

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IRISH LANGUAGE, GAELTACHT AND THE ISLANDS

### COMHCHOISTE NA GAEILGE, NA GAELTACHTA AGUS NA NOILEÁN

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*Dé Máirt, 18 Nollaig 2018*

*Tuesday, 18 December 2018*

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The Joint Committee met at 4 p.m.

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#### MEMBERS PRESENT:

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.

In attendance: Deputy Seán Crowe..

DEPUTY CATHERINE CONNOLLY IN THE CHAIR.

**Seirbhísí trí Ghaeilge: Tusla**

**Chairman:** Ba mhaith liom tús a chur leis an gcrúinniú. Cuirim céad míle fáilte roimh na hoifigigh. Táimid ag tnúth lena gcur i láthair. Is mian linn soiléiriú a fháil i dtaobh na Gaeilge agus maidir leis an dul chun cinn atá déanta ag Tusla. Cuirim fáilte roimh Mr. Patrick Smyth, príomhfheidhmeannach eatramhach; Mr. Alan Breen, stiúrthóir cumarsáide; Ms Amanda Pathe, bainisteoir an aonaid gnóthaí parlaiminte; Ms Fiona McDonnell; agus Mr. Noel Kelly, stiúrthóir seirbhíse sna seirbhísí oideachais agus leanai.

I dtús báire, tá rud le déanamh agam maidir leis an Acht um Chlúmhilleadh. Beidh na finnéithe in ann a gcur i láthair a dhéanamh nuair a bheidh sé seo déanta agam. Ba mhaith liom a chur ar aird na bhfinnéithe go bhfuil, de bhua alt 17(2)(l) den Acht um Chlúmhilleadh 2009, finnéithe faoi chosaint ag lánphribhléid maidir leis an bhfianaise a thabharfaidh siad don chomhchoiste 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 díobh cleachtadh parlaiminte a urramú nár chóir, más féidir, duine ná eintiteas a cháineadh ná líomhaintí a dhéanamh ina n-aghaidh, ina n-ainm, ina hainm nó ina ainm ar shlí a bhféadfaí iad a aithint. Ba mhaith liom na finnéithe a chur ar an eolas 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 chomhchoiste 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, ar shlí a bhféadfaí iad a aithint. Tá mo chuid déanta agam. An bhfuil sé i gceist ag na finnéithe labhairt i nGaeilge nó i mBéarla?

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** Béarla.

**Ms Amanda Pathe:** Béarla agus Gaeilge.

**Chairman:** Iontach.

**Ms Amanda Pathe:** Déanfaidh mé iarracht ar aon nós.

**Chairman:** Go raibh míle maith agat. Beidh sé seo beagáinín deacair. Leanfaidh muid ar aghaidh trí Ghaeilge. Tá na cluasáin ar fáil. Déanfaidh muid ár ndícheall.

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** Ba mhaith liom míle buíochas a ghabháil le baill an choiste as an deis seo dul i ngleic leo inniu. Tá sé i gceist agam faisnéis a leagan amach maidir le bunú Tusla agus lenár dtiomantas ár ndualgais faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla a chomhlíonadh chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn agus cearta teanga ár n-úsáideoirí seirbhíse a chosaint. I apologise for being unable to continue in Irish, but the standard of my spoken Irish is not good enough to enable me to do so. I will read the opening statement in English, if that is okay. I am joined today by Ms Fiona McDonnell, who is Tusla's national service director for the regulation of children's services, including early years services; Mr. Noel Kelly, who is Tusla's director of education welfare services; Mr. Alan Breen, who is Tusla's head of communications; and Ms Amanda Pathe of Tusla's parliamentary affairs unit. I am the interim CEO of Tusla. As a brief introduction, I remind the committee that Tusla was established in 2014 on foot of a recommendation made in 2012 by the task force on the Child and Family Support Agency.

**Chairman:** Gabh mo leithscéal. Tuigeann muid cé chomh tábhachtach is atá an obair atá

á dhéanamh ag Tusla. Níl na finnétithe os comhair an Chomhchoiste um Shláinte. Tá siad os comhair Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus na nOileán chun ábhar na Gaeilge a phlé. Iarraim ar an Uasal Smyth díriú isteach air sin. Tuigeann muid an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an obair atá á dhéanamh ag Tusla. Tá na finnétithe os ár gcomhair ar bhunús eile. Iarraim orthu breathnú ar úsáid na Gaeilge agus díriú ar an dul chun cinn atá déanta ag Tusla ó thaobh na Gaeilge de agus ó thaobh na freagrachtaí dlíthiúla atá ar Tusla.

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** Okay. We can do that. I will give an overview of the progress we have made. It is acknowledged that in the absence of a dedicated Tusla-owned or Tusla-commissioned Irish language service, the quality of services provided through Irish is varied. There are examples of areas in which services of a high standard are provided and of areas in which our obligations are not being met in full. Tusla has demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring the availability through Irish of services, documentation and reports in its early years inspectorate, its educational welfare service and its communication unit, as well as in some local areas, including those in the Gaeltacht. While competence in Irish is not one of the criteria used when staff are being recruited to Tusla, we have identified 24 staff across our services who are competent in the language. We are conscious that a staff audit needs to be undertaken to reflect accurately the actual number of staff who have competent levels of Irish for the purposes of service provision. We intend to undertake such an audit in 2019. Twelve of the 24 staff who are competent in Irish are based in the Galway-Roscommon area. They are involved in ensuring services can be provided through Irish in areas like child protection, children in care, prevention, partnership and family support. Among the services they provide are Meitheal, individual parenting sessions, social work assessments, inter-agency meetings and information briefings. Tusla staff in the Louth-Meath area have established a quality improvement initiative to review how better to respond to the needs of children who are referred through Irish. Irish-speaking foster carers are available in some areas for children whose needs are best met in the family setting. Tusla also funds three family resource centres in the greater Donegal Gaeltacht area where services are provided through both English and Irish.

The role of Tusla's early years inspectorate is to promote and monitor the safety and quality of care and support provided to children in early years provision in accordance with the Child Care Act 1991 and the 2016 early years services regulations. The aim of these regulatory inspections is to determine the extent to which services are well governed, the health, welfare and development of each child is supported, children are safe, and premises are safe, suitable and appropriate to the care and education of children. Some 259 Irish-language services are registered with Tusla, 110 of which were inspected in 2018. Reports were provided in Irish to those services which requested them. A further 94 services were inspected the previous year and Irish reports were again provided when they were requested. The early years inspectorate is committed to supporting early years services where Irish is spoken. Formal written communication in Irish between services and the inspectorate is arranged. There is one inspector in the inspectorate with high-level proficiency in the Irish language. A specific Irish language inspector with expert proficiency in both oral and written Irish is being recruited to enhance and increase the service delivery to naíonraí and Gaelscoileanna.

The policy of the inspectorate is that while formal written communications are offered to services on request, inspection reports are available in Irish, as is the quality and regulatory framework, which was published recently. The inspectorate continues to explore initiatives which would make translation more accessible and affordable. It is constantly looking at ways to deliver services through Irish. To enhance this work, the inspectorate engages with external stakeholders and Irish language representative organisations, including Comhar Naíonraí

na Gaeltachta, which is an integral member of the early years inspectorate regulatory support forum, and Gaelscoileanna Teoranta, which is a member of the Tusla early years consultative committee. These organisations offer information, advice and input on engaging with senior management in Tusla's early years inspectorate. Our communications unit is committed to publishing as much content in Irish as possible. It is expected that the amount of such content will increase significantly in the coming year. I will mention some examples of the steps that will be taken. Irish versions of press releases will be drawn up and we will be communicating in Irish across social media platforms. I am personally committed to improving the quality and quantity of the service provided by Tusla through Irish.

I would like to mention some of the steps that are planned for 2019. We are required to prepare a draft language scheme. We have a scheme in the western area at the moment. That is to be extended to the other areas in which we are involved with providing services. As I have mentioned, we are looking at the recruitment of an Irish language officer, or the procurement of the services of such an officer. As part of the creation of Tusla, we have worked with the HSE on many of these services under a memorandum of understanding. To a large extent, our reliance on that has made it difficult to advance our Irish language services. We are reviewing our publications in line with our obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003. As I said, we are recruiting a dedicated additional Irish-language early years inspector. Staff information systems are in place to assist in responding to communications received through Irish. I have mentioned that we are undertaking a staff survey to establish the number of Irish speakers within our services. We are looking to identify additional spokespersons to speak in Irish on broadcast media. We already have a number of people who can perform this function for us. We are going to undertake an audit of Tusla's estate portfolio. We need to draft business cases around the extension of bilingual signs. Historically, the HSE has undertaken much of this work for us because many of our buildings are shared with that organisation. Tusla will take up much more of that work as it moves forward. We plan to promote Irish-language upskilling and training through our workforce learning and development programme.

In summary, since its establishment Tusla has focused on its core services, which involve the protection of vulnerable children and their families. It is only since 2016 that increased investment has allowed us to develop supports in other areas. This has enabled us to adhere to the highest administrative standards in compliance with our legislative requirements. As we move into the next stage of maturity and sustainability, there will be an increasing focus on developing and investing in the corporate spine of the agency, including increasing and improving the quantity and quality of services provided through Irish by Tusla.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Gabhaim buíochas leis na finnétithe as teacht os ár gcomhair. Nuair atá páistí aonteangacha, nó fiú dátheangacha, ag déileáil le daoine údarásacha, tá sé ríthábhachtach go mbeadh na teangacha dúchasacha ina bhfuil na páistí sin á dtógáil ag na hoifigigh sin. Sa tír seo, ba cheart go mbeadh an Ghaeilge acu siúd a théann i dteagmháil le páistí atá á dtógáil le Gaeilge. Tá mé ag caint ní hamháin faoi fhoireann Tusla, ach faoi oibrithe in aon eagrais Stáit lena mbíonn daoine óga ag déileáil, múinteoirí san áireamh. Ba cheart go mbeadh Gaeilge acu. Dúirt an tUasal Smyth go bhfuil Gaeilge ag 24 ball foirne de chuid Tusla, nó go bhfuil cumas Ghaeilge acu. Tá níos mó ná 4,000 duine ag obair le Tusla. Sa lá atá inniu ann, tá sé an-éasca suirbhé a dhéanamh. Ba cheart do Tusla iarracht a dhéanamh láithreach fáil amach cén leibhéal cumas teanga atá i gceist. Ní féidir le haon eagrais plean gnímh a dhéanamh, nó aon chur chuige ceart maidir leis an nGaeilge a ghlacadh, mura bhfuil eolas maidir le líon na nGaeilgeoirí ar fáil san eagrais sin. Measaim go bhfuil sé scannalach nach bhfuil sé sin tarlaithe ag an staid seo.

Tuigim na tosaíochtaí atá ag Tusla, agus tuigim na géarchéimeanna agus na huafáis lena mbíonn Tusla ag déileáil anois is arís. Nuair atá baill fhoirne á n-earcú, ba chóir go dtógfaí san áireamh an bhfuil cáilíochtaí nó cumas Gaeilge, nó aon teanga, sa CV ag na hiarrthóirí. Nuair atá Tusla ag déileáil le páistí in Éirinn atá an Fhraincis, an Spáinnis, an Svahailis nó pé teanga eile mar theanga dhúchais acu, caithfidh go mbíonn ar lucht an eagrais ateangaire a lorg chun déileáil leis an bpáiste sin. Tá a fhios agam faoin ábhar seo ós rud é gur tógadh le Gaeilge mé sa chathair seo. Ní raibh Béarla agam i gceart go dtí go raibh mé seacht nó ocht mbliana d'aois. Sa chuid is mó, trí Ghaeilge a bhínn ag déileáil le daoine. Bhí sé deacair orm casadh ar Béarla i gceart. Níor dhein mé é go dtí gur thosaigh mé san ollscoil. Ba sin an chéad uair go raibh orm casadh ar an dara teanga sa Stát seo go hoifigiúil. Nuair a chasann páiste óg le Gaeilge ar an mBéarla, cuireann sé leis an bhfadhb atá againn maidir leis an teanga.

Ba mhaith liom díriú ar na chéad chéimeanna eile. Molaim an liosta atá curtha faoi bhráid an choiste ag an Uasal Smyth. Níl mé ag cur i gcoinne an liosta nuair a deirim go gcaithfear bogadh go tapa chun dréachtscéim theanga a chur le chéile. Is rudaí simplí atá i gceist. Beidh cuid acu buntáisteach do Tusla araon le Gaeilgeoirí. Ba chóir go mbeadh a fhios ag lucht an eagrais cé mhéad duine i Tusla atá in ann feidhmiú mar urlabhraithe Gaeilge don eagrais, agus deis a bheith acu craobhscaoileadh a dhéanamh ar a shon nuair atá plé á dhéanamh ar Raidió na Gaeltachta, TG4, Raidió na Life nó Raidió Fáilte ar cé chomh maith nó cé chomh dona is atá Tusla ag feidhmiú, ag brath ar an gcás atá i gceist. Chabhródh rud bunúsach mar seo le Tusla agus le pobal na Gaeilge. Thaispeánfadh sé go bhfuil Tusla dáiríre faoin cheist seo, ní hamháin nuair atá baill fhoirne ag déileáil le cásanna éigeandála ach freisin nuair atá siad ag déileáil le náiscoilleana agus réamhscolaíocht i gcoitinne. B'fhéidir go mbeidh an tUasal Smyth in ann tabhairt faoin dá cheist sin. Tiocfaidh mé ar ais le ceist nó dhó eile.

**Chairman:** Ceart go leor.

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** The Deputy referred to the number of staff within the organisation who have competence in the Irish language. I think there is no doubt that the true figure is much higher. The Deputy is right when he says there is a need to survey that. We have undertaken to do so next year. Many of the staff employed in our educational welfare services are former teachers. We definitely have access to people with good Irish language skills in that area. However, this element of our service is not focused on the front end of child protection. When we are recruiting people to work at the front end of child protection, we tend to look at the skills first. That has been the case in the past. While Tusla has been able to recruit a large number of social workers in recent years, it has struggled insofar as there has been quite a turnover in social worker skills. We must try to address the need to have good social workers in place who have solid language skills in addition to the necessary skill set for working in child protection. Our first case in recent years has been to try to get the social workers with those protection skills in place, but I take the point. We have a lot more staff within Tusla who have those skills. Part of our process is to try to put the plan together, make it attractive and have a survey of staff done, but it is also to encourage and support staff who have Irish language skills to move into service areas where they can support children who are brought up through Irish.

I reference the point we made about the early years inspectorate, whose job it is to look at the naíonraí and the early years education services and inspect same. We have inspected quite a number of those in recent years and the communication is rarely with the children in those areas. It is usually with the management. The capacity to do those inspections through Irish is there, but we are conscious that we need to invest more and bring in a number of extra people for that. What we have not done and what we plan to do next year is to have an Irish language

officer or someone who has that work attached to them who can co-ordinate, make that a focus and allow us at least to put a plan in place, but who can also be somebody who is a central point in supporting Irish language service delivery.

We are aware of the capacity in terms of speaking to the media. My colleague, Mr. Breen, can give some more information on our plans in that area.

**Mr. Alan Breen:** I want to tell Deputy Ó Snodaigh that, like the other corporate services within Tusla, communications was playing catch-up to a degree. We will take our team from three to 14, it is hoped by the end of February, because we are cognisant of the fact that we have in excess of 4,000 employees at more than 400 locations around the country delivering a full suite of services in child protection and welfare. One of the priorities is to put the strategy in place. We have a communications strategy, part of which is directly related to our obligations under the Irish language legislation. In the context of conducting a communications baseline audit, in our internal communications service and workshops, two of which we have conducted already, we have been looking to ascertain if we can identify additional proficient Irish speakers. Obviously some training comes with that. If, as is the case with any large organisation, we are identifying spokespersons to speak with some degree of authority on a particular area, they will need training and some of them will sometimes be speaking on areas on which they need to be brought up to speed. It certainly is a priority for us in 2019 to ensure that we have identified more spokespersons with a view to having them available to deal with broadcast media such as Raidió na Life, Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Gabhaim buíochas leis na finnétithe. Níl mé ag súil le hathrú thar oíche. Tuigim cé chomh mall agus a tharlaíonn athruithe agus aithníonn Tusla gur gá an t-athrú seo.

Tagraím don mhéid a dúirt an tUasal Smyth faoi na cigirí luathbhlianta a théann isteach i naíscoileanna. An bhfuil Gaeilge acu siúd ar fad a thugann cuairt ar scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht? Cad faoi lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht? Tá a lán naíonraí nó réamhscoileanna atá lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht, agus tá an fhoireann ag freastal ar na páistí as Gaeilge, ach an mbíonn orthu athrú go Béarla chun labhairt leis an gcigire nuair a thagann sé nó sí isteach? Más fíor é sin, conas is féidir a dhéanamh cinnte de nach dtarlaíonn sé sin amach anseo?

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** I ask my colleague who oversees that area, Ms McDonnell, to respond to those questions.

**Ms Fiona McDonnell:** Within the early years inspectorate we have 4,459 services, so the Irish language services, predominantly the naíonraí, are 6% of services at 259. We have a lot of work yet to do in this area. We are committed to the Irish language and we have representatives on our consultative forum and our regulatory support forum from the Gaelscoileanna and Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta, CNNG.

On inspections, we only have one inspector in place who is fluent in the Irish language and that inspector is placed in a Gaeltacht area. We are just finishing a campaign to have an additional inspector in another Gaeltacht area, and we intend that over the next three years we will have Irish language speakers as inspectors in all Gaeltacht areas.

On the campaign that we undertook, we did not have large numbers applying for the job. This was not because of the Irish language requirement but because there was also the requirement to have an early years background for inspections and so forth. That is limited so that is



something that we have to work on.

On when we inspect services and naíonraí, many of our inspectors would have the basics to be able to talk at a basic level of Irish so they are conscious that the majority of the interaction is through English. In 2019, we intend to undertake training assessment and training need and to try to identify people, in the Gaeltacht areas in particular, with whom we can expand and improve on that.

On inspections reports, we translate them when requested. We are conscious that it is just when we are requested to do so. We publish many documents in Irish and we publish a lot of documents. This includes our quality regulatory framework. We intend to publish every single document we have in Irish, but we have linked very strongly with our member representation from the Irish language community, particularly through our consultative forum, and they give us advice on which documents are more important to them. However, we see that within five years we should be in a better position and we will be able to facilitate inspections, maybe not wholly or absolutely but to a better level than we have done, and we will put more expertise within the Gaeltacht areas.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Ar an gceist sin-----

**Chairman:** Tiocfaidh mé ar ais chuig an Teachta.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Chun críochnú leis an méid a dúirt siad.

**Chairman:** Ceart go leor.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** An bhfuil Tusla ag déanamh teagmháil leis na hollscoileanna agus a leithéid sin? Má tá Tusla ag lorg daoine le scileanna luathbhlianta, an bhfuil na finnétithe ag rá sna hollscoileanna go bhfuil Gaeilge ag teastáil chomh maith agus go mbeidh poist amach anseo do Ghaeilgeoirí leis na scileanna atá ag teastáil?

**Ms Fiona McDonnell:** It is our plan to do that because we have just completed a campaign so we realise that not as many people came forward as should have. We definitely intend to contact the colleges on that.

**Senator Joe O'Reilly:** Cuirim fáilte roimh na finnétithe go léir. Tá sean aithne agam ar an Uasal Smyth. Tá brón orm nach raibh mé anseo níos luaithe chun an cur i láthair a chloisteáil. Le bheith lán dáiríre, tá an-mheas agam ar an saghas oibre a dhéanann Tusla go laethúil. Tá mo mhac ag déanamh eolaíocht sóisialta agus tá sé ag obair le Tusla ag an bomaite ar chúpla seachtain phraiticiúil, so tá mé buíoch as sin.

Ar bhealach, tá mo chéad cheist freagraithe cheana ach cuirfidh mé ceithre ceist shimplí díreach ar na finnétithe, agus bheadh spéis ag cuid mhaith de dhaoine sna freagraí seo. Cé mhéad cigire luathbhlianta atá fostaithe ag Tusla? Cad é an líon cigirí atá in ann cigireacht a dhéanamh trí mheán na Gaeilge? An bhfuil seirbhís chigireachta trí mheán na Gaeilge ar fáil i ngach ceantar Gaeltachta? An labhraíonn na cigirí as Béarla os comhair na leanaí le linn na cigireachta, agus an bhfuil baill fhoirne naíonraí in ann teagmháil a dhéanamh le Tusla trí mheán na Gaeilge?

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** Again I ask my colleague, Ms McDonnell to fill the Senator in on those issues.

**Ms Fiona McDonnell:** To build on what I have said already, within the early years inspec-

torate we have 47 inspectors, and with our recent campaign we are going up to 57 inspectors. Within the service in the Gaeltacht areas, we only have one inspector in one Gaeltacht area who is proficient to carry out full inspections through Irish. Within the other areas we are building up, so we are limited on that.

When we engage with the staff in the naíonraí, they speak in Irish and English to us and we try to respond in Irish depending on the level the inspector has. In particular, Mr. Smyth stated that we will look at the survey and our workforce and we will identify people in areas whom we can upskill so that we can improve on that.

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** We have an additional number of inspectors who have some level of proficiency in Irish without being fluent. We have one who is fluent and proficient in written Irish, and we are trying to recruit the second and a number of others who can converse in Irish to some extent.

**Chairman:** An bhfuil ceist ag an Seanadóir Ó Donnghaile?

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Níl.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Ghoid mise na cinn mhaithe ar fad.

**Chairman:** Gabhaim buíochas do na finnétithe as ucht an soiléiriú ach ní mór dom a rá go bhfuil sé deacair uaireanta a bheith mar Chathaoirleach anseo agus a bheith ag cloisteáil faoi na bearnaí ollmhóra atá ann ó thaobh na Gaeilge de, agus tagráim do sheirbhísí bunúsacha. Táimid ag caint faoi chearta daonna. Tá sé tuillte ag daoine le Gaeilge go mbeadh seirbhísí bunúsacha ar fáil. Tá na finnétithe ionraic agus molaim iad mar tá siad ag rá go hoscailte cad iad na bearnaí.

Tá líon na gcigirí ag méadú ó 47 go 57. Cé mhéad den uimhir bhreise sin a bhfuil Gaeilge acu? Cén iarracht atá déanta ag Tusla maidir leis an bhfigiúr breise sin? Ó thaobh na daoine atá Gaeilge acu ar leibhéal áirithe, cén sórt cabhair atá i gceist dóibh siúd chun tuilleadh feabhas a chur ar a chuid Gaeilge? An bhfuil siad ag freastal ar chúrsaí? Cad é an céatadán den fhoireann atá i mbun cúrsa faoi láthair?

An rud atá i gceist anseo ná an Ghaeilge a normalú agus gan í a imeallú. Bíonn an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge os mo chomhair agam gach uile sheachtain anseo maidir le gach uile Roinn. Tá an straitéis leagtha síos ansin agus tá plan gníomhaíochta anseo. Tá súil agam go bhfuil sí léite ag na finnétithe mar tá dualgas faoi leith acu faoin bplan seo.

Díreoidh mé isteach ar sholáthar luathbhlianta Gaeilge. Cruthófar dhá phost Ghaeilge i réimse na luathbhlianta laistigh den Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige. An bhfuil sé sin déanta ag an Roinn? An bhfuil aon bhaint ag Tusla leis sin? An bhfuil plan Gaeilge ag Tusla faoi láthair nó an bhfuil sé clúdaithe faoin HSE? Níl a fhios agam faoi sin. An bhfuil Tusla ag feidhmiú gan plan? Rinne na finnétithe tagairt don phlean atá le teacht, ach cén sórt plan atá i gceist faoi láthair?

Nuair a thagann na finnétithe os ár gcomhair, bheadh mise ag súil go mbeadh an straitéis agus an plan gníomhaíochta léite acu agus go bhfuil siad ag díriú orthu. Ní saineolaithe muidne ach bhí saineolaithe taobh thiar de na cáipéisí seo agus tá na spriocanna leagtha amach go soiléir.

Tá rudaí beartaithe ag Tusla. Tá sé ráite ag na finnétithe go bhfuil rudaí ar leith le déanamh acu. Má tá na finnétithe os ár gcomhair ag an bpointe seo an bhliain seo chugainn, cad iad na rudaí a bheidh déanta acu laistigh den bhliain sin?



**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** I will try to take those questions from the bottom up. On what we are setting out to do, it was mentioned that we have a realisation on the development of Tusla's corporate services that since the agency was founded, it has relied heavily on the HSE, where it came from, to develop. One of the services and areas that the Chairman correctly identified that we were involved in was the Irish language services and we operated within the HSE's framework for that for the first number of years. We have tried to step out of that over the past two years in terms of developing our own-----

**Chairman:** An bhfuil plean teanga ag Tusla faoi láthair?

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** No, we do not have a separate plan for Tusla. That is one of the areas we are determined to develop in 2019 to put an Irish language plan in place in line with the Act. As I said about the areas we need to deliver on, we mentioned the need to put more inspectors in place and we are working through that plan. We have one who is proficient-----

**Chairman:** Tá duine as 47 agus beidh duine as 57.

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** We have one in place and one to recruit. The Irish language services are about 6% of the total early years area, so of the 50 or 55 posts, three to four Irish language inspectors would seem like an appropriate number. As my colleague, Ms McDonnell, said earlier, we have a plan for the next two to three years to put that number in place, but that is heavily dependent, as all things are, on having the approvals and resources in place. That speaks to our determination around those services.

We are also determined to take a broader look through the organisation in terms of a survey of and engagement with staff who are willing to provide and develop services through Irish, and as part of that-----

**Chairman:** Beidh suirbhé i gceist an bhliain seo chugainn.

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** Yes, to identify the number of staff in the organisation who have a proficiency in Irish.

**Chairman:** Tá ceist bhunúsach agam. Cén fáth nach bhfuil sé sin déanta cheana ar a laghad chun a fháil amach cé mhéad duine a bhfuil Gaeilge acu? Is rud bunúsach é sin.

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** That is because those services were never clearly looked on as services that Tusla had control over because we were involved in accessing those services with the HSE. It is similar to many other corporate-type services or strategic pieces and it is only over the past two years that Tusla has had the resources and the control over those spaces. It was not done as part of the initial setup. Like many of the other pieces we came across in 2014, we just took what was in place and accepted that, and it was really only over the past two years that an identification of these different elements has come to the fore because there was no resource prior to that. This represents another area in which we are trying to develop and create a service. Our commitment to that is much stronger now than it had been previously.

**Ms Fiona McDonnell:** On the two new posts that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is establishing, we have a good and collaborative relationship with the Department and we will definitely liaise and build accordingly within Tusla and the early years inspectorate to ensure that our responsibility and commitment to growing, promoting and supporting the Irish language will be in tandem so that those positions will also assist us and support us in that.

**Chairman:** Ní bhfuair mé freagra maidir le cé mhéad duine atá i mbun cúrsa, ag foghlaim na Gaeilge laistigh den eagraíocht.

**Ms Fiona McDonnell:** It is my understanding that we do not have anyone currently undertaking an Irish language course-----

**Chairman:** Gabh mo leithscéal ach níor chuala mé an freagra sin.

**Ms Fiona McDonnell:** -----within the inspectorate but we intend to identify personnel to participate, through a survey in 2019, and we will support and promote them in undertaking courses to increase fluency and proficiency within the inspectorate in Irish.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Tá dhá cheist agam agus níl mé ag clamhsán. Aithním na fadhbanna atá ag Tusla, agus cé nach bhfuil an ghníomhaireacht ar an gcomhlacht is measa sa Státchóras, tá na figiúirí atá cloiste againn go dona. Ar a laghad, tá an ghníomhaireacht seo ag glacadh gur gá athrú a dhéanamh.

Tá dhá cheist agam, agus sa dá limistéar seo, tá spéis áirithe agam iontu. An bhfuil teanga ar fáil dóibh siúd atá ag déileáil le ceist chosanta leanaí? Má tá páiste ann agus gur Gaeilge an chéad teanga atá aige nó aici, uaireanta bíonn sé deacair orthu a gcuid fadhbanna a chur in iúl i mBéarla nó in aon teanga eile. Má thagann oifigh an ghníomhaireacht ar pháiste atá i gcruachás, an féidir teanga a bheith ar fáil ar ghuthán nó a leithéid chun cuidiú leis an ngníomhaireacht san obair seo tráth a mbíonn an-tábhacht ag gabháil leis, is é sin ag an gcéad chéim de, nó fiú amháin ina dhiaidh sin?

Sa dara ceist fiafraím den ghníomhaireacht maidir le seirbhís eile. Luaigh an ghníomhaireacht cúramóirí altranaís nó foster parents. Dúradh go bhfuil roinnt cúramóirí agus clann ann atá ar fáil don ghníomhaireacht. Tá a fhios agam ó roinnt cairde atá agam agus ó dhaoine atá ag gabháil dá leithéid, a luaithe a bhfuiltear ag caitheamh le páiste nó le páistí, tá an duine as an gcóras ar shlí amháin. Ní bhogtar daoine timpeall. Má tá clann nó dhá chlann le Gaeilge ann agus tá páistí acu ann cheana féin, an bhfuil earcú leanúnach ar siúl chun clanna nua a fháil agus ceist a chur orthu nuair atá siad á gcur iad féin ar fáil don ghníomhaireacht go bhfuil Gaeilge acu? Má tá páistí ag teacht i gcás mar sin, cás éigeandála, agus gur Gaeilge an teanga atá sa bhaile acu, bheadh sé tábhachtach go mbogaidís isteach i gclann eile a bhfuil Gaeilge mar theanga acu, seachas á mbogadh isteach i gclann eile nach bhfuil an Ghaeilge inti. Má bhogtar iad isteach iad i gclann le Béarla, cuireann sé sin leis an bhfadhb nó leis an gcur as don saol atá ag páiste, go háirithe má tá siad óg, faoi chúig nó shé bliana d'aois.

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** I will start with the second question on foster parents. As time has gone on, it has become increasingly difficult for Tusla to recruit foster parents across the whole spectrum, regardless of language proficiency. That has certainly been much more pronounced in urban areas. The closer one gets to Dublin, the harder it is to recruit foster parents. However, the example of Galway-Roscommon would be quite strong in the numbers of foster parents that they have. In that area there are a number of foster parents that I am aware of who have proficiency in Irish. It depends on the part of the country one is looking at. On the western seaboard, it has always been a bit easier to get access to foster parents. As the economy has improved and available time has reduced, we have found it much more difficult to recruit foster parents in the eastern part of the country. The Deputy's point is correct. It is certainly a problem if children who have a proficiency in Irish are with foster parents who are non-Irish-speaking. I am not aware of it being a major challenge but we can check this out and come back to the Deputy with some detail on that.

On the first question, on the assessment of child protection issues if the child's first language is Irish, I will ask my colleague, Mr. Noel Kelly, to give some insight on that and what we can do in those areas from a schools or educational welfare perspective.

**Mr. Noel Kelly:** In the educational welfare service we have three strands of staff. We have one group of staff who are directly employed by Tusla, which are our educational welfare officers. There are 89 of these, of whom six are proficient in Irish because they have come from a primary school teaching background.

**Chairman:** Abair na figiúirí sin arís, más é toil an Uasail Kelly.

**Mr. Noel Kelly:** We have 89 educational welfare officers and six of those are proficient in Irish. We also have line management responsibility for the home school community liaison scheme. There are 460 home school community liaison co-ordinators nationally. More than 270 of those are based in primary schools and are qualified primary teachers with a proficiency in Irish. While they are not direct employees of Tusla, that is a resource that is available to us as well. Our service development and delivery at the moment is all about integration. We have integrated those services together within Tusla and we are working very closely with our colleagues on this. That is a resource that is available. Colleagues in other services, if they need to, have access to talk to our colleagues. In particular in relation to children in schools, we have a home school liaison teacher on hand who is available to the parents and to the child. That is another support that we are using more and that we need to capitalise on further.

Unfortunately, but fortunately as well, the remit of the home school liaison scheme did not cover early years services, but we have a new circular in development with the Department of Education and Skills which will be putting an emphasis on involvement in early years services. That is something that we should be able to offer as a support to our colleagues, that is, where necessary or possible, the home school liaison teacher could provide support and interpretation as Gaeilge.

**Chairman:** An bhfuil an Teachta críochnaithe?

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Uasal Kelly.

**Chairman:** Rachaidh mé ar ais arís go dtí an t-aonad cumarsáide agus tá an tUasal Breen i gceannas ar an aonad cumarsáide sin. Cé mhéad duine atá ag obair san aonad sin agus cén líon díobh a bhfuil Gaeilge acu?

**Mr. Alan Breen:** Currently, we have a team of seven and we are building to 14. I have recruited one senior communications officer who is proficient in Irish. Since we have taken him on, we have started doing some more communication through Irish. To give one example, in our public awareness week for child and family support, we had activity across our digital side in Twitter and Facebook, we sent out press releases in Irish also, and we offered availability of spokespersons through Irish as well to talk about that week. To answer the Chair's question, currently we have one out of seven who is proficient in Irish and I am recruiting to a staff of 14. I am not certain at this point, because we have some competitions to hold yet, who among the remainder to be recruited will have that level of proficiency.

**Chairman:** Nach bhfuil sé sin leagtha síos mar chuid den phróiseas earcaíochta go mbeadh Gaeilge ag cuid acu? Cén fáth nach bhfuil eolas ag an Uasal Breen faoi sin? Nach bhfuil sé leagtha síos ag an ngníomhaireacht go bhfuil sé sin ag teastáil?

**Mr. Alan Breen:** No, as the chief executive said, it has not been laid down as a requirement. It would be very difficult to recruit people if we put that in as a condition. It would certainly limit the pool and skill set that we require across the different areas the communications team covers, such as brand identity, graphic design, content and digital, internal engagement and content curation, and senior communications people who deal with the press. This would prove to be quite difficult and probably would limit the number of applicants who could apply.

**Chairman:** Tá sé sin suimiúil mar beidh reachtaíocht nua againn, le cúnamh Dé, an bhliain seo chugainn maidir le Bille na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, agus tá sé i gceist sa phróiseas earcaíochta go mbeidh Gaeilge ag 20% de gach uile dhuine a earcófar dá bharr. Beidh an dualgas sin oraibhse cosúil le gach uile eagraíocht eile, nach mbeidh?

**Mr. Alan Breen:** Yes, if that becomes an obligation on us-----

**Chairman:** Beidh oraibh é a dhéanamh ach ag an bpointe seo níl sé á dhéanamh ag an ngníomhaireacht.

**Mr. Alan Breen:** It is important to point out that the communications unit is part of the wider transformation and policy directorate. We have actively taken steps to bring the directorate and the wider agency into line with the Act and have put plans in place to continue developing, for example, different publications that we produce and initiatives to build on that work that we have done. To that extent we have taken a number of steps and perhaps I should point out a number of those to the committee.

I mentioned where we have begun with our social media approach and we propose to continue with that. Any media queries we receive in Irish we respond to in Irish. We arrange that these and the responses to them are translated. We arrange similarly for the translation of emails and our responses to them. This includes a number of other publications like our annual reports and business plans, the publication of some of which is in train at the moment. We also have the Irish language prominent across all of our branding, to include email signatures in the agency letterheads and presentation templates, as we would be presenting regularly to other agencies and organisations throughout the country. We also have a number documents that are available in Irish. These include all of our Children First documents and guidance documents under the Children First legislation and documents for mandatory reporters etc., all of which have been produced bilingually.

I am very conscious of our obligations to comply with the Act. I was recruited a year and a half ago and my first goal was to build a communications strategy. Within that strategy, a priority was to ensure compliance with Irish language legislation. We are coming from behind and I fully acknowledge that, but we are also very conscious and committed to our obligation to ensure that we are in compliance with the Act.

**Chairman:** Is maith an rud é sin a chloisteáil. Críochnóidh mé leis an bpointe seo. Is é croílár an réitigh go ndéanfar an Ghaeilge a normalú tríd an eagraíocht. Chuir mé ceist maidir leis na cúrsaí ach ní bhfuair mé freagra. Fuair mé freagra maidir le cigirí. Cé mhéad duine den fhoireann atá i mbun cúrsaí faoi láthair in Tusla.

**Ms Amanda Pathe:** Níl an t-eolas sin againn faoi láthair, ach mar a dúirt duine éigin cheana féin, is dócha go bhfuil Gaeilge ag a lán daoine in Tusla. Is rud maith é go bhfuilimid anseo inniu agus tá súil agam go dtabharfaidh sé sin spreagadh dúinn chun freastal ar na ranganna agus go bhfaighidh na daoine atá in ann déileáil trí Ghaeilge an tacaíocht atá ag teastáil.

**Chairman:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an ghníomhaireacht. Tá Gaelchultúr ann agus tá obair na gcapall ar siúl ag an eagraíocht sin. Ba mhaith liom soiléiriú a fháil ón ghníomhaireacht le nóta a sheoladh chugainn, más féidir, tar éis an chruinnithe maidir le cé mhéad duine san fhoireann atá i mbun cúrsa nó an bhfuil aon duine ag freastal mar sin, agus cén sórt cabhrach atá ann do dhaoine atá ag iarraidh a leithéid, mar shampla, sibh féin. Tá gá le ceannaireacht a thaispeáint má tá an ghníomhaireacht i ndáiríre faoin nGaeilge, nach bhfuil?

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Ní gnáthcheist é seo a chuirim ar eagraíocht ach ní gnáth-dhuine mise ach an oiread den chuid is mó. An bhfuil aon chabhair bhreise gur féidir linn nó eagrais eile Gaeilge a thabhairt don ghníomhaireacht? Táimid tar éis gearán a dhéanamh le linn ár ndéileáil leis an ghníomhaireacht ach an féidir linn cuidiú a thabhairt don ghníomhaireacht? Tá an ghníomhaireacht tar éis a rá go bhfuil jab mór aici an bhliain seo chugainn plean a chur le chéile. Táimid anseo le cuidiú a thabhairt chomh maith le daoine a thabhairt isteach agus gearán a dhéanamh leo, nó cíoradh trí na cuntais, nó cibé rud. Táim ag tairiscint an chabhair sin don ghníomhaireacht agus ní gá léi ach an cheist sin a chur.

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** I thank the Deputy for that. Part of the positive aspect of this process has been a realisation by us about the fact that while we are desperately focused on the challenging role that we have in the provision of child protection welfare services and family supports, we need to be conscious in the delivery of those services to children and in terms of the education piece in which we are involved of the need, which I accept and see clearly, for an organisation like Tusla to be focused on their provision through Irish, where appropriate and required. Part of our experience, like many of the things that we are trying to put together, has been that this has allowed us to focus on what we need to do, and what we need to get in there are the basics. There are many standard pieces of documentation and so on in the organisation that we need to have in Irish. The challenge for us is much more about how we provide services that interact on a human level with children, foster carers and families so that we are seen as an organisation that can provide Irish language services.

This is somewhat reflective of the Chairperson's questions to us on what we are doing to support the training of staff as an ongoing exercise. That is something that we will look at to see if it may be an area in which we need some assistance, either through other organisations in the public service that do something similar, or we may need to look at how we do that in our own organisation. Until we have done that, there will probably be gaps in our knowledge of things that we think may or may not be possible. That for me is the take-away message from the process that we are in. I appreciate the Deputy's offer of support, and we may come back to the committee on that.

**Chairman:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an ghníomhaireacht agus aontaím leis an Teachta Ó Snodaigh maidir le haon chabhair is féidir linn a thabhairt don ghníomhaireacht. Mar achoimre a dhéanamh, tá an ghníomhaireacht ag rá go mbeidh cigire breise ann le Gaeilge an bhliain seo chugainn, go mbeidh plean teanga agus suirbhé ó thaobh na foirne de, go mbeidh an ghníomhaireacht ag breathnú ar chúrsaí, agus go mbeidh oifigeach Gaeilge earcaithe freisin an bhliain seo chugainn. Ar a laghad beidh na rudaí go léir sin déanta ag an ghníomhaireacht laistigh den bhliain seo chugainn. An bhfuil an ceart agam é sin a rá gan trácht a dhéanamh ar aon rud eile?

**Mr. Patrick Smyth:** Absolutely, we are going on ahead with that.

**Chairman:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Uasal Smyth, an Uasal Breen, an Uasal McDonnell, an Uasal Pathe agus leis an Uasal Kelly. Bhí sé deacair ach táim sásta gur tháinig siad os ár gcomhair, go raibh siad díreach, agus gur chuir siad béim ar na bearnaí atá ann. Faraor gear, tá

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siad ann ach ar a laghad tá siad admhaithe, agus nuair atá siad admhaithe is féidir dul i ngleic leo beagáinín níos fearr nó níos éifeachtaí. Ag an bpointe seo rachaimid isteach i seisiún príobháideach.

*Chuaigh an comhchoiste isteach i seisiún príobháideach ag 5.09 p.m. agus cuireadh an ar athló é ar 5.15 p.m. go dtí 4 p.m. Dé Máirt, 15 Eanáir 2019.*