatadán den fhoireann atá á earcú ag an Roinn atá ag teacht le Gaeilge?

Tuigim faoin mbeirt atá luaite. An é sin beirt as céad nó beirt as deichniúr atá ag teacht isteach? An bhfuil sibh ag cur leis an líon daoine a bhfuil an Ghaeilge acu mar chuid den fhoireann atá agaibh?

Maidir leis an 228 naíonra atá cláraithe leis an Roinn agus atá á rá léi go bhfuil siad ag déanamh a gcuid gnó as Gaeilge, an ndéanann an Roinn aon scrúdú faoi leith air sin? An leagann an Roinn síos caighdeán orthu nó an nglacann an Roinn go ndeirtear léi go bhfuil siad ag feidhmiú as Gaeilge agus fágtar mar sin é agus ní dhéantar aon scrúdú air sin? An bhfuil an Roinn sásta le pé badge atá á chur orthu féin nó an ndéantar scrúdú ar an gcaighdeán Gaeilge atá ann nó níos measa fós an cuma leis an Roinn?

Mr. Paul Fay: I will address some of that and the Secretary General may come in then. The two posts we are recruiting are specifically highlighted in the action plan. They are mentioned because that are designed to be co-ordinator posts. What we find is that we have 30 sitting county childcare committees operating throughout the country to support early years service provision and there is a level of support trí Ghaeilge in most of them. Obviously it is stronger in the Gaeltacht areas than further outside. They are independent companies which operate like this. There are pockets of good practice going on. There are services which are doing things on their own and there are initiatives going on in learning institutions through training and support. It is not centrally co-ordinated and it is not brought together and there is no sharing of the learning. The two specific posts we are talking about are designed to identify good practice and to give us the base line and then to start building on that.

I should have mentioned earlier that the early years' specific group under the action plan will have two purposes. It will monitor the 14 early years' actions we have but it will also be seeking opportunities to increase the use of Irish throughout the country in and outside the Gaeltacht. Preliminarily this will be outside because our colleagues in the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht are responsible primarily for inside the Gaeltacht. These are the two posts.

The Deputy had a further question on general Civil Service recruitment which I might leave to the Secretary General and to the question on increasing the number of staff with Irish.

I will address the last point made by the Deputy on the 228 naíonraí. They are actually self-declared naíonraí. As to examinations and whether we are we looking after the standard of Irish, no we are not. They are subject to the early years regulations that everyone is subject to, and to Tusla and education-focused inspections. Pobal inspects them for compliance with scheme rules etc. They are independent companies that are self-declared to us as naíonraí.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: An lorgaíonn an Roinn go mb'fhéidir go mbeidís cláraithe le heagraíocht faoi leith nó an bhfuil an cinneadh go huile is go hiomlán leo san?

Mr. Paul Fay: That decision is left up to themselves. We contract to provide early years services with private companies or community services with their own boards of management. We are a very different beast to the school sector and it is often not recognised. No, we do not is the simple answer.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Má thagann naíonra chuig an Roinn agus má deirtear libh go bhfuil sé ina naíonra Steiner, an lorgaíonn an Roinn go mbeidh sé cláraithe leis an ngrúpa sin nó má aithníonn naíonra eile iad féin mar ghrúpa eile, an lorgaíonn an Roinn go mbeidís cláraithe le grúpa ansin?

Mr. Paul Fay: I understand the question and the answer is also "No". We have a set of early

years regulations, published in 2016. On the basis of those regulations and a fit-for-purpose inspection by Tusla, we enter into a contractual arrangement to provide early years' services. In relation to the Steiner or specific kindergarten or HighScope or any of the other models, we do not.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: To take the other part of the question on increasing the number of people who speak Irish within the Civil Service, or more specifically within the Department, we keep the number we require under review. We do not have a great extent of Irish language requirement within the Department because the number of services that provide directly to the public is relatively limited. It is largely confined to answering phone calls and some queries and so on.

We are not providing services directly.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Maidir le tomhas an líon cigireachta atá á dhéanamh, níl aon tuairim ag an Roinn cén bhearna atá ann. Conas atá a fhios ag an Roinn go bhfuil go leor cigirí ag an Roinn chun a gcuid gnó a dhéanamh as Gaeilge, mar shampla, mura mbíonn an Roinn ag déanamh tomhais air sin?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I understand.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Conas a bhfuil a fhios ag an Roinn an t-éileamh agus cé chomh mór nó chomh beag is atá an bhearna?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: My apologies as we are at cross purposes here. I was actually referring to the number of people who would be speaking Irish within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs itself. I believe the Deputy's question refers to the inspection regime in Tusla.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Táim ag déanamh tagairt don fhoireann ar fad ar an nguthán, san ardoifig, i measc na gcigirí, i ngach aon áit. Conas a mbíonn a fhios ag an Roinn cén éileamh atá ann mura bhfuil tomhas ar an gcigireacht ar siúl, rud nach bhfuil an Roinn á dhéanamh? An bhfuil an Roinn ag tomhas in áiteanna eile? Conas a bhfuil a fhios ag an Roinn cé chomh mór nó chomh beag is atá an bhearna mura bhfuil sí á tomhas? Cad go díreach é an t-éileamh nó conas a dhéantar an cinneadh nach bhfuil nó b'fhéidir go bhfuil Gaeilgeoirí ag teastáil?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I fully take the point. I was answering a different question on the Department when I said we keep the numbers that we need under review purely within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

On the inspectorate, it is an independent entity and rightly so given the nature of what it does. We do not collect information and I will check with Tusla itself as to the extent of information that it has on the number of Irish speakers, and therefore the number of additional speakers it would require in that language. It goes back to the Deputy's earlier comments and questions about how all of this is structured and about the availability of inspection services in Irish. It is linked to that. We will come back on that point.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Tá sé gaolta leis ach tá sé níos leithne ná sin. Mar a luaigh an Teachta Ó Snodaigh níos luaithe, má tá a fhios ag daoine go bhfuil an Ghaeilinn ar fáil, úsáidfidh siad í leis an Roinn. Má chuireann daoine glaoch teileafóin ar an gceannáras agus mura bhfuil an rogha Gaeilinne ar fáil, ní dhéanfaidh siad a ngnó trí Ghaeilinn mar tá sé níos tapúla dul agus é a dhéanamh as Béarla.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I take the point. The best thing to do is for us to come back to the Deputy

with a response to that as we had promised earlier. We will include that aspect within the response because I cannot give an immediate response to it.

Chairman: Chuir an Teachta ceist ghinearálta faoi chúrsaí earcaíochta, nár chuir?

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Tá cuid den fhreagra ann. Bhí mé ag fiafraí an bhfuil daoine breise ag teacht isteach sa Roinn an bhliain seo chugainn agus, má tá, cad é an céatadán dóibh a mbeidh an Ghaeilinn acu. Tá a fhios againn go mbeidh beirt. An 12% nó 20% den fhoireann é sin? Sin an cheist.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: If the Deputy is referring to the Department alone, it would be a small proportion. In terms of the system as a whole, the focus of those two posts were particular job descriptions within the system.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Táim ag caint faoin dream eile atá ag teacht isteach. Fág an bheirt sin ar leataobh ar feadh nóiméad amháin. Maidir leis an chuid eile den fhoireann atá ag teacht isteach, an bhfuil puinn daoine ann? An bhfuil 100 duine eile le hearcú? An bhfuil deichniúr le hearcú? Cén céatadán den fhoireann atá ag teacht isteach a bhfuil an Roinn ag lorg go mbeidh Gaeilinn acu?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: In the first instance it will be a matter for Tusla to determine the number it needs when it is recruiting people. We have not had a discussion with it about the numbers it requires. It goes back to the requirements for Irish speakers in the first place and to the extent to which that has been met already.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: An bhfuil aon eolas ar an líon daoine atá cinneadh déanta cheana féin iad a earcú? An bhfuil aon eolas ar dhaoine a bheidh ag teacht isteach an bhliain seo chugainn, seachas an bheirt sin?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I do not have information about that in respect of the inspection service. Again, we can cover that in our response.

Chairman: Is dócha go bhfuil míthuiscint áit éigin arís. Bhain an cheist a chuir an Teachta leis an Roinn féin. Thug Dr. Lynch freagra ina ndúirt sé nach bhfuil mórán teagmháil ag an Roinn leis an bpobal agus nach bhfuil mórán éilimh ar chainteoirí Gaeilge sa Roinn. An é sin atá á rá aige?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Yes, that is correct.

Chairman: De réir mar a thuigim ba í an cheist a chur an Teachta, agus tá sé in ann í a chur é féin, ná cén chaoi gur féidir linn brath ar an gcinneadh sin atá déanta ag an Roinn nach bhfuil mórán éilimh laistigh den Roinn nuair nach bhfuil slat tomhais i gceist? Tá Dr. Lynch ag dul ar ais i gcónaí go dtí an chigireacht, ach ní hé sin an cheist. Baineann an cheist leis an Roinn féin. Maidir le cúrsaí earcaíochta, cé mhéad fostaithe, a bheidh ag tógáil post laistigh den Roinn an bhliain seo chugainn, a bheas Gaeilge acu? An í sin an cheist?

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Sea, go díreach.

Chairman: Táim ag caint faoi fhostaithe nua atá á n-earcú ag an Roinn ag gach uile leibhéal agus i ngach grád. An bhfuil sprioc faoi leith ag an Roinn maidir le daoine le Gaeilge?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: We know at the moment that we have six people within the Department who have fluent Irish. A number of others have a reasonable level of comprehension, either

written or oral. On the basis of the service we provide and our interaction with the public at the moment, and I stress that I am referring to the case at the moment, we have no indication that we require a large number of additional people who speak Irish to do the work of the Department. I stress that I am referring to the work of the Department which, after all, is not providing a substantial service directly to the public. I do not know if that answers the Deputy's question. We will of course be recruiting some people next year. There will be a natural turnover of people.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Cén líon a bheidh á earcú an bhliain seo chugainn?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: There probably will not be many additional people because we have increased the total number-----

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: An bhfuil aon tuairim ag Dr. Lynch? An mbeidh deichniúr, 100 nó 1,000 i gceist?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: There are now approximately 250 people in our Department. We have increased those numbers fairly significantly over recent years.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Does Dr. Lynch have a ballpark figure?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: We are pretty much reaching our upper limit. I do not anticipate a significant number of additional people. I would have thought, and I am only surmising at this stage, that there would be no more than nine or ten additional people. There will also be some staff turnover arising from retirements and people leaving to move elsewhere. A very small proportion of the total number of people working in the Department are likely to be moving on or changing jobs.

Mr. Denis O'Sullivan: In respect of the training of existing staff, 12 staff members in the Department are undergoing training at varying levels in the form of 30 hour modules. Twelve staff members came forward for that in 2018. A total of 24 have been trained and educated over the past four years at varying levels from foundation up to level 6, if that is the highest level. The other initiative which the Secretary General referenced earlier is the informal caife le Gaeilge. It is for all of us in the building. We see a group of people having a cup of coffee and speaking in their native language once a fortnight. I gather that the numbers coming forward for that have grown since it began.

If we look at our obligations under the scheme and as a Department, one of the discussions we had coming over was about the proportion of our website available in Irish. While 50% coverage of the website represents an increase over the 40% target we set when we first responded to the questionnaire, we asked ourselves what constitutes an acceptable level of coverage and how high it might be. There is no set figure but one of the things I will be doing over the next while is looking at the capacity to increase that volume and the value of doing so.

Another volumetric is the proportion of press releases released in Irish. We have exceeded the target that was set but again we ask what constitutes a reasonable delivery of simultaneously released translations for the Department. That is another issue at which we will look.

We have a very strong learning and development function in the Department. That came out as a very strong feature of the Department in the Civil Service employee engagement survey. Staff at all levels are being encouraged to come forward for training and their managers are freeing them up for it. I have not signed up yet, but perhaps when I see the committee the next time I will have.

Chairman: B'fhéidir go ndéanfaidh an tUasal O'Sullivan é sin tar éis an chruinnithe inniu.

Mr. Denis O'Sullivan: Maybe.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: On the subject of the Department and its approach to Irish, as I have said, we have specifically recruited a number of people who speak Irish and have recruited a number of others whom we were delighted to find spoke Irish. If it is helpful, I could ask Ms Ní Dhómhnaill to say a little bit about her experience as an Irish speaker in the Department.

Ms Niamh Ní Dhómhnaill: Is í an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí atá freagrach as earcaíocht ghinearálta a dhéanamh don Státseirbhís. Bíonn painéal Gaeilge agus painéal Béarla. Tháinig mise isteach ar phainéal Béarla. Mar sin ní raibh a fhios ag an Roinn roimh ré go raibh Gaeilge agam. D'fhéadfadh é sin tarlú. Níl a fhios ag an Roinn cé mhéad duine atá ag teacht isteach le Gaeilge in aon bhliain.

Chairman: An cinneadh é a rinne an finné féin dul ar an bpainéal Béarla?

Ms Niamh Ní Dhómhnaill: Bhí mé ar dhá phainéal agus fuair mé tairiscint ón cheann Béarla ní ba luaithe.

Chairman: Tuigim.

Ms Niamh Ní Dhómhnaill: Ba é sin roimh an chinneadh glacadh leis. Sin an dóigh ina n-oibríonn sé. Ní bhíonn a fhios ag an Roinn go dtí go mbíonn na daoine ag teacht isteach.

Chairman: Tá cúpla ceist agam féin. Is iontach gur fhan na hoifigigh ón Roinn linn agus go raibh an tuarascáil i nGaeilge. Déanaim comhghairdeas leo as sin. Ní tarlaíonn sé sin go minic. Bhí an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla le fáil le chéile. Ní tharlaíonn sé sin fiú amháin sa Dáil. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Roinn as ucht an bhirt sin. Níl sé léite agam fós.

Maidir le cúpla ceist, céard faoin gceistneoir? Nuair a sheol an coiste an ceistneoir i dtús tháinig sé ar ais agus bhí easnaimh ann. Tá sé sin admhaithe ag an Roinn. An é go bhfuil dul chun cinn iontach déanta anois ón tráth a chomhlánaigh an Roinn i dtús báire nó an raibh rud mícheart ann gur chomhlánaigh an Roinn amhlaidh é? Cén fáth go bhfuil an difríocht mhór ann anois?

Bhreathnaigh mé ar an bplean gníomhaíochta agus gabhaim buíochas as mar bhí míthuiscint níos luaithe maidir leis an bhfóram eile. Níl a lán cuspóirí maidir le do Roinn laistigh de anseo, ach tá cúpla ceann. Ar leathanach 51, de réir mar a fheicim sa straitéis seo, tá cúpla cuspóir i gceist.

Luaigh an Roinn dhá phost Gaeilge i réimse na luathbhlianta. An líonfar an dá phost sin an bhliain seo chugainn? An bhfuil an Roinn cinnte go mbeidh beirt bhreise i gceist? Is é a dara ceann ná go mbunófar bunlíne thacaíochta seirbhísí agus acmhainní a bheidh ar fáil do naíonraí. Tá an spriocdháta idir 2018 agus 2022. An féidir tuilleadh sonraí a thabhairt dom? An bhfuil tús curtha leis sin agus céard é stádas an chuspóra sin? Maidir leis an ngrúpa stiúrtha náisiúnta, de réir mar a thuigim ón Uasal Fay, tá tús curtha leis seo. An bhfuil an grúpa stiúrtha ag feidhmiú faoi láthair agus an bhfuil tuarascálacha idir lámha aige? An féidir sonraí a thabhairt faoi na trí chuspóir sin? Maidir leis an gceann maidir le tuismitheoirí, tá cuspóir faoi leith ansin ar an leathanach céanna. Bheinn buíoch freagra a fháil ón Roinn maidir leis na cuspóirí sin.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: On the questionnaire, a combination of having made progress since the last time and not providing sufficient information equally the last time resulted in our adopting

a somewhat minimalist and a very literalist approach where we said we do not provide services through Irish, full stop. Looking at it again, it was clear to me that that was not the case and that we should have provided more information. I repeat my apology on that.

We have made a decent amount of progress since then, particularly where one looks at-----

Chairman: An bhfuil tuiscint dhifriúil i gceist anois? An bhfuil tuiscint níos fearr ag an Roinn anois ó thaobh na ndualgas atá aici maidir leis an nGaeilge? An é sin atá á rá ag an Roinn?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Yes, we are very much conscious of that but we also interpreted the questionnaire too simply and at too basic a level the last time around. We have, however, made progress on the issues themselves, as well as giving the committee more information.

On the actions under the strategy, I am not completely clear. Was the Chairman referring to the actions under the five-year action plan?

Chairman: Bhí mé ag tagairt don phlean gníomhaíochta.

Mr. Paul Fay: I will be happy to take that. We are in the very early days of that, Chairman. The overall monitoring group for the action plan met for the first time in Killarney a few weeks ago following the formal launch of the plan, and we are convening our first meeting of the early years plan. There has been no material progress on any of those actions. We are at the start of that process. What we have done as to the two posts that the Chairman mentions is critical to bringing a focus and a strategic direction to implementing all of the actions. We have secured the funding in the Estimates for that. We are working on the job specifications in conjunction with our colleagues in the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to ensure that we get that right. In the past, we, Tusla and Better Start - the quality development agency - have all had trouble of one degree or another recruiting people with Gaeilge. We are at the very beginning of that process. A number of things were mentioned around parents and if there had been any progress on this-----

Chairman: Is é sin an cuspóir laistigh den phlean ar leathanach 51 maidir le tuismitheoirí.

Mr. Paul Fay: I do not have that action in front of me, I am sorry.

Chairman: Is féidir leis an Roinn teacht ar ais chugainn maidir leis na cuspóirí seo agus an méid dul chun cinn atá déanta ag an Roinn. Tá beagáinín eolais ag teastáil uainn.

Mr. Paul Fay: One of the things we have been talking about already in the monitoring group is an appropriate form of monitoring and reporting on progress.

Chairman: Tá dhá nó trí cheist eile agam. Maidir le cigirí, agus cé go bhfuil sé seo pléite cheana féin, tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach, ní féidir glacadh leis más rud é go bhfuil cigirí ag dul isteach chuig ionaid éagsúla ag úsáid Bhéarla in ionad Gaeilge. Tá an t-eolas bunúsach ag teastáil uainn. Ba sin an chéad chéim. Níos tábhachtaí fós, cad iad na pleananna atá ag an Roinn maidir lena chinntiú go bhfuil neart Gaeilge ag cigirí ag dul isteach in ionaid Ghaeilge? Maidir le Pobal agus eagraíochtaí eile atá ag soláthar seirbhísí agus ag fáil airgead poiblí, cén chaoi a gcinntíonn an Roinn go bhfuil siad in ann feidhmiú trí Ghaeilge?

Dr. Fergal Lynch: On the first point on inspections, I take the point that it is very important that inspections would be conducted through Irish. The Chairman has asked for information, with which we will certainly come back to the committee, including the plans that we have to ensure that the inspectors have sufficient Irish.

On other organisations providing services-----

Chairman: Táim ag caint faoin eagraíocht Pobal. Tá sé luaite sa ráiteas tosaigh. Mar shampla, cén chaoi a gcinntíonn an Roinn go bhfuil Gaeilge acu? Tá airgead poiblí i gceist ag dul go dtí na heagraíochtaí seo.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: Our focus has been on ensuring that they provide an appropriate and proper service. To be honest, we have not made the money that we are giving to them conditional on the provision of the Irish language. We have inserted in the service-level agreement with Pobal a requirement that it will have full regard to the needs of providing services in the Irish language in early years services to those who wish to avail of this, including the naíonraí and those in both Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas. That is essentially our focus. The funding that we give is not conditional on the Irish language component. It is conditional on services being provided appropriately, etc.

It is important to say that, for example, where we or Pobal provide services, we would have Irish language speakers. We have confirmed that when the affordable childcare scheme, ACS, is in place, which will be next year, its helpdesk will have Irish speakers. There will be an element of an external service providing a service provider to put the ACS in place, and part of the requirement for that also is to have Irish language speakers in place. We will be able to monitor that element of the provision.

Chairman: Is dócha go bhfuil an comhaontú seirbhíse thar a bheith tábhachtach. Tá sé seo ag eascairt, ní as an gcoiste seo, ach ó na moltaí a tháinig ón gCoimisinéir Teanga. Dhírigh sé isteach ar an rud seo agus tá an comhaontú seirbhíse luaite i do ráiteas tosaigh. Níl mé ach ag díriú isteach ar ní a bhfuil an-tábhacht ag gabháil leis. Is rud amháin go bhfuil dualgais ar an Roinn agus muid ag cur brú ar an Roinn na dualgais sin a chomhlíonadh. Is rud eile nuair atá airgead poiblí ag dul go dtí eagraíochtaí éagsúla atá ag feidhmiú trí Bhéarla agus iad ag tabhairt tacaíocht nó ag déanamh monatóireacht ar naíonraí atá ag feidhmiú trí Ghaeilge laistigh agus lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht. Chuala mé freagra an dochtúra.

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil lenár n-aíonna. Ní raibh sé éasca, tá a fhios agam é sin. Ní raibh sé éasca dúinne ach an oiread, ag plé leis an mBéarla agus an Gaeilge ach rinne ár n-aoichainteoirí éacht freisin a bheith soiléir, agus táim buíoch díobh.

Tá ceist dheireanach agam. Tá 250 comhalta foirne sa Roinn agus tá seisear le Gaeilge. Is céatadán an-íseal é sin. Dúirt ionadaithe na Roinne linn go bhfuil fostaithe éagsúla ag freastal ar ranganna Gaeilge. Is maith dearfa an rud é sin ach tá i bhfad níos mó ag teastáil ionas go mbeidh tuiscint dhomhain ag an Roinn faoi chomh tábhachtach is atá an Ghaeilge, go háirithe mar go bhfuil cearta bunúsacha i gceist anseo, ó thaobh tuismitheoirí agus gasúr. De réir mar a thuigim, tá an Rialtas ar tí an Bille nua a fhoilsiú maidir le hAcht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla. Má ghlacann an Dáil leis an mBille nua nuair atá sé foilsithe, beidh dualgais i bhfad níos tromchúisí ar an Roinn ó thaobh líon na bhfostaithe a mbeidh Gaeilge acu. Tá sé tábhachtach go mbeidh an Roinn á réiteach féin don am sin. Tá sé ag teacht.

Dr. Fergal Lynch: I take that point, Chairman.

Chairman: Gabhaim buíochas le gach duine atá i láthair arís. Rachaimid isteach i seisiún príobháideach anois le haghaidh dréacht-tuarascáil a phlé. Cuirfimid an cruinniú ar fionraí mar sin ar feadh cúpla nóiméad le go ligfimid do na finnéithe imeacht.

Chuaigh an comhchoiste isteach i seisiún príobháideach ag 5.52 p.m. agus cuireadh ar

20 November 2018

athló é ar 6.14 p.m. go dtí 4 p.m. Dé Máirt, 4 Nollaig 2018.