

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN ROGHCHOISTE UM FHORMHAOIRSIÚ BUISÉID

COMMITTEE ON BUDGETARY OVERSIGHT

Dé Máirt, 27 Feabhra 2018

Tuesday, 27 February 2018

Tháinig an Roghchoiste le chéile ag 4 p.m.

The Select Committee met at 4 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	
Thomas P. Broughan,	
Dara Calleary,	
Lisa Chambers,	
Pearse Doherty,	
Michael McGrath,	
Jonathan O'Brien.	

Teachta / Deputy Colm Brophy sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Business of Select Committee

Chairman: I have received apologies from Deputy Donnelly. A pilot approach to gender budgeting has been adopted in the Revised Estimates for public services 2018, published in December. At last week's session we engaged with officials from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to discuss the general budget indicators that form part of that pilot. Today the committee will meet with representatives from the National Women's Council of Ireland, NWCI, to consider the equality budgeting initiative in greater detail.

Before we invite them into the meeting we are going into-----

Deputy Lisa Chambers: Before we go into private session, I acknowledge the documents I sent this morning from the Fórsa trade union have been circulated. The documents refer to the tax exemption campaign it has undertaken in terms of their union subscriptions. I thank the Chair for circulating the documents and ask if at some point in our discussions of budget 2019 we might have some time to discuss those particular issues.

Chairman: I was delighted to circulate the documents. It is a worthwhile topic the Deputy has raised. We will get a chance to look at that in more detail I hope.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I raised a parliamentary question with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, and he shot it down pretty completely. He cited the review done in 2016. I am happy to share his reply with the Chair and the committee. However, it was a pretty straight shooting down of the proposals.

Chairman: It can form part of our discussion. However, we are the Committee on Budgetary Oversight and we can-----

Deputy Lisa Chambers: We can make recommendations.

Chairman: -----have a right to look at it and make recommendations. I think that will come up. If there is nothing else we will go into private session.

The select committee went into private session at 4.06 p.m. and resumed in public session at 4.16 p.m.

Equality Budgeting Initiative: Discussion

Chairman: Before we begin this session I remind members and witnesses to turn off their mobile phones or at least to put them in airplane mode. Interference from mobile phones affects the sound quality in transmission of the proceedings.

I welcome Eilís Ní Chaithnía, policy co-ordinator and Jennifer McCarthy, head of policy, at the National Women's Council of Ireland, NWCI. I thank them for taking the time to attend our meeting. The purpose of today's meeting is to examine the pilot programme on gender budgeting. After this meeting the committee will prepare a short report on the matter. As part of today's meeting we will focus on the quality indicators used as part of the pilot to measure the progress in each of six Departments, the process used to devise the indicators and the ways in which the pilot project in the Revised Estimates volume can be improved and help to encourage greater use of performance information during the Estimates process.

I draw the attention of witnesses to the fact that they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I invite Ms Ní Chaithnía to make her opening statement now.

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: I thank the Chairman and members of the committee for the invitation to appear before the committee and for the opportunity to comment on the equality budgeting initiative led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and undertaken by six other Departments.

I understand that, all in all, the committee has received three NWCI documents over recent months - our substantive report setting out a proposed framework for gender budgeting in Ireland; a briefing document focusing specifically on what form the Government pilot project should take; and, an instructional tool setting out gender assessment mechanisms that could be adopted in *ex-ante* and *ex-post* analyses with illustrative examples applied to some budget 2018 measures. This final document was presented to high level officials in a briefing supported by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform last year.

I am aware that the Department appeared before the committee last week and has given it an overview of its broad approach and priorities. I will therefore not repeat those but will move directly to the task outlined by the Chairman, to provide an assessment of the pilot initiative. My opening statement involves a broad assessment and obviously, thereafter we are happy to go into detail where we can.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has informed the committee that it has consulted with the National Women's Council of Ireland, NWCI, and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, IHREC, during its process of developing that initiative and we commend Mr. Beausang, Ms Swaine and their colleagues on their efforts to do so. I also welcome the initiative shown by the six Departments that have committed to engage in the pilot process.

As members will be aware, in its working paper the Government committed to prioritising gender as its initial equality focus area in accordance with broad international precedence and due to the relatively wide availability of data. Departments were in the first instance asked to review and assess policies for impact on gender equality and set high-level gender equality objectives and indicators at programme level. Much of the work to assess policies and set high-level gender equality objectives within Departments was in fact done for the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020. Some Departments have done the work to identify specific needs of men relevant to their portfolios. The Department of Health has, for example, identified gender-specific objectives in its men's health action plan. Departments were therefore advised to begin by looking to the commitments they made in the national women's strategy in identifying their goals and objectives for gender budgeting. This strategy can be viewed as a compila-

tion of existing policy commitments already agreed within Departments.

Departments were then asked to report on gender equality, budgetary objectives and targets in the Revised Estimates Volume, REV. At first glance, the identified objectives could be described as underwhelming. It is important, however, to take into account the period of time Departments had to prepare for the REV, the limited training to date made available to relevant officials, the absence of gender expertise within Departments and, as referred to by Mr. Beausang last week, international lessons recommending specificity in the pilot stage. Though close monitoring and critical reflection is essential to the effective implementation of gender budgeting, we must also accept that this will necessarily be a long-term process. Departments must therefore have the opportunity to scope out how best to utilise the tools made available to them and how to concretely apply them. Genuine commitment will be needed to *ex ante*, as well as *ex post*, analysis, for example. I therefore am not inclined to overly criticise the policy decisions evident in the REV at this point but rather to look at how Departments are armed to achieve at least the goals they have set.

In saying this, it is clear that some of the objectives identified are not ambitious and do not adhere to the prescribed approach of the pilot to focus on gender equality. As discussed in last week's committee meeting with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the health goal, for example, is extremely limited when considered in the broad context of health inequalities and gendered health inequalities. While the consideration of age-related and socio-economic inequalities is to be welcomed, the metrics disappointingly do not include sex-disaggregated data, which are available to the Department in this area. This is particularly concerning given that, according to 2017 research commissioned by the Marie Keating Foundation and pharmaceutical company MSD, lung cancer has now replaced breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer fatalities among women in Ireland. Indeed, lung cancer rates among women are expected to increase by 136% by 2040.

To ensure an ambitious process of change, experts have emphasised the importance of maintaining an open process that allows for input and influence from outside Government administration and of providing for a co-ordination structure that can provide critical input and feedback. They have cautioned that gender budgeting processes led solely by the public administration system tend to keep ambitions lower and focus on changes that are easily obtained. In this regard, the proposal by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to establish a steering group involving the NWCI and other external expert actors is to be welcomed. Individual Departments must also be encouraged to provide for public participation in setting equality objectives and the oversight roles of this committee and the select committee will be vital.

The availability of data is clearly critical. Our understanding is that, as part of this pilot process, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has requested that Departments identify and log where data deficiencies exist. We are not aware whether a system has been put in place to assist Departments in this regard or to compile this information. I had a brief conversation with the Department yesterday and as it was not able to confirm that, I suspect that as yet, such a system has not been developed. There has been a changeover of staff there and the Department was unable to clarify my query yesterday. This will be crucial in informing the successful roll-out of gender budgeting in the long term. In June 2017, the Scottish Government published Scotland's equality evidence strategy, which aims to identify the key research and evidence gaps for each protected characteristic and assigns responsibility for closing those gaps. In 2008, Israel amended its statistics law to require collection of gender-disaggregated data.

Progress on the REV equality objectives are to be reported in the public service performance report. For gender budgeting to be effective, the quality of data indicators and analysis will be critical. While, for example, the high-level goal set by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is clearly ambitious, it identified only one gender-specific indicator. In order to fully assess the impact of child care expenditure on gender equality in the medium to long term, qualitative as well as quantitative analysis will be required, as is the case across the board. This will necessitate gender expertise, as well as existing economic and budgetary expertise. Gender expertise is a specialised body of knowledge which is currently lacking within most Departments. In the first instance, the newly established Parliamentary Budget Office could recruit in gender expertise to provide for adequate analysis and to develop guidelines for implementation.

Creating the appropriate context for these pilots remains imperative. An administratively-led process is useful to address micro-level and single-policy economic matters. It is easy, however, to lose sight of macroeconomic policies and fiscal policy in particular. The question of overall fiscal policies and the fiscal space remains crucial to equality in Irish society. Members will have seen that in its document to be released tomorrow, the Parliamentary Budget Office, has also made reference to this. One means by which the Government can appropriately guide Departments in their gender budgeting efforts and provide clear indication of their macro-level priorities *vis-à-vis* equality is to publish an equality budget statement alongside budget 2019. In the medium term, the Government should consider creating a legal foundation for gender budgeting, building upon the existing public sector duty requirements.

Chairman: I thank the witness for her opening statement. We propose to publish it, along with the research report, which was circulated to us. Before I open the floor to members, do either of the witnesses want to contribute anything at this point? If they want to feed into members' questions at any point please do so.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I welcome the NWCI, as well as Senator Higgins, who is in the Public Gallery.

Can the witnesses speak to us about the steering group and tell us what is their understanding of the role that group will have? Have terms of reference been discussed? Will that group be up and running ahead of budget 2019?

We discussed many of the concerns of the witnesses with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform last week. It spoke about six pilot projects, and I believe the committee agreed that those pilots were quite underwhelming, to be diplomatic about it, in terms of the potential impact on gender equality. The witnesses have also suggested that here. In terms of the early stages of our roll-out of gender budgeting versus Scotland or Israel, the two examples mentioned, are we more or less ambitious? How do we compare in terms of the roll-out?

Has the NWCI sought to meet the Parliamentary Budget Office to discuss those issues?

What would the witnesses like to see in budget 2019? We are at the end of February now. What kind of measures would the witnesses like to see in terms of gender budgeting between now and budget 2019?

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: My answer on the Deputy's question about the steering group will be very short, in that we received confirmation just last week that the steering group would be established and that the NWCI would be invited to sit on it. My understanding is that the invitations are with senior level staff and are yet to come to us. Consequently, we do not have details

about the terms of reference as yet. We do not have that detail as yet but the NWC also works quite closely with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission with regard to gender budgeting as well as lots of other issues. We will also be having discussions about what we would like to see the steering group achieve and how it should be run. Those conversations will be ongoing with the Department as well as between the other actors who will be invited to sit on the steering group.

In terms of the goals and objectives of the pilot project being underwhelming, I did make reference to the same issue myself. All I can do at this stage is reiterate the point that it was done in a very short space of time. There was a very limited amount of time given to Departments to identify their goals. While the child care goal is ambitious, many goals are narrow in their focus, particularly those from the Departments of Education and Skills and Health. However, all international expertise would suggest that keeping the focus narrow is useful. At this point, officials are just getting used to looking at budgetary measures from a different perspective. Measures are not just about cost-effectiveness *per se*, although they should be informed by cost-effectiveness, but also about equality. It is about the impact of budgetary measures on equality, which is a different perspective for many officials to take. They need time to get their heads around that, to understand what equality objectives and indicators are and what kind of data they will need. This will also require really strong, solid circulars from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and from the Parliamentary Budget Office, PBO. The latest document produced by the PBO is really useful in that regard. The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 contains a specific commitment to building capacity among officials. Based on international experience, the best way to do that, in addition to circulars and so forth, is to establish a mentoring system. Officials will require ongoing support and there will be details that they will need to thrash out and the best way to do that is through mentoring. I would really like to see the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and Ministers from each Department committing to a mentoring process.

In terms of how we compare to Scotland and Israel, one of the equality budgeting examples used quite a bit by Scotland is around apprenticeships, one of the aforementioned narrow-focus goals. The Scots have been very pleased with progress made. In 2007 only 14% of the 9,000 people on apprenticeship schemes were women. This was identified as a concern during the equality proofing of the budget and the resulting change in policies actually improved the overall take-up of apprenticeships. There were 26,000 placements last year, over 40% of which were taken up by women. Scotland is continuing that equality proofing to increase access to apprenticeships for people with disabilities.

It is important to state a number of points here. I have already mentioned that the Departments were directed towards the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 to look for areas in which they would set their objectives and apprenticeships is one of the issues that is identified in that strategy. In that context, the Department followed the guidance that was given. Apprenticeships tend to be not just a gender issue because apprenticeship schemes are also often targeted at lower-income earners or those from lower-income communities. In that context, there may also be other equality outcomes that the Department has yet to identify that may come about. It seems that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is following the international advice that it has received to date.

On the PBO, we have not yet sought a meeting. However, reference was made in our opening statement to a document on our gender budget assessment exercise which was presented to high-level officials and budget officials in November 2017. The director of the PBO was in

attendance and engaged in the discussion at that time. We received good feedback from those who attended. Other than that, we have had some initial conversations with PBO officials but we have not had a formal meeting yet.

A question was asked about what we would like to see in budget 2019. We would like to see some of the refining that was suggested by the PBO in terms of the technical elements of it happening, which would be very useful. We would also like to see an emphasis on equality outcomes for individuals. We will have to see how the indicators are reported on but one concern is that there may be too much focus on performance outcomes in terms of Department's hitting the targets that they have set in the Revised Estimates volume and not enough focus on whether that equates to equality outcomes for individuals. As yet, I cannot see how Departments are going to do that. We have not seen the *ex-ante* analysis to understand why they came up with particular objectives and indicators so it is not clear how we will find out whether there have been clear equality outcomes for the individuals they have identified. We would also like to see an equality budget statement by the Minister to sit alongside the Budget Statement itself at the end of this year. Interestingly, Sinn Féin published a gender budget statement last year alongside its own budget document which was useful. It pulled out the gender priorities from the budget document, which was a good start. We would like to see other parties doing the same thing because that would encourage the Government to do it too.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I welcome the delegation to this meeting. Is it the case that they had no input into the selection of these indicators?

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: No, not into the selection of the indicators. We had an input into the development of the pilot initiative.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: To take the decision to focus on apprenticeships in the education sector, for example, would the witnesses have preferred a broader look across the sector or other targets?

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: We were one of the organisations that suggested that the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 be used as a baseline or reference document in the first instance. As I mentioned earlier, that seems to have been done by the Department of Education and Skills and others but not by the Department of Health. The guidance of the national strategy was followed in some senses. The NWCI also engages with the Department of Education and Skills and other Departments around these issues. Apprenticeships would be one of the issues upon which we would engage with the Department. We are happy enough at the moment but until we get on to the steering group, the level of influence we can have within each Department is unclear, apart from talking to Ministers about gender budgeting.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: In terms of sport, for example, would the delegation have preferred a broader approach? I take on board the point made about Scotland and apprenticeships in the context of the Department of Education and Skills but would a broader approach have been preferable in the context of sport and the target of increasing female representation at the highest levels of the various sporting bodies?

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: There are two parts to that issue. In terms of setting really ambitious goals, potentially the best place to do that is in the equality budget statement. Then, within the Revised Estimates volume and other budgetary documentation, that could be broken down into a number of high-level goals. In Austria for example, each Department is encouraged to identify five high-level goals. The really broad element might sit well in the equality budget

statement and that could then be broken down into more specific pieces within the Revised Estimates volume. The more specific the objective or goal within the Revised Estimates volume, the more specific the datasets can be. That will allow for greater clarity in reporting.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: In the past we had many poverty budget statements. When the Green Party was in government, a climate statement was delivered alongside the budget but that did not change anything very much. One hopes that there will be delivery on gender proofing in coming budgets when we look back in 2019 rather than just aspirations.

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: The big issue that needs to be re-emphasised when it comes to these processes is that they need to be considered for the long term and they should be approached on a multi-annual basis. Part of the learning from Scotland was that equality budget statements initially referenced what had been achieved in the previous year by the budget but the Scottish administrators are moving to look forward over multiple years and not just backwards and to set longer-term indicators and broad, ambitious goals. They are useful for Departments. The Government and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have decided to attach these to performance budgeting. That is sensible in some ways, in particular, because of the emphasis on accountability, transparency, etc., and on multi-annual planning, and, therefore, it should fit well into that. However, those expecting change will have to expect it over the medium term at least. Last week, Mr. Beausang also referred to the fact that some jurisdictions have suggested that they have not experienced major change yet but gender budgeting has only been practised over the past ten years or so. Even the UK now, in referring to the introduction of the public sector duty, recommends that there needs to be eight years worth of implementation for people to be able to get their heads around it and work more naturally in that way. We have to make sure that we give this time. It will also take commitment that will go far past this Government. There will need to be a political commitment within the Houses as well as within Government to make that happen.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: It should be on a statutory basis.

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: That would be ideal. We have referred to that. Austria, for example, has this in its constitution. The country has made a significant commitment in this regard.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: I would like to go back to apprenticeships. Ms Ní Chaithnía mentioned it was part of the Scottish model. She has seen the indicator the Department was looking at, which was bland. Just 300 females have been involved in apprenticeships but it does not dig into the data regarding how many of them completed apprenticeships, went on to full-time employment, and secured mortgages on the back of that. The indicator is not useful in collecting data but data will be key to the roll-out of this process. Chapter 6 of the NWCI's paper refers to consideration of legislative initiatives. Some countries have enacted legislation that sets requirements for public authorities. Does the organisation favour the introduction of legislation?

Reference was made to the importance of membership-based NGOs in this process and the template used in Scotland as best practice. Will Ms Ní Chaithnía elaborate on that?

I presume the advisory group will play a key role. Ms Ní Chaithnía said that we do not know what impact that will have and what its terms of reference will be. If it was left open to the NWCI, what form should the group take? What teeth and powers should it have? What areas should it examine? Ms Ní Chaithnía said the process would take time to bed down and there is no quick fix in this regard but there is no point in setting up an advisory group if it is

not able to give good advice based on evidence. There is a lack of available data according to all the documentation I have read. How can that be addressed?

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnúa: Data availability is one of the key issues and it is not just a key issue for Ireland. It has been a key issue across the world and that is why other jurisdictions have either introduced strategies to address that or they have amended legislation, which was mentioned in our opening statement. That will be a process as well. One of the issues is we have not seen the *ex-ante* analysis as to why particular objectives and indicators have been identified. We do not know how Departments are being guided in identifying what data they should use in the first instance and then what data gaps are evident to them and are causing obstacles for them in making their assessments. There is an issue around transparency in understanding how the process is being moved forward or facilitated by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. I do not wish to overly criticise the Department because it has been committed to this process but I would like to see that detail. As part of our involvement on the steering group, I expect to see some of that documentation and assess it.

With regard to participation, Spanish regions, for example Andalusia, have introduced public participation processes that have been effective in developing budgets but I am not sure that Ireland is anywhere near that. The type of reform that has been undertaken as part of our budgetary reform process has led to more transparency and greater accountability, etc., but even the role of parliamentary committees, for example, and their ability to influence our budgetary process is not to the standard of Scotland. One of the reasons behind that is until recently Scotland only had the opportunity to focus on expenditure and did not have responsibilities in respect of revenue and, therefore, it might have been a more comfortable environment in which to allow parliamentary comment than previously. We are still at the point where even parliamentary oversight has not reached the stage we would like it to. We would very much like much greater public engagement and participation in the budgetary process but I am not sure we are there yet. In the first instance, engaging with established organisations rather than the public would be the best way to go about it. There are pillars, for example, the community and voluntary pillar, which comprises large organisations that have a social justice, equality perspective, that often focus on economic issues. They are being engaged on a range of issues related to the budget and they should be invited to participate more closely in the process.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: What will be the composition of the advisory group?

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnúa: Apart from ourselves and IHREC, I do not yet have an idea of that. What the NWCI would like is not simply to have organisations but to have other expertise on the group. For example, I do not know if the committee has met Dr. Sheila Quinn but she is a leading international expert on gender budgeting. By and large, she is based in Ireland when she is not flying around the world to advise other jurisdictions on what they should do around gender budgeting. We have some serious expertise in Ireland, particularly in the area of gender and economics but also in the area of equality and economics. There are some heavy hitters, who could do some good on that steering committee. We will have those conversations with the Department and we will make those suggestions to officials.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Cuirim fáilte roimh na finnétithe and I thank them for their presentation and the documents they submitted prior to the meeting. Previous speakers asked a number of the questions I intended asking. Reading through the high level metrics, I note the use of the word “unambitious”. Ms Ní Chaithnúa stated that the equality budgeting initiative needed to remain focused. What should the programme do next year? Would the witnesses be satisfied if it were applied to the same types of areas and operated within its current limitations

or must it become much more ambitious? What should be the next step?

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: Is Deputy Doherty referring to the high level goals or the metrics?

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I am referring to the metrics, for example, the target of 300 for apprenticeships.

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: We would like the recommendations made by the Parliamentary Budget Office to be implemented. These are necessary practical, sensible and technical adjustments which could be easily implemented.

On the next steps with the metrics and indicators, it is not yet clear to what extent the indicators and metrics are connected to the pot of money available. For this reason, it is difficult to identify what pot of money is available specific to the metrics that are identified and where this money will go. If we are to set appropriate metrics and indicators, we need to be able to see the *ex-ante* analysis to understand how the Department has assessed differential impact. In the first instance, we need to see how Departments are assessing the way in which budgets are satisfying the needs of recipients and how the Department is probing challenges and barriers faced by target groups. I do not see this in the document and I cannot see how these exercises will be done. The National Women's Council of Ireland sits on the steering group and will press to have greater clarity on these matters because, as I indicated, the metrics are focused very much on performance rather than equality impact. That is where my concern lies.

Ms Jennifer McCarthy Flynn: I echo the point made by Ms Ní Chaithnía. It is not clear what equality impact is being sought by some of these measures. We can measure an output or metric but why the Department chose this and what it is seeking as an overall equality or gender equality outcome is not clear. We could speculate on apprenticeships and theorise as to the reasons they are a good focus but it is not clear what the specific drive of all the Departments is with their metrics. That is probably an important point, which may relate to the fact that this is very new. Outputs and metrics are always easier to identify, whereas the type of long-term social change needed for equality is much harder to identify. It is almost as if this is a case of wanting to support the first step by providing a way to measure outputs. We now need to overtly link this to an outcome we are seeking. As Ms Ní Chaithnía stated, this is a much longer-term issue which requires a type of gender expertise that is probably not yet present. We hope this expertise is being built through the process of doing this and we would like to support that. While linking the short-term piece with a longer-term piece over a set period is slightly frustrating, this is a process.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I appreciate that and the point about the length of time available to the Department to do this. If the Minister were to ask the National Women's Council of Ireland to indicate what should be the high level metric in education and skills or if it should be apprenticeships, would the council have a view?

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: I return to my earlier point by referring to the national women's strategy. The National Women's Council of Ireland worked very closely with the Department of Justice and Equality in developing the national women's strategy. As I stated, the strategy is more of an action plan than a strategy as it was a compilation of commitments that had already been made by Departments with regard to women's equality, gender equality, the advancement of women, etc. That is what has been done to date under the strategy, which is fine because it is a live document. The National Women's Council of Ireland also sits on the monitoring group for the national women's strategy. From our point of view, we are eager to see the commitments

made in the strategy fulfilled. If that were to happen, it would make a significant difference to women's equality. The National Women's Council of Ireland made a substantive submission to the consultation on the national women's strategy and our recommendations under each of the headings were probably more ambitious than what ended up being provided for in the strategy. I expect that is fairly standard regarding the types of recommendations that social justice and advocacy organisations make and the provisions that are agreed in the long term.

As I stated, I am reticent about being overly critical of this initial phase of----

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I understand the National Women's Council of Ireland is working with the Department and is represented on the steering group - tús maith and so on - and I also acknowledge that this is the beginning of a journey. What I am trying to figure out is where we will be on this journey in next year's budget or in five years time. Will we still have indicators that are not ambitious and about which, in some cases, questions arise as to how they will impact on gender equality. It is fine if we are building but will we build for next year? The joint committee must produce a report on this initiative which will, we hope, influence the future direction of the Government, as will the steering group. What will be the next steps? I am not criticising what has been done because we are in a much better position than we were last year when we could not even get this issue on the agenda. While we all welcome the initiative, we would like to know what will be the next step that will build on some of the achievements that have been made thus far.

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnía: The Deputy asks a fair question and I thank him for taking us through it again. The National Women's Council of Ireland is a policy and advocacy organisation and the Department is a part of Government. Our relationship with the Department is very much as one would expect it to be. The National Women's Council of Ireland has produced a significant body of work in the past 12 months aimed at influencing the Department and we are happy to be critical where necessary. It is not necessarily the case that we do not want to be critical of the Department. Rather, we accept that officials are in the very early stages of the process, which is key.

Significant efforts were made in the area of poverty proofing about ten years ago and policy proofing was pursued for a certain period before being dropped. When we speak to officials about poverty proofing we find that political and ministerial commitment to the issue was sometimes lacking. Moreover, it created additional work for officials who are busy. This is one of the reasons I am reluctant to be critical at this stage. It is important to us that the Department signed up to the process in the first instance. I would like other Departments to engage with the process fairly quickly. We engage regularly with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and I am disappointed it has not engaged in this process. I spoke to one of the budgetary officials who informed me that it was not directly invited to engage in the process, which I was disappointed to hear. That would not necessarily have precluded it from engaging. It already carries out switch analyses, for example. The type of work it does is really appropriate for gender budgeting. It should be involved in this pilot. By next year, it should be engaging actively on this. I am having those conversations with the officials.

We view this as a pilot scheme that definitely needs to be built on. That is part of the reason we are being so encouraging about it. If there was an equality budgeting statement, with broad and very ambitious commitments made within it by the Department and the relevant Minister, and if the Department came back next year with several high-level goals which link back to the overall goal identified in the equality statement, that would allow us to say that a range of issues are being addressed in order to achieve that equality outcome. This would provide greater

clarity. There has to be a better sense within Departments of what is meant by different types of indicators. The Parliamentary Budget Office is included in that as well. It is important to know whether there are output or outcome indicators in the Revised Estimates volume. That issue is quite fuzzy at the moment. We need to have much greater clarity in respect of it.

I would like to see some sort of qualitative assessment take place. I understand that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is seeking such an assessment. I am also concerned with performance budgeting. There has been a real move into quantitative analysis across the board because it is more concrete and easier to assess. However, any equality budgeting needs to have that qualitative assessment which very clearly links each of the high-level goals back into that equality budget statement goal that has been set. That would provide us with a greater chunk of information, a better idea of where the Government is going and how the Departments are fulfilling those commitments.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: That is very helpful. I note the comments on the gender equality statement Sinn Féin released last year. We will continue to work towards that.

Civil Service staff have bought into the process. It is a new process and a different way of thinking and acting. Does the National Women's Council of Ireland offer training to staff in the different Departments? Has that been a topic of discussion so far?

Ms Eilís Ní Chaithnúa: The NWCI does not really provide training. We occasionally receive funding, either from foundations or through Government, to carry out elements of training. We have carried out training with the Department of Justice and Equality on unconscious gender bias, for example. We have provided training at times, and if we received funding it is something we would be willing to do. However, different types of training are required for officials. Ideally, ongoing mentoring training that officials need would be provided. There is a commitment in the national women's strategy to build capacity among officials. That is absolutely crucial and needs to happen as quickly as possible.

The best means to do that is to look at what has been done in other jurisdictions and what has worked. Ms Christina McKelvey, MSP - or, Member of the Scottish Parliament - visited last year. I do not know if she spoke before the committee. She was invited over by Senator Higgins and the NWCI. We presented to an early iteration of the Oireachtas Women's Caucus. I spoke to Ms McKelvey and asked her if it would be possible for some arrangement to be made between Scottish and Irish officials. She was speaking in a very particular capacity, but I asked her if that would be a possibility. I also asked her if connections could be made between relevant committees in both countries in order to progress the process. She believed that it would be possible to act on both of those suggestions. It would make sense. The same could be said about links between Austria and Ireland because the former has specifically connected gender budgeting into its performance management systems, which is what Ireland is seeking to do. That is absolutely key to the success of this project. It must be resourced.

Chairman: On a point of information, we are planning a video conference link between our committee here and the Scottish committee. It will cover a number of areas, and this will certainly be one of the areas on the agenda.

Deputy Michael McGrath: I have just one comment to make. I do not want to repeat what others have said. I apologise for being late. I thank the witnesses for their presentation. I pledge our support for the project and echo the point that gender or equality budgeting needs to be meaningful. We do not want to embark on a process which only involves ticking boxes.

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It has to be meaningful and has to be linked to overall policy objectives. Its impact has to be measured, as does progress towards meeting those objectives. It is something that Fianna Fáil supports in that context.

Chairman: I thank the witnesses. This was a very worthwhile engagement which will tie in with what we heard from the officials in the Department last week. We appreciate the work the witnesses are carrying out on this project and the very heavy involvement they have had in it. I thank them for attending and for contributing to our process.

The select committee adjourned at 5.05 p.m. until 3 p.m. on Wednesday, 31 March 2018.