

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IRISH LANGUAGE, THE GAELTACHT AND THE IRISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

## COMHCHOISTE NA GAEILGE, NA GAELTACHTA AGUS PHOBAL LABHAR- THA NA GAEILGE

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*Dé Céadaoin, 30 Márta 2022*

*Wednesday, 30 March 2022*

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Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 1.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 1.30 p.m.

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Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Dara Calleary,	Seán Kyne,
Catherine Connolly,	Niall Ó Donnghaile.
Joe McHugh,	
Aindrias Moynihan,	
Fergus O'Dowd.	

Teachta / Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

**An tAire Dlí agus Cirt: Plé.**

**Chairman:** Tá ceathrar comhaltaí i láthair agus, Teachtaí Dála agus Seanadóirí san áireamh, agus cuirfimid tús leis an gcuinniú, dá réir. Leanfaidh an cruinniú seo ar aghaidh go dtí 3.30 p.m., más gá, agus tá súil agam go mbeidh ár gcuid oibre críochnaithe roimhe sin. Tá leithscéal faighte againn ón Teachta Daly agus ní dóigh liom go bhfuil aon leithscéal eile faighte againn go fóill. Is mian liom fáilte a fhearadh roimh chomhaltaí an chomhchoiste agus roimh aon chomhalta eile a bheidh ag freastal ar an gcuinniú, nach baill den chomhchoiste iad. Cuirim fáilte freisin roimh na finnétithe a bheidh ag labhairt os ar gcomhair inniu agus roimh ár lucht féachana chomh maith. Ba mhaith liom fáilte ar leith a leathadh roimh an Aire Dlí agus Cirt, an Teachta McEntee, agus roimh an bhfoireann atá léi: Doncha O'Sullivan, an rúnaí cúnta; Mary McKenna, an príomhoifigeach; agus Mícheál Ó Cearúil, aistritheoir atá anseo mar ionadaí thar ceann na Roinne Dlí agus Cirt. Gabhaim mo bhuíochas leo as a bheith istigh linn inniu. Is mian liom a chur ar an taifead go bhfuil na finnétithe ar fad ag freastal ar an gcuinniú ó sheomra coiste 4 laistigh de phurláin Thithe an Oireachtais. Maidir leis na comhaltaí, tá an Teachta Connolly liom sa seomra cruinnithe agus tá an Seanadóir Kyne agus an Teachta Calleary ag glacadh páirte óna n-oifigí i bParlaimint i dTithe an Oireachtais.

Tá trí rud a leanas a bheimid ag féachaint orthu inniu: an fáth go fuarthas réidh leis na bunriachtanas d'iarrthóirí a bheith incháilithe le hardú céime fháil chun céimeanna mar sháirsint nó chigire an grád 50% a bhaint amach sa scrúdú inniúlachta béil sa Ghaeilge; cinneadh an Rialtais nach mbeadh Gaeilge riachtanach níos mó ag baill den Gharda Síochána; agus polasaí na Roinne Dlí agus Cirt i leith chur chun cinn na Gaeilge ina Roinn féin agus sna comhlachtaí reachtúla, neamhreachtúla agus achomhairc a thagann faoina cúram agus a thugann sí maoiniú dóibh.

Sula leanfaidh mé ar aghaidh leis an ábhar sin, tá dualgas orm na rialacha agus na treoracha a leanas a leagan faoi bhráid na ndaoine atá ag freastal ar an gcuinniú seo: meabhraím do chomhaltaí, d'fhinnétithe agus do bhaill foirne a chinntiú go bhfuil a ngutháin shoghluaiste múchta le linn an chruinnithe mar gur féidir leis na gléasanna seo cur as do chóras craolacháin, eagarthóireachta agus fuaime i dTithe an Oireachtais. Mar a léirigh mé cheana, tá rogha ag na comhaltaí freastal ar an gcuinniú go fisiciúil i seomra an choiste nó go fíorúil ar Microsoft Teams, agus óna n-oifigí i gcás cruinnithe phoiblí i dTithe an Oireachtais agus feictear dom go bhfuil an Teachta Ó Muimhneacháin tagtha isteach go fíorúil óna oifig féin freisin. Nuair atá comhaltaí ag freastal óna n-oifigí, ba chóir go mbeidh an fhíseáin ar siúl an t-am go léir agus iad le feiscint ar an scáileán. Baineann sé sin le finnétithe freisin má tá siad ag freastal ar an gcuinniú ó sheomra eile. Ba chóir do chomhaltaí agus finnétithe atá ag freastal ar an gcuinniú ó áit eile a chinntiú go bhfuil a micreafóin múchta nuair nach bhfuil siad ag caint.

Cuirim ar aird na bhfinnétithe go bhfuil siad, de bhua Bhunreacht na hÉireann agus reachtaíochta araon, faoi chosaint ag lánphribhléid maidir leis an bhfianaise a thugann siad don chomhchoiste chomh fada agus atá siad lonnaithe laistigh de phurláin Thithe an Oireachtais agus an fhianaise sin á tabhairt acu. Ní féidir le finnétithe brath ar an gcosaint sin agus fianaise á tabhairt acu ó thaobh amuigh de phurláin Thithe an Oireachtais. Molaim d'fhinnétithe, go mórmhór iad atá ag freastal ar an gcuinniú ón taobh amuigh, a bheith cúramach leis an méid a deir siad agus fianaise á tabhairt acu. Má ordaíonn an comhchoiste dóibh éirí as fianaise a thabhairt i leith ní áirithe, beidh orthu amhlaidh a dhéanamh láithreach. Ordaítear dóibh gan aon fhianaise a thabhairt nach fianaise í a mbaineann le hábhar na n-imeachtaí atá á bplé ag an gcomhchoiste. Ba chóir dóibh a bheith ar an eolas go ndéanfar na ráitis tosaigh a chuir siad

faoi bhráid an choiste a fhoilsiú ar shuíomh gréasáin an chomhchoiste tar éis an chruinnithe seo.

Fiafraítear d'fhinnéithe agus do chomhaltaí araon cleachtadh parlaiminte a urramú nár chóir, más féidir, duine nó eintiteas a cháineadh ná líomhaintí a dhéanamh ina n-aghaidh ná tuairimí a thabhairt maidir leo ina ainm, ina hainm nó ina n-ainmneacha nó ar shlí a bhféadfaí iad a aithint. Chomh maith leis sin, fiafraítear dóibh gan aon ní a rá a d'fhéadfaí breathnú air mar ábhar díobhálach do dheachluí aon duine nó eintiteas. Mar sin, dá bhféadfadh a ráitis a bheith clúmhilleach do dhuine nó eintiteas aitheanta, ordófar do na finnéithe éirí as na ráitis sin láithreach. Tá sé ríthábhachtach go ngéillfidh siad leis an ordú sin láithreach.

Anois, tosóimid lenár mbreithniú ar ábhar an chruinnithe seo. Iarraim ar an Aire labhairt os comhair an chomhchoiste.

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Gabhaim buíochas leis an gcoiste as an deis chun labhairt leis inniu maidir leis na riachtanais Ghaeilge laistigh den Gharda Síochána agus maidir le cur chun cinn na Gaeilge i mo Roinn féin. In éindí liom anseo inniu, as mo Roinn, tá Doncha Ó Súilleabháin, rúnaí cúnta; Mary McKenna, príomhoifigeach; agus Micheál Ó Cearúil, aistritheoir Gaeilge na Roinne.

Is eol dom go bhfuair an comhchoiste faisnéis ón nGarda Síochána, ón Údarás Póilíneachta agus ó m'oifigigh ar roinnt de na saincheisteanna sin i mí Feabhra. Inniu, tabharfaidh mé an t-eolas is déanaí don choiste ar roinnt saincheisteanna a pléadh ag an gcruinniú sin a bhí aige roimhe seo.

Maidir le hearcaíocht chuig an nGarda Síochána, bhí an comórtas earcaíochta a bhí ann ar na mallaibh i gcomhair comhaltaí den Gharda Síochána faoi rialú ag Rialacháin an Gharda Síochána (Ligean Isteach agus Ceapacháin), 2021. Is rialacháin iad sin a thugas isteach, tar éis don Rialtas iad a fhormheas, i mí na Nollag 2021. Leis na rialacháin sin, tugtar isteach roinnt athruithe ar Rialacháin an Gharda Síochána (Ligean Isteach agus Ceapacháin), 2013. Ceann de na hathruithe sin ná deireadh a chur leis an riachtanas go mbeadh inniúlacht in dhá theanga ag iarratasóirí. Bhíodas tar éis a aithint go bhféadfadh an riachtanas maidir leis an dá theanga a bheith ina bhac ar dhul isteach sa Gharda, nó ar iarratais ar dhul isteach ann, ó roinnt grúpaí daoine agus, dá dheasca sin, go bhféadfadh sé bheith ina bhac ar an eagraíocht a bheith ina léiriú iomlán ar an bpobal éagsúil dá bhfónann sí. Tá an-áthas orm a dhearbhuí don choiste go bhfuil os cionn 10,000 iarratasóir tar éis iarratas a dhéanamh faoin gcomórtas seo chun dul isteach sa Gharda Síochána agus go bhfuil 466 iarratasóir de na hiarratasóirí sin tar éis iarratas a dhéanamh faoin sruth Gaeilge. Tá sé sin cuid mhaith níos airde ná an 132 duine a rinne iarratas faoin sruth Gaeilge nuair a réachtáladh an comórtas deireanach sa bhliain 2019. Iarrfaidh mé ar Mhicheál Ó Cearúil anois an chuid eile den aitheasc atá agam a léamh amach.

**Mr. Micheál Ó Cearúil:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Ag dul ar aghaidh dúinn anois go ceist an ardaithe céime chuig sairsint agus cigire, tá arduithe céime chuig céimeanna sairsint agus cigire sa Gharda Síochána faoi rialú ag Rialacháin an Gharda Síochána (Ceapachán chuig Céimeanna Cigire agus Sáirsint), 2021, anois. Ba ón mbliain 2006 do na rialacháin a bhí ann roimhe sin. Is bunathrú atá sna rialacháin nua trína fhoráil go ndéanfar comórtais ardaithe céime chuig céimeanna maoirseachta sairsint agus cigire, a ndéanadh an Garda Síochána iad a bhainistiú go himmheánach roimhe seo, a réachtáil den chéad uair i mbliana faoi chúram na seirbhíse neamhspleáiche um cheapacháin phoiblí.

Sula raibh ann do na rialacháin sin, áiríodh sna critéir incháilitheachta chun dul san iomaíocht chun ardú céime a fháil chuig céim sháirsint go mbeadh iarrthóirí tar éis pas a fháil i

dtástáil inniúlachta sa Ghaeilge. Mar chuid den phróiseas comhairliúcháin le Coimisinéir an Gharda Síochána agus leis an Údarás Póilíneachta le linn na rialacháin nua a bheith á ndréachtú, nótáladh go n-áirítear sainriachtanais sa chlár bonnoiliúna go ndéanadh earcaigh an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim agus go ndéanfaidís a gcumas agus a n-inniúlacht sa Ghaeilge a léiriú. Ceanglaítear ar gach earcach chuig an nGarda Síochána an oiliúint sin a chur i gcrích, ar cuid í den chlár BA sa phóilíneacht fheidhmeach. Comhaontaíodh sna comhairliúcháin sin nach raibh gá le riachtanas go mbeadh tástáil inniúlachta bhreise ar leith ann chun go mbeadh iarratasóirí incháilithe chun ardú céime a fháil. Tá sé seo ag teacht, chomh maith, le dea-chleachtas maidir le comórtais ardaithe céime eile sa tseirbhís phoiblí trí chéile chun a chinntiú go ndéanann an bhuíon iarrthóirí is ilghnéithí agus is féidir iarratas ar dheiseanna ardaithe céime.

Ag dul ar aghaidh dúinn anois go dtí an cheist dheireadh, a bhaineann le cur chun cinn na Gaeilge sa Roinn agus i gcomhlachtaí lasmuigh den Roinn, tá comhlachtaí atá lasmuigh den Roinn neamhspleách ag feidhmiú a gcuid feidhmeanna dóibh, lena n-áirítear cur chun cinn na Gaeilge i measc a bhfoirne féin. Tá a scéimeanna Gaeilge féin ag comhlachtaí aonair faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003.

Agus é sin ráite, comhoibrímid le chéile go minic ar imeachtaí chun an Ghaeilge a cheiliúradh. Mar shampla, níos luaithe sa mhí seo, bhí aitheasc dátheangach ó Frank Clarke, a chuaigh ar scor mar Phríomh-Bhreitheamh le déanaí, mar aon le taispeántas fíorúil de bheis is 40 saothar ealaíne agus cheardaíochta le daoine faoi choimeád, is é sin, príosúnaigh, le tráchtai-reacht dhátheangach, mar chuid d'imeacht na Roinne chun ceiliúradh a dhéanamh ar Sheachtain na Gaeilge. Tá an t-imeacht a reáchtálann an Roinn chun ceiliúradh a dhéanamh ar Sheachtain na Gaeilge tar éis fás i gcaitheamh na mblianta agus tá sé anois ina mhóriméacht bliantúil sa Roinn chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn agus a cheiliúradh i measc na foirne. Is imeacht é ar a bhfreastalaíonn go leor ball foirne.

Is maith is eol do mo Roinn a cuid dualgas faoina scéim Ghaeilge agus coinnítear an scéim faoi athbhreithniú leanúnach chun a chinntiú go gcuirimid seirbhísí i nGaeilge ar fáil do dhaoine a bhfuil siad ag teastáil uathu. Ó tugadh isteach a céad scéim Ghaeilge, tá an Roinn tar éis 23 chúrsa inmheánacha Gaeilge a reáchtáil inár n-oifigí i mBaile Átha Cliath agus i gCill Airne araon, ar chúrsaí iad a cóiríodh d'oifigigh na Roinne agus a bhain le labhairt agus le scríobh na Gaeilge araon. Ina theannta sin, tugann mo Roinn tacaíocht do bhaill fhoirne chun freastal ar chúrsaí Gaeilge, idir chúrsaí seachtracha agus chúrsaí ar líne. Anuraidh, le linn na dianghlása, bhunaigh mo Roinn ciorcal comhrá Gaeilge ar líne agus tagann lucht an chiorcail comhrá sin le chéile i gcónaí.

Gabhaim buíochas leis an gcoiste. Tá an tAire ar fáil chun aon cheisteanna a fhreagairt a bheidh ag baill anois. Tá aiféala orainn go mbeidh orainn na ceisteanna sin a fhreagairt as Béarla, áfach.

**Senator Seán Kyne:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire, an Teachta McEntee. Is deas í a fheiceáil anseo os comhair an chomhchoiste agus is deas í a chloisint ag úsáid na Gaeilge freisin. Mar is eol di, tá Gaeltacht stairiúil ina contae féin, Contae na Mí, i Ráth Chairn agus Baile Ghib. Tá daoine sa Ghaeltacht agus daoine le Gaeilge trasna na tíre ag lorg seirbhísí Stáit trí mheán na Gaeilge, seirbhísí ón nGarda Síochána san áireamh. Tá a fhios againn go bhfuil deacrachtaí ag an Stát seirbhísí a chur ar fáil i stáisiúin Gharda sna Gaeltachtaí trasna na tíre toisc nach bhfuil gardaí ar fáil atá in ann freastal ar dhaoine trí mheán na Gaeilge. Is é sin an fáth go bhfuilimid anseo ag plé na hábhair thábhachtacha seo. Cuirim fáilte roimh na figiúirí sa ráiteas tosaigh a léiríonn go bhfuil 466 iarratasóir as os cionn 10,000 iarratasóir a rinne iarratas chun dul isteach sa Gharda Síochána tar éis iarratas a dhéanamh faoin sruth Gaeilge. Is figiúr maith agus figiúr

ard é sin. Léiríonn sé dul chun cinn suntasach i gcomparáid le 2019. An bhfuil an tAire sásta go mbeidh ardú suntasach ar an líon garda a bhfuil Gaeilge acu i ndiaidh an phróisis de thoradh an fhigiúir sin? Tá a fhios ag an Aire an céatadán atá leagtha amach sa phlean teanga do sheirbhísí Stáit, is é sin go mbeidh 20% d'earcaithe don Státseirbhís in ann freastal ar dhaoine trí mheán na Gaeilge. Is ceann de na chéad phróisis earcaíochta mhóra ar a mbeimid in ann súil a choinneáil maidir leis an gcéatadán atá earcaithe le Gaeilge é seo. An bhfuil an tAire sásta go mbeidh céatadán ard de ghardaí le Gaeilge ag teacht amach ón bpróiseas seo?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** As the Senator has acknowledged, we have fantastic Gaeltacht areas in my own country. I work as closely as I can with them to support them in ensuring that they remain and that they can prosper and flourish. As he outlined, the figures speak for themselves. The fact that 466 people have applied under this new stream is fantastic considering the number applying in 2019 was 129. With regard to the 20% target, in the light of the funding we have for 800 gardaí this year alone, without knowing who will be able to complete or be successful in the process and become members of An Garda Síochána, 466 applicants in the context of 800 posts certainly gives us a very good chance and an opportunity to reach that 20% target. I really hope that we will be in a position to do so but, without knowing who of the 10,000 who have applied will reach that stage, I cannot give the Senator a definitive answer. Given the increase in the number applying this year, I certainly hope we will see an overall increase in Garda numbers. There is a requirement in legislation for the Garda Commissioner to ensure, insofar as is practicable and possible, that gardaí stationed in Gaeltacht areas are proficient in Irish. This certainly helps in that regard. There is also work under way with regard to stations in Gaeltacht service towns. We are not just looking at the stations specifically within Gaeltacht areas, but also at those that provide services to those areas. There is a long-term goal to ensure that stations in the Gaeltacht are fully bilingual and that those stations situated outside the Gaeltacht but that serve the area can also provide adequate bilingual services. Increasing the numbers of gardaí who are bilingual and making sure we continue to provide adequate education and training for those members of An Garda Síochána who are not bilingual but who have a certain amount of Irish will certainly be helpful. I am hopeful and positive. These are really positive figures. Again, notwithstanding the fact that we do not know who will make it through this process and be successful at the end, we are possibly in a situation to reach at least the target of 20% of new recruits being Irish speakers.

**Senator Seán Kyne:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as sin. Tá 466 iarrthóir a bhfuil Gaeilge acu agus 9,534 ar a laghad ar an sruth eile. An míneoidh an tAire an próiseas chun an 800 garda a earcú dúinn? Tá 10,000 iarrthóir ann. An mbeidh caighdeán dhifriúla ann? Nílimid ag iarraidh go mbeidh aon gharda le Gaeilge ar chaighdeán níos ísle ná aon gharda gan Ghaeilge ach an mbeidh aon rud á dhéanamh chun a dheimhniú go mbeidh níos mó daoine le Gaeilge ag teacht tríd an bpróiseas? Is é sin an rud is tábhachtaí. Tá an 20% ann faoi láthair. Bhí chuile bhall den Oireachtas, chuile pháirtí agus chuile dhuine eile ag tacú leis. An bhféadfai a chinntiú go mbeidh níos mó daoine le Gaeilge ag teacht tríd an bpróiseas?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** The process is the same. There certainly will not be a lower standard, such as the Senator mentioned, or anything like that depending on the language people speak. We have asked that people be proficient in at least one language other than English. We are not singling out Irish or any other language and creating a different process. There is obviously a physical test that takes place in addition to an aptitude test and interview processes. That interview stage has already started. Everybody goes through the same process but we hope that the fact that we have three times as many people applying in Irish as the last time will, by its very nature, mean that more such people will be successful in the end. It is very hard to



say what the numbers might be but, again, the very fact that there has been such a significant increase in the number applying is a very positive start. There will not be a separate process, however.

**Senator Seán Kyne:** Tá sé dearfach go bhfuil na huimhreacha níos airde ó thaobh na n-iarratasóirí de ach is é an rud is tábhachtaí ná an mbeidh céatadán de ghardaí nua atá inniúil sa Ghaeilge ann ag deireadh an phróisis a dtagann leis an 20% sin. Is é sin an cheist is tábhachtaí. Ba cheart go mbeidh próiseas éigin ann chun a dheimhniú go mbeidh níos mó gardaí le Gaeilge ag teacht tríd an bpróiseas.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** Where there is not a separate process and we are not treating different languages differently, it is very hard to tell what the number will be. The 20% target is for 2030. We hope to have another round as soon as possible after this round and we will open up the application process again in the coming years. If we spread that figure of 466 - and I hope we will have a similar number if not an even higher one the next time - across the next number of competitions, it is to be hoped that, by 2030, we will meet that overall figure. That is not to say we cannot reach it in this round. It is absolutely possible. We have funding for 800 recruits this year alone but it is very difficult to give the Senator a firm commitment that we will reach 20% immediately. The target is to reach it by 2030.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire. Déanaim comhghairdeas léi as an éacht atá déanta aici. Tús maith, leath na hoibre. Fair play di. Tá an comhthéacs tábhachtach i gcónaí. Tá muidne, an tAire agus a comhghleacaithe anseo de bharr tuarascála a chuir an Coimisinéir Teanga os comhair na Dála. Ní raibh an dara rogha aige ach é a chur os comhair na Dála. Dar leis féin, is rud neamhghnách é sin. Bhí sé os ár gcomhair. Is é sin an comhthéacs. Bhí na fíricí sa tuarascáil seo damanta i ndáiríre ó thaobh an easpa dhul chun cinn a bhí le feiceáil. Is é sin an fáth a raibh ar an gCoimisinéir tuarascáil a leagan os comhair na Dála. D'eascair an tuarascáil sin as na coinníollacha ar an talamh i dTír Chonaill, áit a bhfuil easpa gardaí le hinniúlacht sa Ghaeilge. Bhí moltaí ansin a bhain le Tír Chonaill ach bhain siad freisin leis an gcuid eile den tír. Phléamar an tuarascáil sin ar an gcomhchoiste seo agus bhí Coimisinéir na nGardaí os ár gcomhair. B'shin an comhthéacs agus tá sé tábhachtach é sin a rá mar tá an Coimisinéir Teanga agus an comhchoiste buartha fós faoin easpa dhul chun cinn. Níl a fhios agam faoi na comhaltaí eile ach bhí mise buartha faoin easpa tuisceana a bhí i gceist ó thaobh an Choimisinéara Teanga de maidir leis an dualgas dlíthiúil atá air agus ar an lucht bainistíochta maidir leis an nGaeilge. Tá sé sin ráite anois agam ach tá sé tábhachtach comhthéacs a chur ar an rud. Bhain sé leis an easpa dul chun cinn maidir leis na moltaí sa tuarascáil, a bhí thar a bheith bunúsach.

Anuas air sin, fuaireamar amach, agus tá sé aisteach i ndáiríre, go raibh ar an gCoimisinéir Teanga an tuarascáil sin a leagan os comhair na Dála, mar a dúirt mé, agus ag an am céanna rinne an córas, an Rialtas nó An Garda cinneadh fáil réidh leis an riachtanas an Ghaeilge a bheith ag na hearcaithe agus, freisin, i dtaca le hardú céime chun bheith ina sáirsint nó ina sháirsint. Ar láimh amháin bhí an Coimisinéir Teanga agus an comhchoiste ag rá go raibh géarchéim anseo agus ar láimh eile, tá an chosúlacht air go bhfuilimid ag dul siar. Is é sin an comhthéacs agus tá ár bhfinnéithe anseo ag rá go bhfuil dul chun cinn déanta.

Is í mo chéad cheist dhíreach ná gur mhaith an rud é go bhfuil ardú suntasach ann sa sruth Gaeilge ach iarraim ar an Roinn na figiúirí sin a chur i gcomhthéacs dom. Thug an Roinn an figiúr 132 a bhí ann in 2019 sa sruth Gaeilge ach cé mhéad duine a chuir isteach san earcaíocht ag dul siar go dtí an bhliain sin, 2019, mar tá 10,000 i gceist ann anois?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** My understanding is that 5,000 people applied in 2019.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Cuireann sé sin cuma dhifriúil ar na figiúirí. Is 5,000 a bhí i gceist agus 132 sa sruth Gaeilge. Fiú amháin, is ardú é. An bhfuil a fhios ag an Aire cad atá taobh thiar den ardú sin den chéad uair agus cad atá déanta ag an Roinn atá difriúil nó atá mar bhunús leis an méadú sin ar an bhfigiúr roimhe sin?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** My understanding is that the figure is of those who are proficient in Irish. It is part of the application process that one has to say which language-----

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Tuigim é sin.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** My apologies.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Is é sin an fáth go ndeachaigh mé chomh fada isteach sa scéal. Dar leis na daoine a thagann os ár gcomhair ar an ábhar seo, níl daoine ann le Gaeilge - níl siad ag teacht chun na n-agallamh - ach tá athrú ann agus cuirim fáilte roimh an athrú sin. Cén fáth gur éirigh leis an bpróiseas daoine le Gaeilge a fháil anois nach raibh siad in ann iad a fháil roimhe seo?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** Our significant focus this time was on telling people about the recruitment process. There was a particular focus on diversity and we very much tried to ensure this time that different communities and groups were aware of the fact that this competition was open and that more women were going to apply. That in itself applied also to our Irish community and Irish speakers. This was due to the fact that we had a campaign over the past number of weeks to try to encourage people to think of An Garda Síochána as a career for them and asked people who had not, perhaps, put themselves forward or considered a career in the force before now to do so on this occasion. That would include people within our Gaeltacht areas and those who are proficient in Irish. We have seen a significant increase in other diverse communities applying, together with an increase in women applying and putting themselves forward. This is due to the fact that we put a very significant focus on letting people know that this campaign was open and that we very much wanted people from every community across the country to apply. Other than that, "I do not know" is the honest answer to the Deputy's question about why we have an increase in these numbers. The fact that we placed this focus on letting people know about the campaign and asked people from other communities to come forward had, possibly, a very significant part to play.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Tá an freagra sin ón Aire ionraic agus is maith an rud é go bhfuil sí ag rá nach bhfuil a fhios aici. Tá gá le tuilleadh taighde ar an toradh seo ionas go mbeimid in ann ceacht foghlama a fháil as.

Tá an-suim agam i gcúrsaí éagsúlachta ach is rud difriúil í an Ghaeilge sa chomhthéacs gurb í an teanga oifigiúil. Tá dualgas dlíthiúil ann. Mar a dúirt mé, tá sé an-tábhachtach go mbeidh éagsúlacht sa Gharda ach tá mise agus an comhchoiste seo ag díriú isteach ar an nGaeilge de bharr na géarchéime agus an easpa foirne. Ag filleadh ar Ghaillimh, táim ar an joint policing committee ann agus tá sé ráite le déanaí, cosúil le háiteanna agus Gaeltachtaí eile, go bhfuil folúntais ann agus nach bhfuil siad in ann comhaltaí den Gharda Síochána le Gaeilge a fháil nó, uaireanta, tá siad in ann daoine a fháil ach níl an taithí acu. Dúradh linn go neamhbhalbh nach féidir garda a sheoladh chuig ceantar Gaeltachta gan taithí, atá suimiúil ann féin, agus fágfaimid an ghné sin ar leataobh.

Tá sé seo tábhachtach ó thaobh an chinnidh atá anois déanta le rialacháin maidir le hardú

céime sa mhéid is nach bhfuil an Ghaeilge ag teastáil. Ar an talamh táthar ag rá linn nach bhfuil gardaí le Gaeilge nó tá gardaí le Gaeilge ach níl an taithí acu. Is fadhb phraiticiúil é sin.

Críochnóidh mé le ceist eile. Tá an méid de na cúrsaí atá déanta suimiúil. Cé mhéad duine le Gaeilge atá sa Roinn anois agus cén dul chun cinn atá déanta? Feicim líon na gcúrsaí atá i gceist. Cén dul chun cinn atá déanta? An bhfuil figiúirí agus plean ag an Roinn mar tá deireadh le scéimeanna teanga anois mar is ré nua na gcaighdeán a bheidh i gceist as seo amach? Cén plean nó cad atá i gceist sa chomhthéacs sin - maidir leis an dá rud sin? Táim críochnaithe anois.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** I thank the Deputy. I will come back to the Deputy's original question. We do not know exactly and we do not have clarity from the people who applied as to why they did so, but perhaps the new strategy itself is a signal to members who are applying that there is a Gaeltacht strategy or an Irish-language strategy within An Garda Síochána with a real focus now, and that there is a plan for Irish speakers. There has been communication - members of the force went on Raidió na Gaeltachta and on other radio stations as part of a communications campaign. It is very hard to tell but there are a number of possible ways in which people were encouraged in which they may not have been before.

Within the Department, currently we have five members of our staff who are currently undertaking Irish-language courses. These will finish shortly. Since 2019, some 39 staff have been supported through the various courses, 24 of whom have progressed through multiple levels of training. We are not as big a Department as some of the other large Departments so that is a good figure, but obviously we could improve on it.

In our Irish-language scheme, we have published the official Irish version of the 1986, 1997 and 2001 consolidations of the rules of the superior courts. We are making progress to ensure that work is done not just in our teams within the Department but also in the areas which we govern, in particular around the courts, and that translation work is done there. The Department has a panel of officials who are always available to answer queries in Irish. They are given specifically designated badges or are highlighted.

In respect of the other services that we provide through Irish, other than the rules of the courts which I have mentioned which have been translated recently, the fact that we do not provide services directly to the public means that we do not have a whole suite of teams that one, perhaps, might also find in other Departments. It is about making sure that we can deal with the State agencies we work with directly in Irish and that we can respond in Irish. We also want to ensure we can respond in Irish when dealing with the Oireachtas. However, we may not have the same levels as other Departments that have that face-to-face element.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Tuigim é sin. Bhain mo cheist leis an bhfoireann ó thaobh na Gaeilge de, ionas go mbeidh tuiscint i bhfad níos fearr ann ó thaobh na Gaeilge de. Deir an tAire go bhfuil dul chun cinn déanta agus tá figiúirí tugtha, ach arís, níl an figiúr iomlán agam chun é sin a thuiscint. Tá 39 duine i mbun cúrsa nó atá cúrsa déanta acu, agus 24 acu ar multiple levels.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** That is out of 1,500. I was not sure of the overall figure for the Department.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Tá 1,500 duine ann agus as sin tá 39 i mbun cúrsa.

**Mr. Micheál Ó Cearúil:** Tá i bhfad níos mó Gaolainne ag daoine istigh sa Roinn ná mar



a léiríonn na figiúirí sin. Cuireann sé iontas ormsa i gcónaí. Mar a chuala an coiste ón Aire í féin, tá daoine le máistreachtaí nó dochtúireachtaí sa Ghaolainn sa Roinn. Tá go leor daoine sa Roinn go bhfuil ardchumas Gaolainne acu. Ní bheinn buartha faoi na caighdeáin nua nuair a bheidh siadsan á gcomhaontú le Roinn na Gaeltachta. Táim cinnte go mbeidh an-bhéim ar an oiliúint agus tá muidne ag prapáil chuige sin chomh maith. Cuirimid fáilte roimhe. Mar is eol don choiste, beidh cumas sa Bhéarla ag na daoine le cumas sa Ghaeilge chomh maith so beidh siad ar fáil mar sheirbhísigh agus mar oifigigh sa Roinn. Fáiltímid roimh an deis seo, chun an fhrinne a rá, an cumas laistigh den Roinn a ardú. Tarlóidh sé sin agus tá sé ag tarlú faoi láthair. Tá daoine go bhfuil ardchumas Gaolainne acu laistigh den Roinn. Níl aon cheist faoi sin. Tá painéal againn le daoine go bhfuil fonn orthu an Ghaolainn a úsáid agus go mbeadh sí mar chuid dá n-obair.

**Chairman:** Agus finnétithe ag labhairt, más mian leo agus má tá siad compordach, is féidir leo an masc a bhaint dóibh. Cloiseann mise iad ach is gá go gcloisfear iad ar an taifead. Thuig na haistritheoirí iad ar aon chaoi. An bhfuil aon cheist eile ag an Teachta?

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Tá neart ceisteanna agam ach tá mo dhóthain ráite agam.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** The figures I mentioned are people who have sought out lessons to improve and become proficient but, as Mr. Ó Cearúil has said, there are quite a number of people who are proficient when they come to the Department. I do not know if there is a way of identifying how many in the Department have Irish, but if there is, it might be helpful to give that to the committee.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Bheadh sé cabhrach go ginearálta mar táimid ag iarraidh athrú meoin a fheiceáil anseo. Tá mé anseo ó 2016 agus tá a fhios agam go bhfuil dea-thoil ann ó thaobh na Gaeilge de, ach in ainneoin sin tá géarchéim ann. Ba mhaith liom plean a fheiceáil. An bhfuil plean ag an Roinn go mbeidh an fhoireann dhátheangach laistigh de thréimhse ama? Tá sé ceart go leor a rá go bhfuil 39 duine ag déanamh cúrsaí, agus is maith an rud é sin, ach cad an sprioc atá ag an Roinn chun daoine a mhealladh? Cén chaoi an meallfar iad? Cad iad na cúrsaí a chuirfear ar fáil? An bhfuil an t-éileamh níos mó ná an méid cúrsaí? Sin na figiúirí gur mhaith liom a fheiceáil, go ginearálta.

**Chairman:** Má tá na figiúirí ag na finnétithe, is féidir iad a chur ar aghaidh níos déanaí.

**Deputy Dara Calleary:** Tá fáilte roimh an Aire agus an fhoireann. Tá sé go deas iad a fheiceáil. Tháinig Gaeilge Chontae na Mí ó Mhaigh Eo so ba cheart go mbeadh Gaeilge líofa acu i gContae na Mí. Bhí áthas orm na figiúirí a chloisteáil, ach i gcomhthéacs na bhfreagraí a tugadh don Teachta Ní Chonghaile, táim saghas buartha anois. An saghas self-declaration a bhí ann do na daoine ag déanamh iarratais go raibh caighdeán Gaeilge acu? Cén bealach an mbeidh muid in ann a fháil amach an bhfuil an caighdeán ag na daoine atá ag iarraidh a bheith sa Gharda chomh láidir agus a chaithfidh sé a bheith? Cén uair a bheidh na figiúirí sin againn chun a fháil amach cé mhéad as na huimhreacha sin a bhfuil Gaeilge líofa acu?

Ó thaobh na ngardaí atá sa tseirbhís inniu, go háirithe gardaí sinsearacha, tá sé tábhachtach go dtuigeann an Garda agus an Roinn obair an choiste seo. Tá Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht agus seirbhísí sa Ghaeltacht an-tábhachtach, ach tá sé an-tábhachtach freisin go mbeidh seirbhísí ann do dhaoine a bhaineann úsáid as an nGaeilge i ngach áit sa tír. Caithfidh daoine a bheith in ann dul go stáisiún Garda in aon áit sa tír agus Gaeilge acu. Ba cheart go mbeadh siad in ann Gaeilge a úsáid sa stáisiún Garda. Má tá agallamh nó má tá gardaí ag cuidiú le fiosrú, ba cheart go mbeadh siad in ann an t-agallamh sin a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge. Tá a fhios agam nach mbeidh

na figiúirí ag na finnétithe go díreach, ach cén percentage de na stáisiúin Gharda sa tír ina bhfuil garda atá in ann agallamh le haghaidh cás nó cuidiú le fiosrúchán a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge? Cén percentage de na stáisiúin ina bhfuil daoine in ann é sin a dhéanamh?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** I am sorry to say I do not have those figures but I can get them for the Deputy.

**Chairman:** Gheobhaidh muid na figiúirí sin. An bhfuil aon cheist eile ag an Teachta?

**Deputy Dara Calleary:** Do na daoine atá tar éis iarratas a chur isteach, an mbeidh próiseas speisialta ann chun a fháil amach cé chomh láidir is atá an caighdeán Gaeilge acu? An bhfuilimid ag breathnú ar na daoine sin? Seans go roghnaítear iad i gcomhthéacs an phróisis, ach nuair atá siad sa stáisiún, mar a deirtear as Béarla, they are making it up as they go along. Ní bheadh muid sásta leis sin. Cad é an próiseas chun a fháil amach cé chomh láidir is atá an caighdeán Gaeilge ag na daoine atá sa phróiseas ag an nóiméad seo?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** There is an interview process. I would not call it a test but there is an interview process whereby, if somebody is selected who has Irish as a language, he or she will have to show he or she is proficient. I am sure there are people who put down that they are proficient in Irish when they may not be, but it is important that if someone says they are proficient in a language, particularly if they could potentially be sent to a Gaeltacht area, they do have the language they say they have. There will be an interview process. Obviously not all 10,000 people who have applied will go through that interview process but those who are selected will be tested in the language, in the same way others will be tested in other languages as well.

Separate to that, while there is an onus on those who say they are proficient to make sure they are, there is a specific focus within the organisation on trying to improve everybody's proficiency in Irish as well. That comes with the Irish-language strategy that was published recently. There is an online resource available to people so they can, at every stage, try to improve, upskill and upgrade their language skills.

**Deputy Dara Calleary:** Ag dul ar ais ag an méid a dúirt an Teachta Ní Chonghaile, is gá cuimhneamh go bhfuilimid anseo mar gheall nach raibh muinín ag an gCoimisinéir Teanga sa Gharda. Ní raibh muinín aige go raibh an Garda agus an Roinn chomh dáiríre faoi chúrsaí Gaeilge agus a chaithfidh siad é bheith. Ceapaim go bhfuil athrú meabhrach ann agus go bhfuil suim ag an Aire san ábhar ach beimid ag teacht ar ais ag an scéal seo. Beimid ag teacht ar ais leis an gcoimisinéir agus leis an Roinn freisin. Tá sé tábhachtach a thuiscint nach mbaineann sé seo leis an nGarda amháin ach le seirbhísí na cúirte freisin, atá faoi Roinn an Aire. Caithfidh daoine a bhfuil Gaeilge acu, is cuma cén áit sa tír ina bhfuil siad, a bheith in ann an Ghaeilge a úsáid i gcomhthéacs na ngardaí nó na cúirte. Tá sé tábhachtach nach ndéantar aon dochar do chearta na ndaoine a bhaineann úsáid as an nGaeilge más rud é nach féidir an Ghaeilge a úsáid i gcúrsaí dlí agus ceart. Tá sé an-tábhachtach go dtuigeann an tAire cé chomh dáiríre is atá sé sin, agus go dtuigeann an Roinn agus na agencies ina mbíonn fuadar iontu é sin freisin.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** I fully support the Deputy in that. It is very important, not just for the gardaí but for the Prison Service, the Court Service and all agencies that fall under the remit of the Department of Justice, that they clearly set out their Irish-language strategies and plans. Earlier, I mentioned the 2030 target for the 20% of recruits. In order to reach that, all our agencies need to make sure they are doing the work they need to do, not just to encourage more people into their organisations but to make sure that those who are there are supported.

There should be opportunities available at all times to those who, perhaps, did not consider Irish as a language or who are not proficient to improve their language skills. That is set out in the Irish-language strategy, our plan within An Garda Síochána.

I reiterate what Mícheál Ó Cearúil said in his opening remarks. As part of the consultation process with the Commissioner and the Policing Authority, when they were drafting the new regulations, in regard to the sergeant and inspector rank, the foundation training programme has those specific requirements I mentioned for recruits to learn and demonstrate their competency and proficiency in the Irish language. That is there and it is part of making sure that those who say they can speak Irish will be able to speak it. It is important to retain and maintain that as well.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Fáiltím roimh an Aire agus a ráiteas trí Ghaeilge. Gan dabht, fáiltím roimh an eolas atá ann freisin, an méadú atá tagtha ar líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge, agus an 466 iarratasóir a luaigh an tAire. Is dea-scéal é sin.

Tá gá le breisiú ar líon na Gaeilgeoirí sna gardaí. Ós rud é go bhfuil ardú ar líon na n-iarratasóirí anois, an ndéanfar iarracht faoi leith líon níos mó Gaeilgeoirí a thabhairt tríd an gcóras nuair a bheidh siad ar fáil? An bhfuil aon phlean faoi leith maidir leis sin?

Tá cúpla ceist eile agam don Aire. An nglacann an Roinn agus An Garda Síochána leis go raibh ísliú céime i gceist maidir leis an teanga nuair a cuireadh an t-athrú sin i bhfeidhm ag deireadh na bliana seo caite? Bhraith aon Ghaeilgeoir ar labhair mé leis é sin. Cheistíomar é ag an gcoiste cheana féin agus bhíomar ag iarraidh díriú isteach ar cad as ar tháinig an tuairim seo. Cén taighde a rinneadh ar éifeachtacht an dátheangachais? Cad as ar tháinig an tuairim seo? An é go raibh tuairim ag duine éigin nó an raibh aon taighde bainteach leis an gcéim seo, chun an dátheangachas a bhaint? Cé a chuir an moladh chun cinn? Cén fhianaise a bhí ann chun tacaíocht a thabhairt leis an moladh sin? An féidir leis an Aire soiléiriú a thabhairt ar sin?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** It is very difficult to tell how many Irish speakers will come through the process, but our focus and priority was to make sure that people applied in the first instance. The more people apply, the more people will go through the process and be successful at interview stage as well as subsequent stages, which will hopefully increase our overall numbers.

It is regrettable that there is a view or a sense that by changing the regulations, there was a downgrading. That was certainly not the intention. As regards where this came from, first, the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland set out a huge piece of reform which is under way, based on its initial report. It specifically noted that diversity is vital in any organisation, but particularly in an organisation such as An Garda Síochána that needs to be innovative, adaptable and representative of the communities it supports. The need to have Irish as a second language was seen as a barrier to many people when applying to An Garda Síochána.

Prior to the change in the regulation, the numbers were not increasing. I am not sure whether people were encouraged to come forward just because it was a mandatory requirement. The way people are encouraged to come forward, be it in An Garda Síochána or other agency or organisation, is by engaging with them, making sure there is a clear plan and strategy, and supporting them in the development of their language. I believe that is what we have tried to do here and what the Garda Commissioner is trying to do with the new Irish-language strategy. During our campaigning in recent weeks since the beginning of the year, there were specific call-outs to people in Gaeltacht areas and beyond, encouraging them to come forward and to

consider An Garda Síochána, more so than we have done before. If people looked into it, they could see that there was a clear plan, that Irish speakers were being considered and that there was a clear strategy for them within An Garda Síochána. That in itself is very positive.

Making something mandatory does not necessarily mean you will get the outcome you want. Going by the figures, we have seen some progress. Obviously, until we see the numbers of those who get through the interview process and are successful in the end, that remains to be seen. The fact that the number of applicants is 466, up from 129, is progress in itself and we want to build on that.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Tá cúpla pointe agam. Tuigim gur cuireadh an pointe seo chun cinn mar gheall ar an teanga agus an éagsúlacht. Nuair a cheistíomar na finnéithe sna cruinnithe deiridh, ní raibh aon duine in ann aon fhianaise a chur ar fáil chun a rá gur ón bhfianaise sin a tháinig an t-eolas agus seo é an taighde a bhain leis. Tháinig tuairim ó áit éigin. Ní fheadar cad as ar tháinig sé. Ní raibh aon duine in ann rud breise a chur leis sin. Ar cuireadh eolas breise ar fáil don Aire nuair a tugadh an moladh di, nó ar tháinig an moladh ó tuairim éigin a bhí ag dul thart gan aon taighde bainteach léi? An féidir leis an Aire é sin a shoiléiriú?

Is maith an rud é go bhfuil na figiúirí ardaithe. Mar a luaigh mé níos luaithe, rinneadh níos mó fógraíochta agus rinneadh iarracht níos mó chun daoine a mhealladh isteach. Braithim gurb é sin an fáth ar thug Gaeilgeoirí breise tríd an sruth Gaeilge seachas aon athrú maidir leis an teanga. Gan dabht, níl aon taighde agam chun é sin a chinntiú mar níl aon eolas agam ar na figiúirí, ach braithim gurb iad an fhógraíocht agus an t-eolas breise a mheall daoine isteach, agus ba iad na hiarrachtaí sin ba chúis leis seachas aon athrú maidir leis an teanga. An bhféadfaí soiléiriú a thabhairt ar aon taighde nó eolas breise a cuireadh ar fáil don Aire mar gheall ar an athrú sin? Nuair a cheistíomar na finnéithe sa choiste roimhe seo, ní raibh siad in ann aon eolas breise a chur ar fáil ach amháin a rá go raibh an tuairim seo ann, go raibh an teanga ag cur isteach ar an éagsúlacht. Is cosúil go raibh an tuairim ag dul timpeall agus nach raibh aon taighde ann chun tacaíocht a thabhairt di.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** I refer to removing the barrier. As the Deputy has said, I and others believe the increase in numbers has happened for a number of different reasons, including communications and outreach. What was happening before clearly was not working, we were not seeing those numbers increase in the way we wanted and this requirement was preventing others from applying. The Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland engaged across the board with An Garda Síochána, the Garda Inspectorate, the Policing Authority, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission and communities and tried to get a picture of the Garda, its work and its structures. The Garda itself would have an idea of the composition of its membership but it also went out to other communities and asked them why the members of those communities were not applying. This included under-represented communities, and what came back from many of them was they did not have Irish and the fact that Irish was mandatory was preventing them from applying. Having it as a mandatory requirement did not discourage nor encourage Irish speakers from applying but it did discourage others from applying. In trying to create a diverse police force and in trying to ensure the Garda represents and is reflective of the communities it represents, this was seen as a barrier. It was as simple as some research from asking communities and gardaí speaking to people. That fed into what was highlighted in the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

We need to rethink how we engage with Gaeltacht areas and Irish speakers and we need to learn lessons from this recruitment campaign. If possible, we need to try to understand why people have applied. We will not understand that until we go through the overall process but

progress is being made and it is to be hoped we can continue to make that progress.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Táim sásta leis na freagraí sin.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire agus roimh a cuid oifigigh fosta. Aithnínm na hoifigigh ón Roinn, go háirithe Micheál Ó Cearúil fá choinne a tiomantas ar son na teanga thar na blianta. Tá sé díograiseach agus tá suim mhór aige sa teanga agus sa chultúr. Gabhaim buíochas leis as sin.

Níl ceist agamsa ach tá cúpla pointe agam. Tá obair ag bogadh ar aghaidh i Leitir Ceanainn. Tá na ceannairí iontach tábhachtach do na daoine uilig atá ag bogadh na teanga ar aghaidh. Bhí mé i gcónaí ag labhairt leis an Cheannfort Terry McGinn i Leitir Ceanainn agus tá suim mhór aici sa teanga. Bhí sí ag cur fíorbhrú ormsa an Ghaeilge a bogadh ar aghaidh fosta. Nuair a thug mise aitheantas, mar Aire Stáit le freagracht as an Ghaeltacht, ar Leitir Ceanainn mar bhaile seirbhíse in 2015, b'shin an chéad stop. Ina dhiaidh sin d'fhógair an tAire clár faoi aitheantas do na bailte seirbhíse tríd An Gharda Síochána fosta agus ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil chuici agus chuig Terry McGinn fá choinne an tiomantais faoi sin. Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCoimisinéir Drew Harris fosta. Bhí seisean iontach tiomanta chuig an teanga an lá a bhí sé sa Dáil ag labhairt faoin teanga, faoin fhís agus faoin todhchaí.

Ó thaobh na gardaí uilig ag obair taobh amuigh den stáisiún i measc an phobail agus ag labhairt leis na daoine, b'fhéidir go mbeidh deiseanna ann faoin scéim i gcomhair community policing. Bhí taithí mhór sa Gharda leis na gardaí ag obair as lámha a chéile leis na daoine ar an talamh agus leis na daoine a bhí ina gcónaí sna ceantair, go háirithe sna bailte móra nó sna ceantair iargúlta. B'fhéidir go mbeidh seans ann chun dul chun cinn a dhéanamh nó chun straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm chun an teanga a úsáid ar an talamh. Tá níos mó Gaeilge ag gardaí an lae inniu. Tá Gaeilge briste ag roinnt acu agus tá gardaí eile ag foghlaim agus ag athfhoghlaim na teanga. Tá suim mhór sa Ghaeilge sa Gharda agus dá mbeadh na daoine ag smaoineamh faoin teanga, seans go mbeadh siad á n-úsáid i measc an phobail. Chomh maith leis sin, tá aithne agam ar an scéim ina bhíodh na gardaí ag dul go dtí cúrsaí. Mar shampla, bhí siad ag dul go dtí Oideas Gael i nGleann Cholm Cille agus go dtí contaetha eile fosta. Dá mbeadh aon chuidiú nó cabhair sna scéimeanna sin, bheadh sin níos fearr agus d'fhéadfadh na gardaí dul go dtí ranganna Gaeilge neamhfhoirmiúla agus go dtí cúrsaí neamhfhoirmiúla. D'fhéadfadh siad dul ag dreapadóireacht nó scéimeanna agus tograí cultúrtha eile a dhéanamh. B'fhéidir go mbeadh seans ann tacaíocht nó cuidiú a thabhairt do ghardaí dul sa phróiseas sin nó chun dul ar aistear mar sin.

Chomh maith leis sin, tá Gaeilge an Aire go han-mhaith. Bhí sí ag léamh na Gaeilge ina ráiteas tosaigh agus tá blas ar dóigh aici. Níl a fhios agam cén bhlas atá aici. An Contae na Mí é? B'fhéidir go bhfuil blas Ráth Chairn ag an Aire, macasamhail leis na daoine a chuaigh go Ráth Chairn ó Chonamara. B'fhéidir go bhfuil canúint Chonamara ag an Aire ach tá blas maith aici agus fair play di as a iarracht féin a dhéanamh. An chéad uair eile a bheimid ag labhairt taobh amuigh den seomra seo, beimid ag úsáid na Gaeilge. Táim ag dúil go mór leis sin.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** I am not sure what the accent is; maybe Roscommon. The Deputy made a point about Letterkenny and this is a Garda station that will be a service station and a training station. Those who are going to Letterkenny will have an opportunity to learn their essential policing skills and to make use of their Irish-language skills, which is welcome and the Deputy has been passionate about making sure that happens. It is important those who are not fluent Irish speakers and who go into An Garda Síochána always have an opportunity to improve, learn and become Irish speakers where they are not at all, and that is where the Irish-language strategy comes into play. It is about encouraging more people who can speak fluently,



who can teach others and who can converse with the public, be it on the ground, in our communities, going to courts or in other areas. There must be continuous ways in which people can improve, with online learning being an option, and that is something the Commissioner and the Garda are making available to people. At the same time, you cannot beat face-to-face physical contact and conversation and it is important those options are available to people.

Thinking ahead, there is an option or an opportunity as we develop our community safety partnerships. There are three pilots under way in Dublin inner city, Waterford and Longford, and this is about making sure communities feel safe and take charge of the policing and safety plans in their areas. Where these expand beyond the pilot areas, members of the Gaeltacht areas would potentially be included in these community safety partnerships. They could work closely with the Garda and other members of the group to make sure people in Gaeltacht areas are supported in the same way as everybody else through the Irish language. It is about making sure it is incorporated into every aspect of the work An Garda Síochána is doing and spreading it out into the community as well.

**Chairman:** Bogfaimid chuig an Seanadóir Ó Donnghaile, ach sula thosnaíonn sé, aithním go bhfuil an Teachta O'Dowd tar éis teacht isteach sa chruinniú.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire agus roimh a cuid chomhghleacaithe. Níl agam ach ceist amháin. Cén dóigh a mheastar inniúlacht sa Ghaeilge mar chuid den chlár BA sa phóilíneacht? Cén dóigh ar féidir linn a bheith cinnte de go bhfuil sin níos airde ná, nó ar a laghad ar chomhchéim leis, an phas a bhí de dhíth sa tástáil inniúlachta a bhí ann roimhe sular fuair an Roinn réidh leis an riachtanas sin maidir leis an Gharda?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** My understanding is that it is the same level. It has not changed and there has not been a reduction - I will not say "downgrading" - with regard to the level of proficiency required. There has not been any change with regard to what is required.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Níor íslíodh iad, ach ar ardaíodh na riachtanais?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** People are required to be able to speak Irish and to be fluent enough to engage with people, not just in general conversation, but when attending court or engaging with various different agencies. Obviously, more than a basic level of understanding is needed to converse with people in those circumstances. The standard has always been that high. That has not changed.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Tá ceist dheireanach agam. Glacaim leis an méid atá ráite ag an Aire ansin. Tá smaoineamh eile agam. Níl aon athrú tagtha ar an modh nó an dóigh ina meastar é sin. Aithním an méid atá ráite ag an Aire i dtaca leis an chaighdeán. An bhfuil athrú ar bith tagtha ar an dóigh nó bealach a úsáidtear chun é sin a mheas?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** I might ask one of my officials to respond on that. I am not clear on the answer.

**Mr. Doncha O'Sullivan:** As I understand, the entire competition for the Irish-language stream takes place as Gaeilge so not only would somebody who does not speak Irish not be able to persuade somebody of his or her ability to speak Irish, but they would not be able to do a good interview and do well in the examinations and so would not get into An Garda Síochána. A very high level of Irish is required. Clearly, there are others in the Garda who have not come through that stream and who have only conversational Irish. The programme in Templemore also teaches basic Irish for day-to-day interactions. The people who come in on the specialist

Irish-language stream must face the entire process in Irish. It is a very high standard.

**Chairman:** Tá cúpla ceist agam féin. Ní fheicim aon duine eile atá ag lorg ceist a chur. Tá ceist agam a n-éiríonn ón méid a luaigh an Seanadóir ansin. Tá sé á rá go bhfuil leibhéal an-ard acu siúd atá tar éis teacht isteach ar an stream Gaeilge seo ach nach iad sin na daoine atá ag lorg ardaithe chéime go dtí sáirsint. Is iad chuile bhall eile den Gharda Síochána nár tháinig isteach ar an stream áirithe seo atá ag lorg an ardaithe chéime sin. Go dtí seo, bhí ar iarrthóirí pas a fháil i dtástáil inniúlachta. Bhí scrúdú ar leith i gceist seachas a bheith ar dhaoine freastal ar ranganna nó léachtaí amháin. Go bhfios dom, is é sin atá i gceist leis an gclár BA i bpóilíneacht fheidhmeach. Níl scrúdú ar leith i gceist. Fiú tar éis na bhfadhbanna a bhí ann go dtí seo, níl aon tástáil ar leith bainteach leis an gclár BA i bpóilíneacht fheidhmeach atá i gceist anois. Is leor freastal ar na ranganna nó an modúl.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** You have to demonstrate that you have competency and proficiency in the language. It is not a test but you have to demonstrate that you have proficiency. With regard to the changes on the promotion side of things, the new regulations were informed by the Garda Inspectorate report from 2015 which recommended that a new process be put in place. I appreciate the regulations represent a fundamental change from what was there before. As the Chairman has said, candidates had to go through a particular test. This is the first time a process has been held through the Public Appointments Service. It is quite a departure from the previous system. As part of the consultation with the Commissioner and the Policing Authority on drafting these new regulations, it was decided the foundation programme would include specific requirements for recruits to learn and to demonstrate their competency, as I have outlined. They are required to complete the training that forms part of the programme. It was agreed that a requirement for a separate proficiency test was essentially unnecessary. The main focus is on candidates' skills and ability to carry out their work so, once they have demonstrated that they have Irish, the focus is on their ability to carry out their work and the specific skills and requirements they need for that particular promotion. I appreciate it is a departure from what was there before but this was done in consultation with the Garda Commissioner, the Policing Authority and having regard to recommendations in the 2015 report, Changing Policing in Ireland.

**Chairman:** Is é an rud atá á rá ná nach bhfuil aon tástáil ar leith agus nach bhfuil aon chaighdeán ar leith riachtanach seachas gur gá d'iarrthóirí léiriú gur féidir leo Gaeilge a labhairt, agus is féidir leo teacht isteach le freagraí a d'ullmhaigh siad roimh ré. Nuair a bhí muid ag déileáil le hAcht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Leasú), 2021, bhí a lán caint ann faoi Theastas Eorpach na Gaeilge, leibhéal B1 agus leibhéal B2. Dúradh linn go raibh tástáil aitheanta ar leith á chur chun cinn ag Ollscoil Mhá Nuad maidir leis an leibhéal áirithe seo. Níl ardeistiméireacht, teastas sóisearach nó tástáil aitheanta ó thaobh na Gaeilge de i gceist anseo.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** The Garda Commissioner needs to be mindful of striking a balance and make sure that people going for promotion have the relevant skills needed for that promotion while also ensuring we have enough people with proficiency in Irish. This goes back to the original point that the more people we have in An Garda Síochána who can speak Irish fluently or who are proficient in the language, the more such people will rise through the ranks having gone through that promotion process. What came out of the process of developing the new regulations was the need to make sure that people were able to do the job. It is not that the language issue is secondary. It is still important but it needs to be balance with the overall need to be able to do the work. The fact that competency and proficiency in the language is still required means that there is still a focus on it.

**Chairman:** Rachaidh mé ar ais go dtí ceist a raibh an Teachta Ó Muimhneachán ag triail

freagra cruinn a fháil uirthi. Níor chuala mé é ag fáil a leithéid so níl freagra againn go fóill. Is ceann de na fáthanna a bhfuil an tAire os ár gcomhair é sin. Bhí muid ag iarraidh a fháil amach cé go díreach a dhein an moladh go bhfaighfí réidh leis an gcoinníoll a bhí ann. Tá sé tarlaithe agus níl muid ag dul ar ais air ach dúirt An Garda Síochána linn nár lorg sé aon athrú ar an gcaighdeán. Dúirt an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí linn nár lorg í é. Dúirt an tÚdarás Póilíneachta an rud céanna. Ní raibh aon mhiontuairiscí de na cruinnithe ar fáil dúinn so fós níl a fhios againn cén duine nó eagrais as siúd a bhí ag déanamh cainte faoi athruithe sa Gharda Síochána a lorg athrú ó thaobh stádas na Gaeilge de ná athruithe eile ag an gcéim seo. An ón Roinn féin a tháinig an cinneadh? Measaim go raibh an Garda Representative Association agus an Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors páirteach sna comhráite freisin. B'fhéidir go raibh daoine eile páirteach ann ach ní raibh aon duine sásta a rá gur lorg siadsan an t-athrú agus an fáth gur lorg siad é agus an fhianaise ar a mbunaidh an cinneadh seo a thabhairt dúinn. Is é sin an príomhrud nach raibh ar fáil dúinn go dtí seo. Luaigh an tAire an Coimisiún um Thodhchaí na Póilíneachta in Éirinn. Níor luaigh aon duine go raibh fianaise nó eolas i dtuarascáil an choimisiúin maidir le haon bhac ar dhaoine dul isteach sa Gharda Síochána nó meon daoine faoi na harduithe céime seo. Is ceist eile é sin. Tá dhá cheist eile agam ina dhiaidh sin.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** The answer is that the Department took the decision. It did so based on the information that it was available to it at the time. The Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland highlighted a lack of diversity and a need to increase diversity within An Garda Síochána. The Garda itself, in reaching out to other communities, identified that one of the reasons people were not coming forward was because they had to have both languages, including the Irish language. It is not just different communities but people with learning disabilities, dyslexia and other learning challenges who said this was a challenge for them. There was not a specific ask through the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland or the Garda but taking all that information into account, a decision was taken to remove this requirement. It was also decided that there would be a particular focus and emphasis on Irish in the next recruitment round in order to increase the numbers. That is where the communication aspect came in and An Garda Síochána developed its new strategy. It is based on the information we have.

To answer the previous question, it was clear that the Irish-language requirement did not actually increase the numbers applying or support people, but it did act as a barrier to other people applying, which I do not think any of us want to see happening. We want to make sure everybody knows that they can apply and that they have an opportunity to become members of An Garda Síochána. This was seen as a barrier in that regard. The Department took that information on board and put forward these recommendations.

**Chairman:** An mbeadh an tAire sásta na sonraí sin nó an t-eolas sin, ar a raibh na cinntí sin bunaithe, a roinnt leis an gcoiste?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** The report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland has been published and is available to anybody. I am not sure if the information from the Garda on its engagement is published but it was based on the conversations and engagement that happen regularly with An Garda Síochána that this feedback came to us. It is not information that we would have had ourselves but that is not to say the Garda does not have it.

**Chairman:** Is féidir linn é sin a lorg ón nGarda Síochána. Tá an t-ardú i líon na nGaeilgeoirí atá ag déanamh iarratais ar an gcomórtas chun bheith sa Gharda Síochána dearfach. Go bhfóire Dia orainn má dhéanann aon iarrthóir leath-bhréag maidir leis an inniúlacht atá acu. Cén tús é sin lena saol mar gharda má tá siad ag insint bhréige nó leath-bhréag ar an iarratas? Tá sé go maith go bhfuil ardú ann. Bhí 2.64% Gaeilgeoir ann an uair dheireanach agus 4.66%

an uair seo. Tá sé an-íseal fós agus toisc gur comórtas oscailte atá ann, níl aon gheallúint fiú go mbeidh an céatadán sin ar fad ann. B'fhéidir go bhfuil sé seo déanta anois ach nuair a labhair muid leis an nGarda Síochána tamall ó shin, measaim roimh an Nollaig, níor rith sé leo feachtas earcaíochta dírithe ar Ghaelcholáistí a reáchtáil. Dúirt siad go raibh siad chun é a dhéanamh. Toisc go bhfuil sé i gceist go mbeidh Gaeilge ag 20% dóibh siúd atá earcaithe roimh 2030, an bhfuil sé i gceist comórtas earcaíochta ar leith a rith do Ghaeilgeoirí amach anseo, chun déanamh cinnte de go mbeidh slám mór Gaeilgeoirí ag teacht isteach sa Gharda Síochána? Fiú leis an ardú, ní fheicim conas gur féidir an figiúr sin a shroicheadh gan céim ar leith a thógáil. An bhfuil aon tuairimí eile ag an Aire conas an 20% sin a shroicheadh?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** Quite simply, we need to keep everything under review and under consideration. That we have seen an increase in this round is positive. We need to see the numbers that come out of this and whether the actions we have taken have been successful. We need to allow for the strategy within An Garda Síochána to bed down and to see how successful that is. Obviously, 2030 is not that far away. It will not be long before we have another recruitment campaign. From my own point of view, I think everything needs to be kept under consideration and nothing should be excluded, the Cathaoirleach's suggestion included.

**Chairman:** As an 132 eile a bhí san fheachtas dheireanach, cé mhéad a d'éirigh leo a bheith earcaithe isteach sa Gharda Síochána? As 5,000 iarratas, rinne 132 iarratas ar leith don sruth Gaeilge. Luaigh mé é seo an uair dheireanach a bhí An Garda Síochána os ár gcomhair. Bíonn daoine ann le Gaeilge nach gcuireann isteach ar an sruth Gaeilge mar nach bhfuil siad ag iarraidh a bheith istigh sa bhosca "Gaeilgeoir". As an 132 sin, cé mhéad a bhí earcaithe? B'fhéidir go raibh 132 istigh ar an gcomórtas agus nach bhfuair aon duine acu post.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** Some from the Irish stream were moved into the English stream. I do not have a figure for the 129 that ended up specifically in that stream. I should have brought more figures with me so I apologise. I will try to come back to the Cathaoirleach on that directly. I know some of them moved streams and moved across the various Irish and English streams. I will endeavour to come back to the committee with that figure.

**Chairman:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. An bhfuil an Teachta Ó Muimhneacháin ag iarraidh teacht isteach arís?

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Tá ceist amháin thapa agam. Baineann sí leis na ceisteanna a bhí agam níos luaithe agus líon na nGaeilgeoirí. Éifeacht eile a bhí ag an athrú seo ná go raibh daoine nach raibh ach an t-aon teanga amháin acu ar fáil. An bhfuil aon tuairim ag an Aire cé mhéad iarrthóir atá tagtha isteach anois nach bhfuil ach teanga amháin acu?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** I do not have sight of that yet. It has only been a matter of weeks since the competition closed so we would not have any of that information yet. It is important that people who only have one language are allowed to apply. As I said, there may be people with learning difficulties where that would not in any way impact their ability to carry out their jobs the same as anybody else. It is important that it is open to everybody, whether they have one language, ten languages or two, and whether that includes Irish or not. As soon as those figures become available to us we can provide them to the committee.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Glacaim leis an bpointe gur chóir go mbeadh an deis ag daoine le teanga amháin cur isteach, ach tuigim gur an rud a bhí taobh thiar de seo ar fad ná éagsúlacht. An bhfuil costas air sin mar gheall go bhfuil éagsúlacht teanga á bhrú amach chomh maith?

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** I would not agree with that. Diversity comes in all shapes, sizes and forms. Without knowing the figures, I am certain many people have applied who have more than one language but I am also sure there are many people who do not. We need to make sure everybody has a fair crack of the whip.

**Chairman:** Cad faoi dhaoine atá Gaeilge den scoth acu agus nach bhfuil an Béarla acu chomh maith céanna? Níl an oiread sin daoine mar sin ann ach fiú i mo chás féin, agus mé tógtha sa chathair, bhí an Ghaeilge i bhfad Éireann níos fearr agamsa ag leibhéal na hardteistiméireachta ná mar a bhí an Béarla. Tá a lán daoine a théann trí scolaíocht lán-Ghaeilge agus tá buntáiste acu ó thaobh na Gaeilge de. An chéad uair a bhíonn orthu casadh ar an mBéarla ná nuair a théann siad ar ollscoil, nó sa chás seo, nuair a dhéanann siad iarratas ar An nGarda Síochána. An bhfuil sé sásúil go mbeadh an Ghaeilge acu amháin? B'fhéidir go bhfuil teanga éigin eile acu ach d'fhéadfaí go bhfuil Fraincis níos fearr ná Béarla acu.

**Deputy Helen McEntee:** The stipulation is that people must have English or Irish as their base. Irish is treated equally in this instance and if people have other languages, then that is obviously great too. It is not just English with Irish as a potential addition.

**Chairman:** Tá ceisteanna eile agam ach níl mé chun iad a chur inniu. Tá a lán ceisteanna agam faoi na cúirteanna agus na comhlachtaí eile. B'fhéidir go dtabharfaimid cuireadh ar ais don Aire am éigin amach anseo. Labhróidh muid leis na cúirteanna iad féin maidir leis an nGaeilge agus an tslí ina ndearna siad dul chun cinn, chomh maith leis an Probation Service agus a leithéid, agus fiú lucht na bpríosún, maidir leis na fadhbanna atá acu ó thaobh na Gaeilge de. Tá a lán fadhbanna eile acu de bharr an oiread teangacha gur gá a bheith sna príosúin ach uaireanta bíonn fadhbanna ann ó thaobh na Gaeilge de, toisc nach bhfuil an tseirbhís ar fáil. Tá sé i gceist againn tochailt nó iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar na fadhbanna i gcoitinne. Tá sé go maith gur thug an tAire aitheantas sa mhéid a dúirt sí níos luaithe don ról gur gá don Roinn a imirt, fiú leis na heagrais siúd atá neamhspleách ón Roinn.

Sin deireadh leis an seisiún seo. Gabhaim buíochas leo siúd ar fad a ghlac páirt sa chruinniú inniu, agus na finnétithe go háirithe: an tAire Dlí agus Cirt, chomh maith le Donncha O'Sullivan, Mary McKenna agus Micheál Ó Cearúil, a bhí mar ionadaithe thar ceann na Roinne. Níl aon ghnó eile ar an liosta inniu so leis sin cuirfimid clabhsúr leis seo agus tiocfaimid ar ais le chéile arís níos déanaí um thráthnóna.

Cuireadh an cruinniú ar athló go dtí 4 p.m. ar an 30 Márta 2022.

Is é seo an dara cruinniú den choiste ar an 30 Márta 2022.

### **Soláthar Seirbhísí Sláinte: Plé.**

**Chairman:** Leanfaimid ar aghaidh anois go dtí 6 p.m., más gá, agus tá súil agam nach mbeidh gá. Fearaim fáilte roimh na comhaltaí ón gcomhchoiste, roimh aon chomhalta eile atá ag freastal ar an gcruinniú seo ar líne nach bhfuil sa seomra faoi láthair, roimh an lucht féachana agus, go háirithe, roimh na finnétithe atá os ár gcomhair. Tá leithscéal faighte agam ón Teachta Daly nach féidir leis a bheith linn inniu. Fearaim fáilte go sonrach roimh na finnétithe atá linn mar ionadaithe thar ceann Fheidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte, FSS: Paul Reid, príomhoifigeach feidhmiúcháin; an Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald, ceannasaí náisiúnta sláinte poiblí agus cuimsiú sóisialta; Tony Canavan, príomhfheidhmeannach grúpa, an Grúpa Ollscoile um



Chúram Sláinte Saolta; agus Cuimín Mac Aodha Bhuí, ceannasaí na seirbhíse Gaeilge. Chomh maith leo siúd inniu tá Robert Watt, Ard-Rúnaí; Muiris O'Connor, rúnaí cúnta; agus Jade Pepper, oifigeach Gaeilge i láthair mar ionadaithe thar ceann na Roinne Sláinte. Ar líne, tá Mark Brennock, stiúrthóir náisiúnta cumarsáide de chuid FSS linn chomh maith céanna. Gabhaim mo bhuíochas leo go léir arís as a bheith anseo.

Ba mhaith liom a chur ar an taifead freisin go bhfuil na finnéithe go léir eile, seachas Mark Brennock, ag freastal ar an gcrúinniú ó sheomra coiste 4 laistigh de phurláin Thithe an Oireachtais. Tá comhaltaí an chomhchoiste seo a leanas ar líne linn go fóill: na Teachtaí Ó Muimhneacháin agus Calleary, agus an Seanadóir Kyne. Aithneoimid na daoine eile nuair a thiofáidh siad isteach ar líne. Táimid ag déanamh breathnú ar an dá ábhar seo a leanas ar an gcrúinniú seo: na fiseáin nua atá curtha ar fáil ag FSS chun mná torracha a spreagadh chun an vacsaín i gcomhair an coróinvíreas a fháil, fiseáin atá ar fáil in a lán teangacha eile ach nach bhfuil ar fáil as Gaeilge, príomhtheanga na hÉireann; agus na teangacha éagsúla ina sholáthraíonn nó ina bhfógraíonn FSS agus an Roinn Sláinte a gcuid seirbhísí don phobal.

Sula dtosóimid an cruinniú i gceart, tá dualgas orm na rialacha agus na teoracha seo a leanas a leagan faoin bhráid na ndaoine atá ag freastal ar an gcrúinniú seo: meabhraím do chomhaltaí, d'fhinnéithe agus do bhaill foirne a chinntiú go bhfuil a ngutháin shoghluaiste múchta le linn an chruinnithe mar gur féidir leis na gléasanna seo cur as do chórais chraolacháin, eagarthóireachta agus fuaime Thithe an Oireachtais. Tá rogha ag comhaltaí freastal ar an gcrúinniú go fisiciúil i seomra an choiste nó go fíorúil ar Microsoft Teams, ar an gcoinníoll i gcás cruinnithe poiblí gur óna n-oifigí i dTithe an Oireachtais a dhéanfar seo. Is riachtanas bunreachtúil é sin. Le linn do chomhaltaí a bheith ag freastal óna n-oifigí, ba chóir dóibh an fiseán a bheith ar siúl an t-am go léir agus a bheith le feiceáil ar an scáileán. Baineann an coinníoll seo leis na finnéithe atá ag freastal go fíorúil chomh maith. Ba chóir dóibh siúd atá ag freastal ar an gcrúinniú go fíorúil a chinntiú go bhfuil a micreafóin múchta acu nuair nach bhfuil siad ag caint ar an gcomhchoiste agus cloí leis sin.

Cuirim ar aird na bhfinnéithe inniu go bhfuil siad, de bhua Bhunreacht na hÉireann agus reachtaíochta araon, faoi chosaint ag lánphribhléid maidir leis an bhfianaise a thugann siad don chomhchoiste chomh fada agus atá siad lonnaithe laistigh de phurláin Thithe an Oireachtais agus an fhianaise sin á tabhairt acu. Is fíric é nach féidir le finnéithe brath ar an gcosaint sin agus fianaise á tabhairt acu lasmuigh de phurláin Thithe an Oireachtais. Molaim d'fhinnéithe, go mór mór dóibh siúd atá ag freastal ar an gcrúinniú lasmuigh de phurláin Thithe an Oireachtais, a bheith cúramach agus fianaise á tabhairt acu. Má ordaíonn an comhchoiste dóibh éirí as fianaise a thabhairt i leith ní áirithe, beidh orthu a dhéanamh amhlaidh láithreach. Ordaítear dóibh gan aon fhianaise a thabhairt nach fianaise í a bhaineann leis na hábhair nó leis na himeachtaí atá á bplé ag an gcomhchoiste. Ba chóir dóibh a bheith ar an eolas go ndéanfar na ráitis tosaigh a chuirtear faoi bhráid an choiste a fhoilsiú ar shuíomh gréasáin an chomhchoiste tar éis an chruinnithe seo.

Fiafraítear d'fhinnéithe agus do chomhaltaí araon cleachtadh parlaiminte a urramú nár chóir, más féidir, duine nó eintiteas a cháineadh ná líomhaintí a dhéanamh ina n-aghaidh ná tuairimí a thabhairt maidir leo ina ainm, ina hainm nó ina n-ainmneacha, nó ar shlí a bhféadfaí iad a aithint. Chomh maith leis sin, fiafraítear díobh gan aon ní a rá a d'fhéadfaí breathnú air mar ábhar díobhálach do dhea-chlú aon duine nó eintiteas. Mar sin, dá bhféadfadh a ráitis a bheith clúmhilleach do dhuine nó eintiteas aitheanta, ordófar do na finnéithe éirí as na ráitis sin láithreach. Tá sé rithábachtach go ngéillfidh finnéithe leis an ordú sin chomh láithreach is a eisítear é.

Déanfaimid breathnú anois ar ábhair an chruinnithe inniu. Aithním go bhfuil an Seanadóir Ward tagtha isteach ar líne ansin. Iarraim ar phríomhoifigeach feidhmiúcháin de chuid FSS labhairt os comhair an chruinnithe.

**Mr. Paul Reid:** Good afternoon, Chairperson and members. My apologies in advance as I will relay my opening statement in English because my Irish is not strong enough. I am joined today by my colleagues: Tony Canavan, CEO, Saolta Hospital Group; Cuimín Mac Aodha Bhuí, head of the Irish-language service in the HSE; Mark Brennock, national director of communications; and Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald, specialist in public health, HSE national social inclusion office.

The HSE attended this committee in November 2021 and gave an update on our work to provide information and services in Irish and our implementation of our Irish-language strategy. The HSE has some ground to make up in this area, as the committee is aware. I regret the opportunities missed to adopt and implement a scheme under the previous Act. We are renewing our commitment to work to meet our duties under the updated legislation from now on. We want to use the good work done during the Covid-19 period as a platform for that improved service to Irish speakers.

In December, the committee asked that I attend to discuss videos produced by the HSE in 12 languages of migrant communities to encourage uptake of the Covid-19 vaccine. The committee also asked to discuss generally the languages in which the HSE provides information to the public. Let me first address the context of the videos for our migrant communities. In the course of the pandemic, very clear at-risk groups emerged along with evidence of groups less likely to take up the vaccines. We noted especially low vaccine uptake rates of 26% for nationals of EU 14-27 countries working in sector A, which includes agriculture, forestry and fishing.

In response, the HSE's social inclusion team worked on measures to ensure that Covid-19 advice and vaccine promotion messages were adapted for those communities representing lower uptake rate or higher levels of ICU admissions. These programmes included creating videos in the languages spoken by at-risk communities who are unlikely to be served by traditional channels or information in English or Irish.

For this particular purpose, neither English- nor Irish-language versions of these videos were required. There is an English-language version on the website to act as a reference, but this was not promoted or used as part of the campaign. We are very proud of our partnership with Translate Ireland, which has worked with us to reach people that are not well served by our traditional communications campaigns.

Let me address the provision of services and information in the Irish language, focusing on our Covid-19 communications over the last two years. Our mainstream communications campaign during the pandemic used a wide range of mass media channels to reach the public. Both the English and Irish languages were included in our daily news and media interviews with HSE leaders; social media messages from the HSE; HSE Live, our Covid-19 phone information service; *hse.ie*, the main source of advice and information; advertising campaigns on TV, radio, newspapers, posters and cinemas; Google search advertising and digital advertising on websites and HSE booklets delivered to all households.

The Saolta hospital group has also carried out extensive Irish-language communications during Covid-19, including social media and news media communications and a dedicated section on its website, along with information sheets and walk-through videos for vaccination

centres in Gaeltacht areas.

Members will already be aware that many of the above channels have seen a much greater proportion of Irish-language messaging, since the pandemic began, than our previous norms. We have seen enhanced levels of Irish-language activity on social media and our Covid-19 television and radio adverts were produced in both languages and aired on television on TG4.

The HSE website, *hse.ie*, has been the main source of reliable information for the public and with the support of the HSE Irish-language service, 108 pages of Covid content are provided in Irish. HSE Live, our phone support service, has Irish-speaking operatives to allow registration for the Covid-19 vaccine through Irish.

Substantial HSE information booklets on Covid-19 were produced bilingually and delivered to all households in Ireland in 2020 and again in 2021. Our Covid-19 vaccine information booklets have been produced in English and in Irish from the outset of the programme, with updates to the text and translations being carried out each week since December 2020. These booklets are all available on the HSE website and printed copies are also made available.

We have taken many opportunities to provide an unprecedented level of advertising and patient information through Irish during the pandemic and will extend this to other topics in line with the new legislation. We also acknowledge, as discussed in our November attendance here, that some opportunities to advance our vision for the Irish language as detailed in our strategy have been missed during this period.

We have addressed the availability of our online applications connected to Covid-19, such as the vaccination portal and the systems used to book antigen tests, and to book a vaccine or Covid-19 test in Irish. I am happy to say that all these systems are now available through Irish on *hse.ie*.

Our plans to improve and extend our public information in Irish include providing a high-quality user experience and up-to-date content on the HSE's website. We have begun the process of developing a semi-automated process with a high-quality translation service to ensure accuracy. The initial scope of this project is to enable the HSE website to be multilingual and to provide Covid-19 and Covid-19 vaccination information on *hse.ie* in Irish in the first place. We aim to have this in place by the end of April.

Looking forward, we will ensure we meet the upcoming legislative requirements placed upon us by the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021. This will include appointing a new senior manager to lead the process. The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media has told us it will be in touch with us with regard to the commencement of the new legislation and will run information sessions for public bodies. We look forward to participating fully and to further improving the services we provide in Irish.

**Mr. Robert Watt:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach for the invitation. I will also make my statement in English.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Gabhaim mo leithscéal. An bhfuil an ráiteas seo ar fáil i nGaeilge freisin?

**Ms Jade Pepper:** Beidh sé ar fáil níos déanaí.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** An bhfuil sé ar fáil anois i nGaeilge don choiste lán-Ghaeilge?

**Ms Jade Pepper:** Níl sé ar fáil faoi láthair.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Cén fáth?

**Ms Jade Pepper:** Cheap mé ar dtús go mbeadh príomhaíocht ag an leagan Béarla ós rud é go bhfuil sé á léamh as Béarla ar dtús, ach beidh an leagan Gaeilge ar fáil.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Ní féidir glacadh leis sin. Ba chóir go mbeadh an dá ráiteas os ár gcomhair. Tá sé dona go leor go bhfuil an rud go léir as Béarla agus anois, níl an ráiteas Gaeilge ar fáil.

**Chairman:** Níl ach ráiteas amháin os mo chomhair. Tá ráiteas Paul Reid as Gaeilge agam.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Tá sé léite agam.

**Chairman:** Tá sé sin scaipthe.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Tá a fhios agam ach cá bhfuil an leagan Gaeilge ón Roinn? Níl ach ceann amháin ón Roinn agus tá sé trí Bhéarla. Tá sé admhaithe go mbeidh sé ag teacht.

**Chairman:** Ní bhfuairamar aon leagan go dtí 3 p.m. agus níl ach an leagan Béarla tagtha.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Ní féidir glacadh leis nach bhfuil ráiteas i nGaeilge don choiste Gaeilge. Is masla é.

**Chairman:** Tá súil agam go ndéanfaidh an Roinn nóta de sin.

**Mr. Muiris O'Connor:** Tá sé ag teacht. Tá brón orm go bhfuil sé déanach.

**Mr. Robert Watt:** I am attending with Mr. Muiris O'Connor, assistant secretary in the Department of Health and Ms Jade Pepper, the Department of Health's Irish-language officer. We were invited here, along with our colleagues in the HSE, to discuss the various languages through which the HSE and the Department of Health provide and advertise their services to the public, with particular reference to the Irish language.

This committee has examined our record on the provision of services through Irish in a detailed way in recent sessions which were attended by my colleagues. I acknowledge the feedback we received on foot of those conversations and debates. We have moved to correct mistakes which have occurred in the context of our response to the pandemic and to ensure that our services are available in Irish for those who require it. I am happy to report that, as a Department, we have further strengthened our capacity to manage correspondence and to provide for services in Irish, for those who require or desire it.

Our efforts to incorporate Irish into our response to the Covid pandemic have been examined in detail by the committee during the most recent meeting between officials and this committee. We have learned lessons and we have strengthened our capacity to ensure that the needs of Irish speakers are accommodated in our response to the pandemic.

With regard to digital Covid certificates, a bilingual online portal has been available since August 2021, where people can arrange for changes and corrections to their certificates, among other things. We have seen a substantial take-up of this service, as Gaeilge, by members of the public since its launch, with thousands of citizen interactions with our service centre and online webchat.

With regard to public health notices and health promotion materials, I can confirm that the Department made every effort to fulfil the obligations of the Official Languages Act 2003 during an extremely challenging time for the Department. All printed materials created by the Department were available bilingually at the same time.

The Department regularly posted public health advice across social channels in Irish and in English and statements from the Chief Medical Officer and deputy chief medical officer, outlining and reiterating the public health advice, were available bilingually on the Department's website soon after publication. All printed advertisements placed in regional and national newspapers by the Department were also available bilingually. The Department's press office continues to provide a service in Irish to Irish-language media.

In our commitment to health service improvement and to the implementation of Sláintecare reforms, we will have opportunities to refresh our approach to the delivery of services in Irish and in other languages besides English. In the coming week, the Minister, Deputy Stephen Donnelly, will be bringing a plan to the Government for the introduction of regional health areas.

A key objective of the regional health areas is to ensure the delivery of health and social care services consistent with the needs and requirements of the local population. It is envisaged that this will permit a fresh approach to the provision of services in Irish and in other languages consistent with the evolving requirements of households and communities at regional level.

As accounting officer of the Department of Health, I ensure that my officials are aware of all their responsibilities, including as regards the provision of services in Irish. I am satisfied that this is an area in which we, as a Department, have been able to greatly improve over recent years and we are now in a position where we can manage all departmental business through Irish or English, as desired. We learned a lot through the pandemic and learned from our mistakes.

We are committed to working with the HSE, in particular, to ensure that health service reform takes sufficient account of language needs in the design and roll-out of services. I look forward to engaging with the committee.

**Chairman:** Is é sin an dá ráiteas thosaigh. An bhfuil ceisteanna ag na Teachtaí? Cé atá ag iarraidh tús a chur leis? An bhfuil an Teachta McHugh ag tosú inniu?

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Níl. Fan go bhfeicfimid an bhfuil duine ar bith ag fanacht le focal a rá i dtús báire.

**Chairman:** Tá lámh an Teachta Moynihan in airde.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Níl ach ceist amháin agam. Gabhaim buíochas leis na finnéithe as an gcur i láthair agus an t-eolas a bhí ann. Tuigim go raibh na húdaráis dírithe ar ghrúpaí faoi leith nach raibh an t-éileamh céanna ar an vacsaín uathu. B'fhéidir go raibh siad buartha mar gheall ar an vacsaín agus nach raibh an t-éileamh ann dá bharr. Bhí na húdaráis ag díriú isteach ar na grúpaí sin ach go háirithe. Cad iad na grúpaí gur dhírigh FSS isteach orthu? An bhféadfaí iad a aithint dúinn?

**Mr. Paul Reid:** I will make a couple of quick remarks and then ask Dr. Fitzgerald to provide an update. I will mention again where our focus was. We had very good information based on geography and population across the country but, as we reached high levels of vaccine uptake



in the primary programme, we became concerned about vulnerable groups and non-Irish groups in particular. Our approach involved a number of languages, which my colleague will outline. While, as I said in my opening statement, we targeted particular languages, I acknowledge that we recorded a version in English, which was put up on our site. In hindsight, we should have recorded an Irish version as well. However, as Dr. Fitzgerald will outline, the target population was very clear because of the vulnerabilities and exposure among those groups. We did make progress through that communications campaign. I will ask Dr. Fitzgerald to list the specific groups.

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach. In our national office for social inclusion, our remit includes those who are socially marginalised or excluded from mainstream society. This includes groups such as Travellers, Roma, people in direct provision, homeless people, people affected by addiction and irregular migrants. In the course of our work during the Covid pandemic, we saw how much Covid outbreaks were affecting those who are most excluded and who are, as I used to say, not necessarily watching the news on RTÉ at night or reading the mainstream media. When the roll-out of the vaccination campaign started, we were acutely aware that we needed to think outside the box. I wrote a paper with my colleagues in mid-2021 highlighting how we needed to reach out to vulnerable migrants. Even though we knew there was a focus on giving people access to vaccination based on medical vulnerability in line with the advice of the national immunisation advisory committee, NIAC, we knew that not everyone in society could get access easily and that a pathway needed to be opened for several of these groups. Access issues could relate to language, physical distance, the lack of a car, distrust in society or distrust in the vaccination message. Through our research and on-going work, we could see that the level of uptake of vaccination among some communities in Ireland, particularly multi-ethnic communities, was very low even as their cohorts were offered vaccination. That was the main driver of the production of these videos.

The first indication that we needed to do something different was that pregnant women were very hesitant to take up vaccination. Our colleagues on the ground, and GPs in particular, who were already working with Translate Ireland, an organisation that started up after the beginning of the Covid pandemic, suggested that we produce video material in the languages of certain communities, especially the languages of eastern Europeans, Brazilians and people coming from Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, to be delivered by healthcare workers from their own countries so that they could hear the voices of their own communities. We felt that written material did not suit these communities and that they had to be given something they could see and hear in a video or multimedia format, that is, something that could be shared on WhatsApp. They were our main motivations.

The languages we initially picked were Arabic, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Romanian and Urdu. We then moved on to Lithuanian, Polish, Ukrainian, Georgian, Somali, Czech and Slovak. Ukrainian was added latterly to meet the needs of the Ukrainian community that has just arrived. We picked the top 11 languages based on the numbers of people we had in the community and the numbers of people in direct provision, another group that was greatly affected by the Covid pandemic. We picked a mixture. Obviously, not all ethnic minorities are excluded socially but many work in low-paid industries. We picked the languages based on the communities, their context and the hesitancy and lack of access that we could see from our statistics. English was picked as an audit tool to make sure we knew that what we were translating was correct. That is why we did not look at doing one for the Irish-speaking community at that point.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Tuigim go raibh na figiúirí ag rá nach raibh éileamh ó ghrúpaí ar leith. Luaigh an Dr. Fitzgerald cuid de na grúpaí sin, mná a bhí ag iompar clainne ina measc. Díreimid isteach air sin. An ndearna FSS video don ghrúpa sin ach go háirithe? Tuigim ó na figiúirí go raibh easpa éilimh i measc ban a bhí ag iompar clainne. Más rud é go ndearna, cén teanga ina ndearnadh é sin? Cén saghas figiúirí a bhí ann i gcomhair an ghrúpa sin i gcomparáid leis na grúpaí eile, an pobal Polannach nó an pobal Rúiseach mar shampla?

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** I do not have those figures to hand. We knew that there was a hesitancy among pregnant women in the wider community. There were some difficult times in getting the message across. However, with regard to the migrant groups, clinicians expressed a view that there was a need to make it easy-----

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Táimid ag díriú ar ghrúpaí nach raibh éileamh uathu ar an vacsaín. Tuigim ó na finnétithe go raibh FSS dírithe ach go háirithe ar ghrúpaí nár theastaigh uathu an vacsaín a ghlacadh. Ba cheann de na grúpaí sin na mná a bhí ag iompar clainne. Shamhlóinn go mbeadh an céatadán céanna Gaeilgeoirí i measc ban atá ag iompar clainne agus atá ann i measc an phobail i gcoitinne. Mar sin, dá mba rud go raibh FSS ag díriú ar dhaoine nach raibh éileamh uathu, shamhlóinn go mbeadh ábhair curtha ar fáil sna teangacha atá oiriúnach dóibh. An ndearna FSS aon video i gcomhair an phobail a bhí ag iompar clainne? An ndearnadh é sin as Gaolainn nó as Béarla?

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** We made a range of videos for pregnant women, antenatal women, women who were breastfeeding and people with the top ten primary health conditions.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Cén teanga ina raibh siad?

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** We did them in eight languages, focusing on those people coming into the country and especially on those in direct provision and those for whom-----

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Cad faoi mhná Éireannacha a bhí ag iompar clainne agus mná eachtrannacha a bhfuil Gaolainn acu, mar níl sé teoranta go dtí Éireannaigh? Feicimid inár scoileanna go bhfuil Gaolainn ag daoine ó gach cearn den domhan. Rinne FSS video i gcomhair ban a bhí ag iompar clainne in ocht dteanga éagsúla ach ní dhearna sí ceann as Gaolainn. An é sin atá á rá? An bhféadfaí soiléiriú a thabhairt air sin?

**Mr. Paul Reid:** Our primary route with regard to communicating with pregnant women has generally been clinical pathways through their consultant at the hospital they would have been attending. I can clarify, through Mr. Brennock, if we made specific videos for pregnant women. However, our primary route for pregnant women, which worked through the process was at their appointments and generally as they were coming through their clinical pathways. Mr. Canavan might want to confirm this. I am not certain we made dedicated videos in English or any other language for pregnant women but I ask Mr. Brennock, our communications manager, to clarify that.

**Mr. Mark Brennock:** I do not believe we did. My apologies, as I have not understood all of the exchange, but as Dr. Fitzgerald said, the particular groups in whose languages the videos were made were selected arising from statistics from the Central Statistics Office and elsewhere and were related to people who were not accessing communication as normal via their clinicians or mainstream sources. There was not seen to be a need to make videos of this type in English or Irish. Dr. Fitzgerald has explained the reason one video was made in English and put on the website. However, it was not promoted or used as part of a campaign to pregnant

English-speaking women.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Tuigim go raibh na fiseáin déanta chun díriú ar ghrúpaí nach raibh éileamh acu ar an vacsaín.

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** We had concerns when hospital admissions and admissions to intensive care were higher and were notable among those who were not vaccinated and in pregnancy. We worked mostly with doctors from the migrant communities, in this instance, to produce short videos that could explain to the communities the advantages and the importance of the vaccination in case they did not pick it up from mainstream media.

Out of that initiative, we developed a series of videos, including on how to get a GP, how to apply for a medical card and what happens when one is pregnant. We did these in other languages in order that people from those communities who were not able to access mainstream health services could do so. We agreed the wording with the national immunisation office and HSE communications. It was aligned with the general communication for most of the population but it was an extra measure for people who did not pick up on the excellent messages that were out on radio, television and the media.

**Mr. Tony Canavan:** I will confirm the arrangement for communication with women during pregnancy. During Covid, we were particularly trying to target vaccination through their clinicians. Information was provided to consultant obstetricians and the antenatal staff who were meeting regularly with patients on a regular basis in order that they would use those meetings as an opportunity to promote the uptake of the vaccine.

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** We provided the video translations for clinicians to use. The translation was delivered by a Russian or French doctor and then we advertised to our GP colleagues through the Irish College of General Practitioners and told them to look at it. The main driver for the initiative, called “my health, my language”, came from GPs and advocates in the community who wanted better messaging for migrant communities. GPs and clinicians were encouraged to go to this video and show it and share it on WhatsApp. They were told that this was what they should tell their patients. That was the freagra.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Is é an rud a thuigim ná go raibh grúpa faoi leith a raibh éileamh íseal aige ar an vacsaín agus go raibh slite difriúla a raibh na finnéithe ag teagmháil le daoine, cuid acu a raibh teangacha difriúla acu.

**Chairman:** Tá cúpla ceist agam agus tá deis ag daoine eile teacht isteach. Luaigh na finnéithe na fiseáin. Glacaim leis go raibh póstaer agus a leithéid ar fáil á gcur an teachtaireacht seo trasna chomh maith i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge nó á gcur ábhar eile trasna. An raibh na póstaer nó na bileoga ar fáil i ngach uile ionaid nó áite dochtúra timpeall na tíre as Béarla agus as Gaeilge?

**Mr. Paul Reid:** Any publication we set out throughout Covid was in both Irish and English and distributed nationally to the regional health areas and communities and acute services. I will labour the point a small bit. With regard to the focus of the videos, in particular, we were acting on clinical feedback and advice we were getting about vulnerable groups, especially those in ICU. I do not want to go into too much detail on it but there was strong feedback from intensivists and consultants in ICU about migrant communities and their particular exposure. It was a very driven and focused initiative to reduce risk and that is where the risk was.

**Chairman:** Ó thaobh na fógraíochta i gcoitinne sa phaindéim, ghlac Paul Reid leis go raibh

fadhbanna ó thaobh an cur chuige seo. Maidir leis na figiúirí atá agam ó mhí Mhárta go dtí Meán Fómhair 2020 faoi chaiteachas an FSS ar fhógraíocht i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge ar theilifís, raidió, na meáin shóisialta agus na nuachtáin, tá difríocht shuntasach ann. Ó thaobh fógraí raidió de, caitheadh breis agus €1 milliún sa tréimhse sin ar fhógraí raidió. As sin, ní raibh ach €5,600 caite ar fhógraí raidió as Gaeilge. Ar an teilifís, bhí €1.4 milliún caite ar fhógraíocht i gcoitinne agus ní raibh ach €40,000 nó mar sin caite ar fhógraí as Gaeilge. Ar na meáin shóisialta, caitheadh €135,000 ar fhógraí as Béarla agus sa tréimhse sin, de réir na bhfigiúirí a dtugadh dúinn, níor caitheadh pingin ar fhógraí as Gaeilge. Níor cuireadh fógraí as Gaeilge sna nuachtáin de réir na bhfigiúirí a dtugadh dúinn. Ó thaobh Twitter de, ní raibh ach breis agus 4% de na postálacha a rinne FSS as Gaeilge. Níl a fhios agam ar tháinig feabhas air sin sa chéad tréimhse eile. Níl a fhios agam an bhfuil aitheantas ann anois ar an dualgas breise atá agus a bheidh ar FSS amach anseo toisc an reachtaíocht nua a ritheadh le déanaí, Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Leasú), 2021, faoin gcaiteachas ar fhógraí as Gaeilge agus an líon ar gá dóibh a shroicheadh. Níl na figiúirí ná a leithéid agam ó thaobh na Roinne féin. Níl a fhios agam an raibh an caiteachas ar an méid céanna. Má tá na figiúirí ag Jade Pepper, an féidir léi iad a roinnt linn?

**Ms Jade Pepper:** Níl an caiteachas deighilte idir Ghaeilge agus Bhéarla. Is féidir linn é sin a leanúint agus teacht ar ais chuig an gCathaoirleach maidir leis sin. Tá na figiúirí maidir le caiteachas ar acmhainní Gaeilge agus ar aistriúcháin anseo, más mian leis an gcoiste. Tá deighilt mhór idir 2020 agus 2021 agus is féidir a rá, toisc go raibh i bhfad níos mó ábhar le heisiúint i rith na bliana seo caite, gurbh é sin an chúis a bhí leis an gcaiteachas. Ag deireadh 2021, tháinig an méid sin chuig €105,502.19. Is é sin an figiúr iomlán a caitheadh ar an nGaeilge anuraidh i dtaobh acmhainní fógraíochta, aistriúcháin agus oiliúna sa teanga fosta. Más rud é go bhfuil briseadh síos níos sonraí ag teastáil, is féidir liom na figiúirí sin a lorg ach is é sin an caiteachas ina iomlán ar an nGaeilge in 2021.

**Chairman:** Más féidir in aon chor é sin a chur ar aghaidh chugainn-----

**Ms Jade Pepper:** Is féidir cinnte.

**Chairman:** -----ionas gur féidir linn é a chur a chur i gcomparáid leis an bhfeidhmeannacht-----

**Ms Jade Pepper:** Más féidir liom cur leis sin, le toil an Chathaoirligh, in 2020, bhí iomlán de €33,961.48 i gceist. Is méadú mór é sin idir é sin agus €105,000. Is féidir a rá toisc na paidéime go raibh tuilleadh ábhar á n-eisiúint i measc na sluaite ábhar eile ach fós is méadú suntasach mór é sin i gcomparáid le 2020.

**Chairman:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an bhfinné. Bhí an cheist sin dírithe ar na finnéithe eile freisin. Tá an cheist seo faoin gcaiteachas a tháinig feabhas air, idir na figiúirí a léigh mé amach ó Mhárta agus Mheán Fómhair 2020, agus le linn na paidéime ina dhiaidh sin, suas go dtí anois. An bhfuil fás tar éis teacht ar an méid airgid atá á chaitheamh ó thaobh fógraíochta as Gaeilge de agus an bhfuil níos mó ann ná mar a bhí? Bhí sé tubaisteach ag tús na tréimhse sin. Bhí gach duine faoi bhrú ach, fós féin, tá pobal ann le Gaeilge, cibé gurbh í an chéad teanga atá acu nó go bhfuil siad á foghlaim, agus tá sé de cheart acu fógraí a fheiceáil ina dteanga féin, go háirithe nuair atá na húdaráis sláinte ag brú nó ag impí ar pháistí nó ar chlanna nithe a dhéanamh. Mura bhfeiceann siad go bhfuil sé sin ag teacht ón Stát sa teanga is dual dóibh, uaireanta cuidíonn sé sin chun iad a scaradh amach ón gcóras Stáit.

**Mr. Paul Reid:** If I understand the Cathaoirleach correctly, the figures that he has are from March to September 2020. We can provide the updated figures through to 2021 but, like my

colleagues in the Department, I would stress that we had a very seriously enhanced investment in communications in both languages throughout 2021 where we can demonstrate a very significant increase in spending. We can provide those overall figures to the committee.

I want to acknowledge that we got many learnings in the area about Covid-19 but particularly in respect of our communications throughout 2020. We have strengthened and upped our game in 2021.

I want to return to the earlier part of the Cathaoirleach's question to ourselves on respecting our obligations under the Act. We have obviously not done ourselves justice throughout and have not done enough in meeting our obligations on this issue and, certainly, in the context of the new Act, with Cuimín Mac Aodha Bhuí and all the rest of the team, I want us to embrace it in a better way. I have seen where it works well and I came from a role in Fingal County Council where we put a particular plan in place and it very much galvanised the workforce who embraced it. It is something I am very anxious, through our communications director, Mr. Brennock, to embrace, not just in order to meet our obligations, but to try also to get people active and encouraged in the language, including myself obviously.

**Chairman:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an bhfinné. Tá ceisteanna eile agam mar gheall ar an dara cuid den ábhar a bhí á dhéanamh againn inniu agus is é sin na teangacha ina láithríonn FSS agus an Roinn a gcuid seirbhísí don phobal. Tá a fhios agam go raibh a lán stró ar dhaoine faoin todhchaí agus go bhfuil aitheantas ann anois go mba chóir go mbeadh seirbhísí ar fáil ar gach uile leibhéal do Ghaeilgeoirí agus, go háirithe, do pháistí le Gaeilge lena leithéidí de sheirbhísí mar theiripe teanga.

Fuair mé litir ó bhean inniu a bhí ag iarraidh an cárta leighis a bhí aici a fháil as Gaeilge. Chuir sí iarratas isteach i mí na Samhna anuraidh agus chuir sí an t-eolas isteach trí huairé as Gaeilge agus níl cárta leighis nua fós eisithe chuici. Tá a fhios againn go bhfuil fadhbanna ann ach nuair a chloistear rudaí mar sin, cuireann sé sin stró ar dhaoine agus casann siad ar an mBéarla. Ní cóir go mbeadh ar aon saoránach casadh ar theanga den dá theanga oifigiúla nach bhfuil siad sásta léi agus, go háirithe, más í an teanga náisiúnta, an Ghaeilge. Ba chóir go mbeadh an córas in ann déileáil leo as Gaeilge chomh tapa agus is féidir nó níos tapúla i gcás na Gaeilge toisc gurb í an teanga náisiúnta. Cad é an t-athrú nó an bealach atá ag an dá dhream atá os comhair an chomhchoiste inniu chun tabhairt faoi na seirbhísí seo agus a dhéanamh cinnte de go bhfuil siad ar fáil as sa bhliain atá romhainn agus amach anseo?

**Mr. Paul Reid:** I can respond, first, to that question. I am disappointed to hear about the woman with the medical card, in particular, because we have in our Primary Care Reimbursement Service, PCRS, centre in Finglas in north Dublin dedicated people who support the processing of medical cards in Irish so I am quite happy to take that case up separately for the Cathaoirleach. We have some dedicated focus there to support those applications as Gaeilge.

Specifically on what we are going to do and as I mentioned in my opening statement, from our perspective we are working closely with the Department. First, we will appoint someone at a senior level to support the services in respect of raising our game and our communications in respect of the Irish language. We also want to strengthen the interface with an Coimisinéir Teanga in getting good advice from that office about who how we can improve this. We want to put in supports for both the community and acute services as they communicate outwards and do so directly themselves in many communications. We plan to put certain training in place at all stages to promote the Irish language where people will be encouraged to take up Irish-language courses.



The provision of the Irish language on our website and in all of our communications is something that we are going to strengthen further. As I said in my opening statement, we now have 108 pages but we want to ensure that we have an equivalence also.

Those are some of the actions, Cathaoirleach, that we are setting out to do and if it is okay I will ask my colleague, Mark Brennock, to add to this on some of the actions that we plan to take, unless the Department wishes to contribute separately before him.

**Mr. Robert Watt:** If I may come in, please, just before Mr. Brennock's contribution, just to add to what Mr. Reid has said in respect of the Department itself. The services that the Department provides are modest in the context of the services that the HSE provides to citizens. As I set out in my opening statement, we are making efforts now to improve our compliance and our obligations, as mentioned by the Cathaoirleach, under the new Act. We have increased awareness among staff and provide workshops for colleagues so that they are aware of their obligations. We are providing more supports to colleagues who want to improve their language skills, to learn the language and to become more proficient. We have also increased the number of fluent speakers in the Department who are able to converse and correspond in Irish. We have a very clear commitment now that people who want to correspond or speak to colleagues in Irish, that that is available to them. From all of the feedback that I am hearing, that is going reasonably well. Obviously, the scale of the challenges that we face as a Department are easier to manage than those which Mr. Reid would face in providing the whole variety of health services through Irish. It is easier in the Department and we are making strides, as are other Government Departments. As I hear from other colleagues, Departments are embracing this legislation and their obligations and are doing their best.

It is very much through that culture that people will be aware and be encouraged to engage in Irish, to improve their skills and to feel that they are being supported by the Department in doing that.

**Mr. Mark Brennock:** I thank the Chairman. I will mention a number of points on changes that we have made and on things that we are proposing to do. This is not to try to say that we are doing a terrific job but it is in line with what the chief executive has said, which is that we are committed to fulfilling our obligations and to serving Irish-speaking communities considerably better than we have done in the past.

The last time we met, in November, a number of members expressed disappointment and concern at the fact the SwiftQueue system for booking Covid-19 vaccinations was available in English only. Since 1 February, it has been available in Irish and in English. We are currently putting in place fairly extensive infrastructure to allow our website to be bilingual. We are focusing in the first instance on providing the information on Covid-19 and the vaccine on *hse.ie* in Irish. That work is under way and will be complete by May 2022.

We will then progress to broader translation of our public website. There are many tens of thousands of pages on our website, so we are not aiming to have the full website translated into Irish, but we are putting in place a project towards broader translation of the website.

More broadly, as the chief executive has said, the Department of the Gaeltacht has written to us. We are going to engage with it on the new legislation and attend the workshops and seminars it is going to hold about implementing the language standards to make sure we do it well over a period of time not just to remain in line with legislation, although of course we will be in line with legislation, but to serve the patients and service users who speak Irish both in

Irish-speaking communities and elsewhere.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Tá cúpla ceist agam. Ní raibh mé ag éisteacht go foirfe ach an raibh an Rómáinis i measc na dteangacha a bhí i gceist ó thaobh na seirbhísí agus fiseáin a aistriódh a raibh na finnéithe ag labhairt fúthu?

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** Yes. We were very concerned about the Roma communities. At the Deputy will know, they are very hidden. They are in many parts of Ireland. Many of them are in rural communities. With the best will in the world, we are still concerned about the low levels of vaccine uptake in the Roma community. It was one of the first of the migrant communities about which we were deeply concerned because of the high rates of death and admission to intensive care in the community, including among pregnant members. There is a high rate of chronic disease in that population and members are at high risk of complications arising from Covid. We found that in the first, second, third and fourth waves. That was one of the first languages we worked on and our concern for this community was one of our drivers or motivating factors in doing this because members of this community are generally not literate. Some are but quite a number are not literate in their own language, Romanian. We therefore felt it was better to have somebody speaking. That goes for some of the other communities that have come into Ireland from the refugee population as well. Many people in our refugee communities do not write in, for example, Arabic. That was very big driver of our first round of videos.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Tá suas le 13 duine ón Úcráin lonnaithe in óstán i Málainn inniu nach bhfuil Béarla acu. Cén straitéis atá ag FSS le nasc a chruthú leis na daoine sin ón Úcráin nach bhfuil Béarla acu? An bhfuil duine ó FSS i dteagmháil leo ar an talamh istigh sa cheantar?

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** As the Deputy will know, in some cases we are running to stand still. This is a rapidly evolving situation. The HSE website is the first port of call. The address is [www.hse.ie/ukraine](http://www.hse.ie/ukraine). On that page, there are multiple resources in Ukrainian and Russian. We are also reaching out to the Ukrainian medical community and the Ukrainian community in general. Mr. Reid is overseeing a large HSE response. We have multiple work streams. Within social inclusion, we have social inclusion managers and workers at local level reaching out to those in the communities and in accommodation provided by the international protection accommodation services of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The challenge is that there are more than 120 new accommodation facilities for Ukrainians. They are in many rural parts of the country, including in some hotels that have never had experience of being a direct provision facility. We are working hard with our partners in Government and in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Mr. Reid is probably also working with local authorities and the Civil Defence. There are multiple ways to engage, including through NGOs. At primary care level, there is a significant initiative in place to support GPs. The HSE has rapidly developed an interpretation and translation service that will also be available on the ground.

**Mr. Paul Reid:** We have a group, which I chair and which meets once a week, overseeing the complete response from the HSE. That includes all of the services Dr. Fitzgerald has outlined. We have appointed a national public health lead to interface with all of the services because there are obviously certain public health needs, which we have already identified. I do not want to be seen to be profiling but one of the immediate public health needs we have seen is the low uptake of immunisation and vaccination among people from many eastern European countries. I refer not only to Covid vaccination, but also to other immunisation programmes. That is one but there are other areas we have already identified. The route to market or how to address these issues is through the group of senior officials from across Departments, which

also meets weekly. We take general direction from that group but, ultimately, our interface is through our services in the community and reaching populations, particularly the Ukrainian populations that have been placed in quite rural locations in these early stages. There is great demand on our services right now.

**Mr. Muiris O'Connor:** Is féidir liom cur leis sin. Thar cheann an chórais sláinte, tá whole-of-government approach i leith na hÚcráine mórthimpeall na Ranna éagsúla. Tá eolas ar fáil ar an Idirlíon ar *gov.ie/ukraine*. Tá eolas ansin ar na tacaíochtaí agus seirbhísí, seirbhísí sláinte san áireamh, atá ar fáil. Tá interdepartmental approach á thógáil agus tá an córas sláinte ag díriú isteach mar chuid den interdepartmental response sin.

**Chairman:** Tá Tony Canavan ag iarraidh teacht isteach sula-----

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Tá brón orm as cur isteach ach an bhfuil fóin phóca ag na daoine ón Úcráin? An bhfuil sé sin ar fáil dóibh?

**Mr. Muiris O'Connor:** De réir mar a thuigim, faigheann siad SIM card, fón póca agus PPSN. Ansin, bíonn an t-eolas roinnte agus coimeádtar i dteagmháil leo. Tá an management den rud ar fad live.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** An bhfuil duine ar fáil ar an talamh? Is cinnte go bhfuil FSS faoi bhrú leis na seirbhísí éagsúla. Is fíor é sin. Nílím ag caint faoi dhuine ó FSS nó ón Roinn Sláinte amháin ach faoi dhuine ón tseirbhís phoiblí. An bhfuil bearna ann? An bhfuil deis ann? Dúirt an Dr. Fitzgerald go bhfuil 120 ionad i gceist timpeall na tíre. An bhfuil duine amháin de dhíth fá choinne achan ionad? Táim ag caint faoi dhuine ón HSE gur féidir leis nó léi teagmháil a dhéanamh leis an Department of Social Protection nó an Roinn Oideachais fá choinne leanaí? An bhfuil bearna ann? An bhfuil duine ar fáil fá choinne sin? Táim ag smaoineamh faoin 13 duine san óstán-----

**Chairman:** Tabharfaidh mé deis do Tony Canavan teacht isteach. Tá muidne ag dul ar strae ón ábhar. B'fhéidir go mbeidh an Comhchoiste um Shláinte nó dream éigin eile ag cur as dom. B'fhéidir go mbeidh Tony Canavan in ann roinnt freagraí a thabhairt dúinn.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Tá sé seo práinneach.

**Chairman:** Tuigim. Níl mé ag iarraidh srian----

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Is é sin ár dtríail mar pholaiteoirí-----

**Chairman:** Tá a fhios ag an Teachta-----

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Cad é an focal Gaeilge fá choinne “digress”?

**Chairman:** Tá na rialacha faoi na Cathaoirligh ar eolas ag an Teachta. Tabharfaidh mé deis do Tony Canavan ach anois is féidir le Robert Watt dul ar aghaidh.

**Mr. Robert Watt:** We can come back separately on the wider question. I appreciate it is not exactly within the remit of this committee but we will come back to the Deputy on that.

**Mr. Tony Canavan:** Níl mórán le rá agam. Táimid ag déanamh comhoibrithe i ngach contae leis na comhairlí contae agus ag obair leo chun seirbhís sláinte iomlán a chur ar fáil. Tá an scéal ag athrú gach lá. Tá sé ina early days, fós. Táimid ag comhoibriú leis na comhairlí contae chun breathnú ar an scéal gach lá agus céard ar cheart do na seirbhísí sláinte a chur ar fáil maidir

le seirbhísí oiriúnacha do dhaoine i ngach contae. Tá an Dr. Fitzgerald á rá liom anois go bhfuil duine éigin ó na seirbhísí sláinte ag an aerfort nuair atá na daoine ag teacht isteach. Tá eolas ar fáil acu ó na seirbhísí sláinte ansin.

**Chairman:** Tá brón orm cur as don Teachta, ach tá a fhios aige go mbaineann an choiste seo leis an nGaeilge agus le cúrsaí Gaeilge

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Tá ceist bhunúsach bhreise agam faoin nGaeilge.

**Chairman:** Fadhb ar bith.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Mar atá a fhios ag na finnétithe, tá cathair na Gaillimhe agus Leitir Ceanainn ina mbailte seirbhíse. Tá sé sin faoi rialachán agus clúdaithe faoi rialachán. Tá An Garda Síochána tar éis polasaí agus straitéis ar son na Gaeilge a fhógairt fá choinne An Gharda Síochána i Leitir Ceanainn. Tá mé ag smaoineamh faoin ngrúpa Saolta, a chlúdaíonn an iarthuaisceart ó Ghaillimh go dtí Tír Chonaill agus Inis Eoghain. An bhfuil nasc idir FSS, Saolta, Roinn na Gaeltachta agus An Garda Síochána faoin nGaeilge a spreagadh? Tá na finnétithe ag labhairt faoin nGaeilge a spreagadh. Tá deis mhór in otharlann na Gaillimhe agus in otharlann Leitir Ceanainn mar tá níos mó daoine lonnaithe sna ceantair Ghaeltachta amhail Carna nó Gaoth Dobhair agus tá siadsan ag obair san ospidéal. An bhfuil comhrá ann faoi sin? An bhfuil straitéis fhoirmiúil ón dream Saolta fá choinne na Gaeilge a spreagadh in otharlann Leitir Ceanainn agus in otharlann na Gaillimhe?

**Mr. Tony Canavan:** Nílím ceangailte le chéile. Is smaoineamh maith é sin ach níl an ceangal sin againn, fós. Aithnímid na dualgais atá orainn faoin Acht agus na dualgais atá ag teacht ón Acht chomh maith.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Cuirfidh mé ceist dhifriúil nó tabharfaidh mé moladh difriúil. An bhfuil na finnétithe oscailte fá choinne scéim phíolótach maidir le ceangal idir gach dream éagsúil chun an Ghaeilge a spreagadh agus a úsáid? Bheadh na daoine a bhfuil Gaeilge acu ó Rann na Feirste agus Chonamara ina gceannairí chun an Ghaeilge a bhogadh nó a chur chun cinn.

**Mr. Tony Canavan:** Is cinnte go bhfuilimid oscailte.

**Chairman:** An bhfuil sé i gceist an físeán a luaigh mé níos luaithe a aistriú go Gaeilge nó an bhfuil an phráinn a bhí i gceist leis é a chur amach ar dtús báire imithe ag an stad seo? An fiú é a chur ar fáil, mar a bhí ráite maidir leis an bhfíseán Béarla, mar áis ar líne?

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** In retrospect, we should have thought of that and we will do so from now on. We were driven by other motivations but we should and will be more inclusive.

**Chairman:** An gá an ceann atá ann a aistriú ag an stad seo?

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** Some of the videos, we should look at what we have done. We will complete an evaluation of Translate Ireland, the group that did this. We will have an official launch, which we deferred from April. It is coming up. We will bring this back to our working group. There is an openness to it because clinicians will provide the narrative. The budget for this is very low. We did not spend considerable money. It is modest in the extreme. We spent well under €100,000 on everything we have done in the past year. The model-----

**Mr. Paul Reid:** The translation budget.

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** Yes. For the translation part, the model is-----

**Mr. Paul Reid:** I wanted to clarify that.

**Chairman:** Not a cheap video.

**Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald:** -----in a way, low tech or low cost but highly effective. We would be very happy to do it as Gaeilge as well and get the líofacht going in our own dochtúirí agus banaltraí to deliver the message.

**Chairman:** Níl aon cheist ag aon duine eile. Is féidir linn wrap a dhéanamh ar an gcruinniú seo. Tá gach rud críochnaithe. Ba mhaith liom mo-----

*(Interruptions).*

**Chairman:** Tá an Teachta McHugh ag teacht isteach arís.

**Deputy Joe McHugh:** Thar na blianta a chuaigh thart, bhí dúshlán mhóra ann agus ba mhaith liom mo chomhghairdeas agus aitheantas a ghabháil chuig gach duine fá choinne na hoibre tábhachtaí agus na sároibre a rinneadh nuair a bhí siad faoi bhrú ollmhór. Gabhaim buíochas leo ar fad.

**Chairman:** Aontaímid ar fad leis sin. Tá súil againn go bhfuilimid ag teacht tríd an chaos a bhí againn. Is chaos difriúil é atá againn anois. Tá dualgais agus freagrachtaí breise ar gach duine sa saol poiblí de thairbhe an méid atá ag tarlú san Úcráin. Táimid fós, na finnétithe ach go háirithe, ag déileáil le ceisteanna sláinte. Níor chuidigh an t-ionsaí a rinneadh in aghaidh an chórais ríomhaireachta le scéal na Gaeilge ná scéal na sláinte ach oiread. Rinne sé níos deacra iad.

Gabhaim mo bhuíochas agus buíochas an choiste as an gcur chuige ó thaobh na sláinte de. Tá súil agam go mbeimid ag gabháil buíochais leis na finnétithe as an gcur chuige ó thaobh na Gaeilge de amach anseo agus go n-éireoidh níos fearr linn. Tá dul chun cinn á dhéanamh agus déanta agus aithnímid é sin. Críochnóimid an cruinniú le buíochas a ghabháil le Robert Watt, Ard-Rúnaí na Roinne Sláinte agus le Muiris O'Connor agus Jade Pepper a bhí anseo leis. Gabhaim buíochas freisin le Paul Reid, príomhoifigeach feidhmeannach de chuid FSS, an Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald, Tony Canavan agus Cuimín Mac Aodha Bhuí.

Cuireadh an comhchoiste ar athló ar 5.08 p.m. go dtí 1.30 p.m. Dé Céadaoin, an 13 Aibreán 2022.