



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Decision of the General Court of the European Union in the Apple Case: Statements	721
Covid-19 (Health): Statements	732
Gnó na Dála - Business of Dáil	757
Ministers and Secretaries and Ministerial, Parliamentary, Judicial and Court Offices (Amendment) Bill 2020 [Seanad]: Second Stage	758
Gnó na Dála - Business of Dáil	767
Ministers and Secretaries and Ministerial, Parliamentary, Judicial and Court Offices (Amendment) Bill 2020 [Seanad]: Second Stage (Resumed)	767
Ministers and Secretaries and Ministerial, Parliamentary, Judicial and Court Offices (Amendment) Bill 2020 [Seanad]: Committee and Remaining Stages	789

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé hAoine, 24 Iúil 2020

Friday, 24 July 2020

Chuaigh an Leas-Cheann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Decision of the General Court of the European Union in the Apple Case: Statements

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I remind Members that this session on the decision by the General Court of the European Union in the Apple case will last for one hour.

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I congratulate the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on her election.

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the recent judgment of the General Court of the European Union. It was always important that the State challenged this decision and did not accept the Commission's reasoning, as some in this House and elsewhere wanted. The decision of the previous Government to appeal the Commission decision was based on our strong conviction that Ireland did not give favourable tax treatment to Apple and that no state aid was provided, with the full amount of tax paid by the Irish branches of the relevant Apple companies. Ireland does not do special deals with individual taxpayers and the court judgment supports our position on these points. In particular, I emphasise some observations relating to the case in response to the public narrative that has developed in the days since the announcement of the judgment.

First, the court annulled the Commission's primary line of reasoning, which claimed that the profits derived from the Apple intellectual property licences should have been allocated to the Irish branches of Apple Sales International, ASI, and Apple Operations Europe, AOE, and the profits of that intellectual property taxed in Ireland. The Commission had tried at that point to rewrite Irish law by arguing the Revenue Commissioner should tax all of the worldwide profits of ASI and AOE in Ireland. There was no basis in Irish law for the approach asserted by the Commission. The decision misrepresented the activities of those two Irish branches. The branches carried out functions and there was no allocation that would have justified the Apple intellectual property licences in those branches. These are the facts as set out by the European General Court. Any appeal will be based on a point of law and not on the facts of the case.

Over the past week, and ever since we decided to appeal the Commission decision, some

have questioned Ireland's stance in this regard. However, the judgment of the court has fully endorsed both our decision to appeal and the underlying principles and transparency of our corporate tax regime. In particular, the judgment will reaffirm certainty in our taxation regime and that it can be relied upon as a fair and appropriate system. If the decision had gone unchallenged, businesses operating in Ireland, either domestic or foreign-owned, would have had no certainty that decisions being made and the prevailing Irish tax law at the time could not be contested a quarter of a century later. This would have constituted a serious and material business risk which, in my view, would have had a chilling effect on investment and employment decisions.

Ultimately, this case related to a mismatch in international tax law. Two branches were incorporated in Ireland but not resident in Ireland for tax purposes as they were managed and controlled in the United States. The significant value creation was in the US but the companies were not resident in the US for tax purposes as they were not incorporated in the US. There was thus a significant mismatch between the Irish and American tax systems but it is clear, and it has been said previously, that state aid law does not constitute an appropriate mechanism for addressing the gaps that exist in the international tax system. Indeed, this case involves an issue that is now of historical relevance only. The opinions date back to 1991 and 2007. They are no longer in force. Ireland has already introduced changes to the law to deal with the mismatch of Irish and US rules regarding company residence.

I would like to address next some of the issues circulating because of the decision and Ireland's tax system more generally. It is important to make these points as they do not seem to be well understood or appreciated. This case did have a significant reputational impact on Ireland and on our corporate tax system. The annulment of the decision should redress some of the reputational outcomes of the decision.

It is unfortunate to hear the arguments that were debunked in this judgment still given credence over the past week. There has been inappropriate and unfair labelling of our tax system, including by some Members of this House, because of our low tax rate. These assertions are untrue and unhelpful. As this case involves an issue that is now of historical relevance, some commentary has failed to acknowledge the changes that have been made not only to our tax system but to the international tax system over the past decade.

Ireland is committed to having a corporate system that meets international standards. Ireland's Corporation Tax Roadmap, which I published last year, provides ample evidence of the significant actions we have taken to date, and will continue to take. I firmly believe that the changes agreed to date internationally will significantly limit the ability of multinationals to engage in aggressive tax planning. Further changes were made to the Irish corporation tax code in the Finance Act 2019.

We have been successful in attracting investment into Ireland and we fully tax companies on the profits attributable to activity that takes place in Ireland. Where companies have in the past been able to use mismatches in Irish and US law to book profits in zero tax countries, we have taken action unilaterally to amend our tax code. US tax reform should also limit the effectiveness of any future aggressive tax planning schemes that could be designed by multinational companies or organisations.

We are a leader in tax transparency and one of only 24 jurisdictions worldwide to be recognised as fully compliant with international best practice. The best way to ensure tax is paid in

24 July 2021

the right place is to ensure that all countries have the necessary information to risk-assess and to audit companies. Our openness and transparency are designed to ensure that we facilitate the exchange of all relevant information with other tax authorities.

The breadth of these changes can be seen when comparing Ireland's effective rate of corporation tax with our headline rate of 12.5%. At the end of June, Revenue published entity-level data on effective tax rates for 2018, showing internationally owned multinational enterprises in Ireland report an effective tax rate of 11.6%, with the top ten companies with a rate of 11.3%. This is further enforced by a recent OECD study and, for Ireland, the figures show an average effective tax rate of 12%.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Ar dtús báire, déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Leas-Cheann Comhairle agus í i mbun a céad dualgais sa phost. Is lá iontach é dár dtír agus don Dáil seo ós rud é go bhfuil an chéad bhean, agus Gaeilgeoir líofa, tofa mar Leas-Cheann Comhairle na Dála seo.

On 15 July, the European General Court ruled that the competition commission did not succeed in showing the requisite legal standard that Apple Sales Ireland, ASI, and Apple Operations Europe, AOE, had been granted illegal state aid through selective tax advantages. It is essential to understand what the ruling of the European General Court did say, what it did not say and what were, and still are, the undisputed facts of the case. The Commission's argument centred on two tax agreements between Revenue and two Irish incorporated Apple subsidiaries, Apple Sales International and Apple Operations Europe. The ruling of the European General Court did not dispute or impugn the fact that the two Revenue rulings, the first in 1991 and the second in 2007, allowed ASI and AOE to attribute their profits to a head office, a shell corporate structure that existed only on paper with no staff whatsoever.

These tax rulings allowed Apple's Irish subsidiary to record European profits of €16 billion in 2011 with only €50 million taxable in Ireland, which is an effective tax rate of 0.03%. These are facts that the European General Court has not disputed or challenged. This arrangement was disclosed by Apple's head of tax operations, Phillip Bullock, at the 2013 hearing of the US Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations as it investigated the onshore operations of Apple. At that hearing, Mr. Bullock confirmed in sworn testimony that the income earned by ASI and AOE was subject to tax "in accordance with the agreement that we have with Ireland", which he confirmed was fixed at a maximum of 2%. Again, these are facts that the General Court did not dispute or challenge.

The fact that Apple's Irish subsidiary paid less than 0.05% in tax is not something this Government should claim as a victory. The Commission lost this case. That does not mean that Ireland has won. Let us start with the Commission. The Commission argued that because the corporate structure in question, which paid less than 0.05% in tax due to an arrangement with Revenue was only on paper with no staff, the profits attributed to it should not have been attributed to that entity. By implication, the Commission argued that the profits should therefore have been attributed to Apple's Irish branches, which were tax resident. The European General Court ruled that it was not enough to show that these profits should not have been attributed to the ghost entity. Instead, the Commission had to demonstrate that the profits should be attributed to the Irish branches, something the court ruled that the Commission failed to do.

The General Court of the European Union found that while the Commission successfully demonstrated that Revenue was often arbitrary and inconsistent in determining where profit should be attributed, this did not prove that these errors provided a selective advantage to Ap-

ple. These were the findings of the court. It did not rule that Apple did not receive illegal State aid. That is a ruling it could have made but did not. Instead, it found that the Commission failed to demonstrate that illegal state aid was granted. This distinction matters. The ruling of the court is not likely to be the end of this case. In reality, this is probably just half-time. If the Commission appeals the ruling to the Court of Justice, that court may overturn the findings of the General Court. There is precedent for all of this, especially in state aid cases concerning tax advantage. In 2016, the Court of Justice annulled the General Court's judgment regarding selective tax advantages enjoyed by Santander. In 2018, the Court of Justice overruled the General Court's judgment in a case concerning a Spanish tax lease system.

This State's tax dealings with Apple may be before the Court of Justice before long. At what cost? The judgment of the General Court did not dispute the fact that an Irish subsidiary of Apple paid an effective tax rate of less than 0.05% for more than a decade. This is not a victory for Ireland. Far from it. This has put the spotlight of the Commission upon our tax affairs and strengthened the resolve of some within the Commission to encroach upon what was never at stake in this case; the right to set our own corporate tax rate consistently and fairly.

The issue in this case was never a corporate tax rate of 12.5%, nor was it our tax sovereignty. The Government knew this but justified its appeal of the Commission's original findings by hiding behind this dishonest argument. However, as a result of this case, the appeal and the agreement between Revenue and Apple allowing the company to pay less than 0.05% in tax, our reputation is tarnished and our tax sovereignty is in doubt. That is not a victory for Ireland. Some on the Government benches have used the results of this ruling to attack Sinn Féin, instead of dealing with the facts and consequences of the agreements made between Apple and Revenue in 1991 and 2007.

I will conclude by putting on the record a robust statement on the Government's appeal of the tax ruling made in September 2016. While the Government's decision to appeal the ruling is not surprising, the Cabinet's explanation of that decision is clearly contradictory. On the one hand the Government is saying it will defend a situation in which the richest company in the world was paying 0.05% tax on profits. On the other hand it says that Ireland will take the lead in the fight for international tax justice. By appealing this decision we are standing by the old regime. The days of massive corporate tax avoidance are coming to an end. We could have started to restore our reputation by admitting that the tax loopholes Apple has availed of were inappropriate. Instead we will be stuck in a legal limbo for the next five years, defending the indefensible while at the same time saying we want to do things in a different way. Those are not my words. They are the words of the Green Party leader, the Minister's Government colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Eamon Ryan.

This may not be the end of the issue. In the event of the Commission appealing the ruling of the General Court of the European Union to the Court of Justice, Ireland will once again be under the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. Whether or not the Commission appeals the ruling, it is clear that moves will now be made to encroach on what was never at stake in this case, our tax sovereignty. I discussed this with the Minister in the Dáil just last week. That sovereignty is worthy of defence. It cannot be denied that the Government's appeal has likely hastened the attack from our European counterparts.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Ní dóigh liom go bhfuil cainteoir ó Pháirtí an Lucht Oibre ann. Bogfaimid ar aghaidh go dtí an Teachta Shortall, Social Democrats.

24 July 2021

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I congratulate the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on her election. It is a great result. There is no doubt that she has a very good track record in chairing the proceedings of the Dáil in a very fair manner. I have no doubt that she will continue like that and I wish her well personally and professionally.

There has been much talk about a victory for Ireland after the judgment of the General Court. However, it has to be accepted that this is a Pyrrhic victory for the taxpayers of Ireland and, indeed, the taxpayers of several other European countries. There are several reasons for this. It is the public purse that loses out from this result. We all have a right to expect a fair system of tax on corporate profits and to expect these taxes to be paid to Revenue. A basic issue of fairness and transparency arises here. If there was a fair system, the €13 billion in question in this case would have been paid into the public purse in Ireland and other countries.

The impact of the loss of that tax money is very significant, especially where our public services are concerned. We know that public services are crying out for adequate investment. We have developed a system and a reputation for treating multinational companies very well. That is fine, and we get a lot of high-quality jobs from foreign direct investment. However, there is a price to be paid for that. Our tax receipts are inadequate to funding proper public services. Our experience with Covid-19 in recent months has exposed the weaknesses of all of our public services and the crying need for investment to bring them up to modern European standards. Our public health service and our system of childcare lags a long way behind those of our European neighbours. That, in turn, puts a huge burden on people living in this State. It also reduces our competitiveness and adds to wage demands. There is a price to be paid domestically for our very generous corporation tax system. It is a very heavy price.

It is not just people who live in Ireland and struggle to deal with the high cost of living who say that, or the many working people who have to shell out for basic public services that citizens and other European countries assume as a matter of right. The business community increasingly says it cannot attract people to come back to Ireland to take up jobs because of the high cost of living. Businesses make particular reference to the high cost of housing, childcare and healthcare. These add to wage demands and reduce our competitiveness.

Moreover, the favourable treatment of multinationals shows a very significant lack of fairness when compared with our treatment of domestic small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs. This unfair treatment is wrong. It makes it very hard for our domestic SMEs to compete. We now know that Apple paid a 0.005% tax rate on the profits in question. *11 o'clock* That amounts to a tax of 5 cent on every €1,000 of profit. It is a real slap in the face for Irish taxpayers and SMEs. Even if the General Court has found that it was legal not to tax profits at a fair rate, it is clearly morally wrong that a global multinational can strategically manage its tax affairs so as to pay so little and was facilitated in doing so by our Government.

The Irish economy should aim to compete for foreign direct investment at the higher end of the value chain, where investment can be predicated less on our tax system than on the agility and innovation of our workforce.

The issue at the heart of this case and many corporate tax questions is tax justice and transparency, as well as solidarity with our EU partners. If the public is to trust in politics and government, transparency and integrity must be the defining features of all decision-making. Transparency is especially important when it comes to Ireland's corporate tax rate, which, as a

result of this tax case, has become the subject of heightened scrutiny throughout the world. The judgment may very well be appealed by the European Commission to the European Court of Justice, bringing further scrutiny of Ireland's historical tax treatment of Apple and continuing to cast an unfavourable light on Ireland's reputation regarding tax matters. The judgment makes clear that it is up to Ireland's politicians to put in place a corporate tax system that is fair and just. Our corporate tax system continues to attract scrutiny and criticism from our European partners. Reform should be pursued to ensure fair taxation and to rebuild our international reputation.

Deputy Ged Nash: I apologise to the Minister and colleagues for my delay in getting to the Chamber. The Labour Party is a pro-FDI party. We support the companies that are here provided that they comply with our laws, each and every one of them pays a minimum effective corporation tax rate of 12.5% and they treat their workers with dignity and respect and provide them with a decent wage. Many of those companies do all of that. It was the Labour Party, under the leadership of William Norton, which transitioned Ireland away from its isolationist and protectionist policy and towards an opening up to the world and the attraction of multinational corporations and foreign direct investment. The historical narrative generally is that this development was an exercise commissioned by Seán Lemass and T.K. Whitaker. In fact, that exercise was commenced by William Norton when he was Minister for Industry and Commerce.

We have always recognised that a generous and competitive rate of corporation tax does not a national industrial strategy make. We also know that a generous corporation tax rate was not the only reason that firms chose to locate to this country or have their European headquarters here. Ireland's educated workforce has long been one of our greatest assets. Following Brexit, Ireland, together with Malta, will be one of only two English-speaking countries in the European Union, and that positions us well for future investment. As the Minister knows, Irish workers are officially the most productive in the world, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, adding an average of nearly €87 to the value of the economy every hour that they work. No company in its right mind would relocate from such a country, which has fluency in English, a highly educated, productive and skilled workforce and access to one of the largest markets in the world. I say that in the context of some of the challenges we will face over the next few years in terms of international moves concerning the taxation of corporations and profits.

In our view, a minimum effective rate of corporation tax should be just that - a minimum effective rate - and it should apply to each and every firm. It is a simple and straightforward position. There is a fairness argument here, as Deputy Shortall noted. We know that SMEs make up 99% of businesses in Ireland and account for more than 70% of employment. SME owners sometimes look askance at some of the aggressive tax planning that we know is carried on by multinational corporations. In the view of those SME owners and many others, that activity deprives the Irish economy of a sufficient tax base to resource the kinds of public services and supports our citizens need. We have a considerable focus at this time on the issues of corporation tax, fairness, tax justice and so on. We need to keep a focus on the evolving question internationally and respond to it in a fair, just and agile way.

I draw the Minister's attention to the skills gaps that are emerging. Dealing with those gaps will be exceptionally important in terms of our ability not just to attract but to retain and maintain investment in this country. We have one of the lowest levels of in-work training in the OECD, at 5.5%, compared with the levels in analogous states. Denmark, for example, invests really heavily in continuous lifelong learning and in-work training. Some 33% of all workers

24 July 2021

in Denmark receive some form of meaningful ongoing training, which will stand to the country in terms of its economic development. We need to look at that model and apply it here. In addition, it is a cause for concern that we have one of the lowest levels of digital skills in the European Union, which is kind of ironic given that we have so many enormously significant technology firms located here. One might wonder what the practical benefits are for citizens in having those firms here if we have such an enormous digital skills divide.

Finally, I draw the Minister's attention to the report last week by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, IFAC, which was really interesting and has some important messages for us. It notes that an international clampdown on aggressive tax planning, whether by the OECD's base erosion and profit shifting, BEPS, process or by the EU via Article 116 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, will likely blow a €2 billion to €3.5 billion hole in our tax receipts. This is revenue that IFAC has previously warned was "unsustainable" but which the previous Government had, in many ways, been using to cover massive cost overruns such as that associated with the national children's hospital. Given the changes to our tax base, I do not think we will have that luxury any longer. Change is coming and we need, as a country, to lead that change and not bury our heads in the sand. That means co-operating with international reforms but also making sure that the kind of case we have been dealing with over the past couple of years never arises again. Notwithstanding that the State says the case was won, there is no doubt that there is reputational damage to Ireland arising from it.

We in the Labour Party have called repeatedly for the establishment of a standing commission on taxation, which would enable us to respond in real time to some of the aggressive tax planning that goes on. We need to be able to pay for the kinds of public services that we aspire to have in this country with a tax system that is objectively fair to everybody, including businesses both big and small. The people of this country are entitled to expect that the public asset gap can be closed over the next few years and that their hard work will be rewarded with the provision of free and accessible health services, decent social and affordable housing, publicly funded childcare and so on. That will only become a reality when we get our act together on corporation tax and make sure all corporations, regardless of their size and scale, contribute fairly in the context of a minimum effective corporation tax rate of 12.5%.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Masks like the one I am wearing are sometimes associated with stick-up robberies. It is kind of appropriate that it is politicians who are now wearing the masks that are associated with such robberies. It might be even more appropriate for the chief executive officers of some of the largest and wealthiest corporations to be wearing them, given the scale of their theft of tax revenues that should accrue to society in general from the absolutely staggering profits those corporations make. Those profits, which they make from the people working for them and on which they pay negligible levels of tax, are obscene. If the Minister does not start from that point, he is just being plain dishonest. The court did not dispute in its ruling that Apple paid 0.005% tax on vast amounts of profits. That is obscene. There are no two ways about it. It succeeded in paying that derisory level of tax on vast profits by working through companies incorporated in this jurisdiction. The fact that the General Court of the European Union concluded that the Commission could not prove that the Revenue authorities conferred selective advantage on Apple does not take from the fact that Apple achieved that aim of paying a derisory level of tax in Ireland. Does anybody seriously believe that Revenue and the Government did not know that was happening? Does anybody believe that for one second? Unless we accept that Revenue and the Governments of the day were complete idiots, and I do not think anybody believes they were, then they knew what was going on and the derisory

levels of tax that were being paid. However, the Commission could not prove that it was an arrangement designed specifically for Apple, although that is what it believes.

I have always believed that it was not just Apple that benefitted from such arrangements, but also a select group of ICT companies and possibly some pharmaceutical companies. They are certainly not arrangements from which the vast majority of domestic small or medium enterprise in this country benefitted. In that sense, a very select advantage is conferred on these enormously wealthy companies.

Of course, the trick in all this is centred around intellectual property. This is not a historic issue. I love the concept of intellectual property. Firms were and are allowed to allocate profits to a company that is tax resident nowhere but is the holder of the intellectual property or the idea. They can allocate any amount of profit they wish to the company that owns the intellectual property. That is what they do. Every year, a company can declare profits of €1 billion, but give €990 million in royalties to the company which is the owner of the intellectual property and which is tax resident nowhere, thereby writing down taxable profit to negligible levels. They effectively write their own tax bill and the State allows them to do it.

These practices are an insult to the workers of the companies. The Government often declares that it must defend the jobs of the workers in Cork. That should absolutely be done. However, the idea that all of the wealth is generated by a company that is tax resident nowhere but holds “the idea” is insulting to the workers who produce iPhones and, indeed, those who sell them in Europe and the rest of the world. Apparently, their labour activity is worth nothing and the profits all result from “the idea”. The ideas and the CEOs are not what kept us going and kept everything moving during the pandemic. Rather, it was the workers who do the physical work, the essential workers and the front-line workers. The ideological notion that one can attribute all the value to “the idea” or the intellectual property is a very capitalist and neo-liberal one which we should reject. That is an aside.

The crucial point is that none of this is historical. After the events which gave rise to the case, corporate profits went from €83 billion in 2013 to €190 billion in 2018. That is a 228% increase in gross trading corporate profits. In 2018, there were €190 billion in profits. That is a massive increase. How much tax was paid on those profits? A total of €10.4 billion. That is not 12.5%. No matter how many times the Minister asserts that these companies are paying 11.6%, as he just did in his address, they are not doing so. If they were paying 12.5% or even 11.6%, they would be paying approximately €23 billion in tax. How are they getting away with it? They are writing down their taxable profit on the basis of royalties paid to the company that possesses the idea or the intellectual property. In that way, they siphon off the profits such that the taxable profits are derisory and the effective tax rate is reduced to a negligible level. These practices are still going on. After pressure domestically and internationally forced the Government to do away with the double Irish, which was the mechanism through which Apple avoided taxes in the period covered by the ruling, the Government opened new doors for these companies. It is still going on. It is shameful and it is robbing people not just in this country but across the world of revenues that are needed for health, education, housing and infrastructure.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Ar an gcéad dul síos, ba mhaith liom comhgairdeas a dhéanamh leat, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I am delighted that she has been elected to her position. I will miss her contributions from the floor. I always valued them and tried to listen to them. I found them to be engaging, interesting, educated and very fair and balanced. I know she will have the very same qualities in her role as Leas-Cheann Comhairle. We have been waiting for 101 years

24 July 2021

for a woman to be appointed as Leas-Cheann Comhairle and it is fabulous that it has finally happened. Obviously, she campaigned for the role, but I know, given the kind of humble person she is, that she would have been gracious in defeat had the result gone the other way. Go n-éirí go geal leat, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

I am glad the judgment has been released. I have mixed views on the issue. I represent the constituency of Tipperary, where there are more than 5,000 direct investment jobs in Clonmel alone. There are other such jobs in Cashel, Nenagh and many other parts of the constituency, including Dungarvan. Half of my parish is in County Waterford. There is a significant cohort of foreign direct development in the area.

It is fine for Deputy Boyd Barrett and many others on the left to just criticise, attack and knock. He referred to the workers. I value workers as much as anybody else does. My company employs between 18 and 25 workers. It is a two-way thing. If we did not have the innovators who come up with ideas, we would not have the jobs. It is a chicken and egg situation. One cannot have it both ways. We value those innovators. In addition, there are tax breaks available in respect of research and development.

I am a big supporter of the 12.5% corporation tax rate. It is upfront and out there for everyone to see. I understand that some other EU countries such as France might have a higher corporation tax rate, but they have a more creative or devious way of getting around it. I only have anecdotal evidence of that, rather than scientific evidence. Anybody who is in business knows there are tax schemes of which one can avail. Goodness knows, several such schemes were included in the July stimulus package announced last night. The schemes take time to bed in. It takes time for the employers and companies who need them to get used to them. The companies need a very good accountant who gives good advice. They need the best advice but often do not get it. I have experienced that myself.

The €13 billion pot of gold was meant to be at the end of a rainbow. Rainbows are common at this time of year or in May or at certain other times but, unfortunately, this particular rainbow was not there. We must accept the decision.

Merck Sharp & Dohme came to Clonmel in 1974 or 1975. It is a fabulous employer. It probably employs 600 or 700 people in its factory, never mind all the spin-off service industries. The situation is similar with regard to Apple. I heard Deputy Barry speaking on the matter last week. He related how he could see the factory up the hill from where he lives in Cork and in various other parts of the city. However, many people do not realise how many small businesses are able to take on employees as a result of sub-contracting for the large companies. The spin-offs are enormous. I refer to the raw materials and other products that are used by the factories. One must consider the businesses that maintain the factories or supply them with food and beverages and everything else that goes into them. Of course, the businesses pay significant sums in rates to the county councils, which forms a large part of the councils' funding.

The problem in recent years is that we cannot get businesses creating foreign direct investment jobs to locate them outside Dublin. Dublin cannot cope. It is wonderful to be on the top floor of the Convention Centre and be able to look across the city and see all the cranes and the massive development in this area. It is fabulous. I do not envy it one bit but we want our fair share in other counties.

I do not know if this judgment is going to be appealed further. I am not right up to speed

with it. It is certainly out there and maybe it will give us clarity. Foreign direct investment companies have people working here, watching and seeing what is going on. They can read as well. The negativity and the attacks on them day in, day out by some politicians of the left are not good because it is an ideological issue. We have had a general election without a very clear outcome. Nonetheless if the people were so aghast at this, one would think they would vote for parties of the left more and change the ideology. I come as a small businessman myself. I pay the taxes, and do not have any corporation tax or special deals. I understand it is onerous and difficult. The PRSI has to be paid, and that is only right because workers must be protected. When we see the likes of Debenhams and many other big companies, when we see the meat industry, Meat Industry Ireland and how they have creative ways, we should tackle those because they are home grown and they are better even than the other companies at getting around the loopholes, investing in paper companies and companies that are just there as technical ways of devising it.

If I say one thing to the Minister, I think we need some of those business people in the Department of Finance to give him advice and to understand the thought process that goes into those big companies and the expert advice that they get. Have we a match for them in our Department? I am not criticising the people in the Department. I am just saying that we need that broad base of expertise. The companies need it too and they probably get people in who understand the tax laws and may have worked in that area as well. We need that as a resource.

As far as this judgment is concerned, I am glad it is out there. I just hope the can will not keep being rattled and we will not be upsetting and annoying every FDI company that we have here, their employees and their families and indeed the boardrooms in America. We are in a very volatile time and the boardrooms are conscious of what is going on. We have to compete with economies in eastern Europe and other areas where there is literally slave labour going on. We cannot condone that. It is abhorrent. We must have a balance and we must try to get as much tax from these FDI people as we can, but we have to be careful to ensure we do not banish them altogether - to hell or to Connacht - because if they left our country we would be a much poorer place. We would be much poorer in Tipperary without Merck, Boston Scientific, Abbot Vascular and many others. Clonmel Healthcare is home grown, but those pharma companies especially are tremendous. They are also innovators and are leading in the field of innovation and lifesaving devices. We must support them as well as criticising them. It cannot be a one-way street. We value the workers, we all support them, and all we want is fair play.

Deputy Marian Harkin: I congratulate the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on her new role. She described herself yesterday as a bean láidir. I would like to add that she is a bean láidir ón iarthar. Déanaim comhghairdeas léi. I also congratulate the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, on his appointment as chair of the Eurogroup. It is certainly a very prestigious appointment for him personally and for Ireland. I suspect the issue we are discussing here may be raised at some point in those meetings.

As far as I am concerned, there are two aspects to this situation. It is complex. First there is the judgment in itself, but second there is the wider implication of tax justice at a national and global level. While those two issues are connected, they are not the same in this instance. The judgment itself is quite definitive in that it says the European Commission did not succeed in showing that Irish tax authorities had granted Apple Sales International, ASI, and Apple Operations Europe, AOE, a selective advantage. It also delivered a stinging blow in that the European Commission must pay all costs.

24 July 2021

Apple and Ireland defended the case on nine grounds and some of them were successful. The Commission failed to show that state aid rules were breached. They also wrongly attributed the €13 billion to the ASI and AOE branches so the story of this pot of gold, as my colleague, Deputy Mattie McGrath, referred to, was just that. Even if the Commission had found otherwise, that money would not have come here. A portion of it might have but it was not ours as such.

The Commission was also wrong when it came to Irish tax law. It is worth noting that the European Commission in its statements at the time of bringing its case was highly political. Margrethe Vestager spoke of illegal tax benefits to Apple of up to €13 billion. That is a very strong statement and a very political one, especially from a high-profile Commissioner like Vestager, who has such a global reach. It was a serious blow. The stakes were high. In this, the Commission got it wrong. It is not wrong to say that Apple avoided paying tax by using various tax mechanisms in Ireland. It did, as we know. We are now afraid of the double Irish, for example, and for good reason. That kind of system facilitated multinationals to avoid paying corporation tax. However, the Commission was wrong to say that competition law and state aid rules could be used to prevent this from happening. The Commission was right in saying that Apple paid an effective tax rate of 1% on its European profits in 2003, but it was wrong in saying that these profits could be attributed to the two Irish subsidiaries. Ireland did not act illegally in this instance. The Minister stated that there is a mismatch in international tax law and that state aid law does not create an appropriate mechanism to tackle this issue. That is true. However, it is also true that our tax laws allowed Apple to evade paying tax. The premise always was that Apple at some point would eventually repatriate its profits to the US and pay tax there. The truth is that no taxpayer in this country could behave in that way, saying we will pay tax on the never-never in the future, whenever we get around to it.

Ireland is a small country, of course, and we have to look to our competitive advantages. Like many other small European countries, including the Netherlands and Switzerland, we have used loopholes in international tax law to facilitate large multinationals to evade paying their taxes, at least for now, on the never-never. The Revenue in Ireland has seen to it that the corporate tax receipts in Ireland are substantial, and indeed by European standards our *per capita* take on corporate tax is one of the highest. That is our dilemma. We have a system that delivers significant corporate tax revenues to Ireland, no matter what people say. However, our tax laws still allow multinationals to evade paying tax. The double Irish comes to an end at the end of 2020, and in truth it should have come to an end sooner. Our new tax arrangements allow multinationals to receive capital allowances for expenditure on intangible assets such as intellectual property. Given that most of the large multinationals are now digital companies, this mechanism may be used to evade paying their fair share of tax. That is why the EU is pursuing a digital tax. We have worked with the OECD but the US is pulling out, so that is not working.

Initially I said that this is a political issue because tax justice is a political issue. I believe Ireland will have to be more proactive in ensuring large multinationals pay their fair share of tax. We cannot be responsible for fixing the international tax system but we must work with our European partners and let Europe take the lead on tax justice. We need to reassess. We need to protect our revenues but we also need to find ways with our European partners to tax multinationals. The common consolidated corporate tax base, CCCTB, would not work for us because of the formula used to decide where the tax was paid. There would be more tax paid but we would get less of it.

The country-specific recommendations from the Commission for the past two years tell

us that we have to deal with aggressive tax planning. As I said, this is complex. We have to protect our revenues and at the same time promote tax justice. Perhaps, in that context, the suggestion from the Labour Party that a standing commission on taxation could play a significant role in teasing out these issues and arriving at an equitable system is something that we should consider.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Sin críoch anois le ráitis maidir leis an mbreith ó Chúirt Ghinearálta an Aontas Eorpaigh i gcás Apple.

Covid-19 (Health): Statements

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I welcome the Minister for Health, Deputy Donnelly. He has ten minutes to make his statement, following which we will move to a question-and-answer session. If a Deputy chooses to use four minutes for a statement and questions and four minutes for answers, I will indicate when the initial four minutes are up.

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): My warmest congratulations to the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on her election. I have no doubt she will serve the office proudly. I am more than happy to do the question-and-answer session in whatever way works for Deputies, be that in taking questions and answers together or responding to all questions at the end of a contribution.

I welcome the opportunity to update the House on Covid-19 and the nation's ongoing response to it. Before I begin, I wish to extend my sympathies to the friends and families of those who have died in recent months due to contracting Covid-19. I know I speak for all Members when I say that all of these people, their friends and families continue to be in our thoughts as we strive to emerge from this incredibly difficult time. This vicious disease has taken an awful and heartbreaking toll in terms of life and in terms of the health of many people who have not died. They are very much in our thoughts at this time. In particular, I pay tribute to those healthcare workers who have lost their lives while caring for others during this pandemic. Healthcare workers have literally given their lives to keep the rest of us safe. Our healthcare workers have played a vital role in bringing us to the point we are at today, where we have been able to reopen the country and step-back most of the restrictions on normal life that had to be introduced in March. We avoided the awful scenes we saw in some countries around Europe, with patients in a lot of distress having to be treated in car parks of hospitals, etc.

As the House is aware, much progress has been made in this country in tackling Covid-19. We have seen the gradual reopening of our society and economy. We were not in a position to move to the final phase, phase 4, of the roadmap, which has been moved forward. This decision was taken following careful consideration of the current status of the disease in Ireland and the recommendations of the National Public Health Emergency Team, NPHET. It is clear from the experience here in Ireland and abroad that a cautious approach is required when dealing with Covid-19 and when reopening our society, communities and economy. The situation deteriorated for several weeks. The number of cases per week over the past four weeks are as follows: week 1, 61 cases rising in week 2 to 93 new cases, in week 3 to 124 new cases and last week to 143 new cases. The average number of close contacts of those infected has grown to more than five per person. The two-week cumulative figure per 100,000, one of the key figures

24 July 2021

that public health experts look at, was down at approximately nine and rose to 22, such that it more than doubled in quite a short timeframe. As we all know, the R-nought number rose from below 1, which we are all happy with, to between 1.2 and 1.8, which obviously was of serious concern to public health and the wider community. However, I am delighted to be able to report that over the past ten days the situation has stabilised. The R-nought number is down again to somewhere between 0.7 and 1.4. That is the latest information I have as of this morning. The best estimate, I am told, is that the R-nought number is now at 1.1, such that it has come back down again in the last ten days, which we are glad to note. The five-day average is also down again now to 16 new cases per day. Yesterday, it was seven. Contact tracing is working well. We know, critically, where the vast majority of cases are and these people are being contacted. The public health experts believe this stabilisation is linked critically to renewed efforts from the public from around two weeks ago. I thank every person in this country for listening to the public health advice and for the solidarity they have shown. What we are seeing two weeks since that renewed focus by the public is that the numbers are beginning to come down again. This shows that the solution to this pandemic does not lie in the Oireachtas, although we obviously have a role to play, or with NPHET, which is leading us on the advice, but with every family, parent, employer and citizen in this country. We will suppress and beat this vicious virus by acting together.

Internationally, things are moving in the opposite direction, with a significant acceleration of the pandemic. The virus requires only a small window of opportunity to re-emerge. It is critical that we follow the advice here to keep the virus transmission as low as possible. It is also essential that we are able to recommence essential health services, education services and to reopen our schools and social services, which have been paused or curtailed in recent months. This is at the heart of the Government's cautious approach to how we reopen society.

Ireland is, therefore, continuing to operate in phase 3. As the House will know, we paused moving to phase 4. Our retailers have reopened, as has a good part of the hospitality sector. The data and evidence will continue to be reviewed in advance of a decision on the appropriate stance regarding phase 4, which is now due to commence on 10 August. Our understanding of the disease and its characteristics and how it is transmitted is continuing to evolve. Clinicians, scientists and researchers across the world are working to learn more about Covid-19. This is the kind of work that, for example, recently lent weight to arguments in favour of more widespread use of face masks. As Deputies will be aware, face masks are mandatory on public transport. The Government is asking that we all wear them in retail and regulations to make that mandatory are being prepared. The World Health Organization and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control have recommended the use of face coverings to complement the other measures that we have become familiar with recently, such as maintaining a 2 m distance from other people, washing our hands frequently and adhering to appropriate coughing and sneezing etiquette. As the House is aware, the Government has responded to this advice with the introduction of the requirements that I have laid out.

The House will be aware that this week a list of 15 countries with similar or better epidemiological situations to Ireland was published. This is to ensure that the appropriate public health measures apply to international travel based on the country of origin from which people are travelling to Ireland. People travelling from these 15 countries will not be advised to restrict their movements on arrival into Ireland. The list will be reviewed every two weeks. If the epidemiological situation in a country deteriorates that country will be removed from the list. For the benefit of the House, the latest information I have is that not a single case of Covid-19 has

been recorded as coming from any of the 15 countries that are on the list. Additional measures to strengthen existing arrangements, including the development of an electronic passenger form and a testing protocol for symptomatic passengers are being implemented. However, the overarching Government advice remains as it was. The safest thing to do is not to travel. We are advising people to holiday at home this summer. It is essential that we ensure that all of the sacrifices made to date are not undermined by any complacency with regard to the risk represented by international travel.

Maintaining the rate of virus transmission at the lowest possible level is key to ensuring that we can recommence many vital health, social and educational services. Our public health teams, the HSE and NPHEC continue to closely monitor the prevalence of the disease in Ireland and they are endeavouring to suppress it as quickly as possible, wherever it appears. We see a united effort by everyone living in Ireland to maintain the solidarity that has marked the past number of months and to continue to follow the public health advice to keep apart, to wash our hands and, more recently, to wear face coverings on public transport and in shops. I know the House will join me in thanking every person and every sector for their hard work to date. I encourage us all to keep going and keep this virus at the lowest level possible.

I can assure the House that the Government is continuing to rely on the best available evidence and advice in responding to this pandemic. We continue to prioritise public health and the suppression of Covid-19 with a phased, careful, and step-wise reopening of our society, our communities and the economy. We have seen the rapid re-emergence of the virus in other countries in the course of reopening. We are as a result moving in a cautious fashion and remain committed to tackling this virus wherever it appears.

I wish to speak about political solidarity, something we discussed yesterday in this House. Since the start of this, political parties and politicians in Ireland have been fantastic in providing solidarity and in working together. This does not mean there is no criticism, of course there is and must be. One of the things that marks Ireland's approach, and which the WHO said is linked to the fact that this virus is suppressed, is that politicians across this House have continued to work together.

I will finish on this point as I know my time is up. I would say to the Deputies in this House that my sense, and I believe their sense, is that perhaps some of that solidarity has strained over the past week or two. If I had a part to play in that, I would like to apologise to the House for that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: With the transition of any Government, there is going to be a period of time-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am going to stop the Minister there.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: -----where there has to be transition. I will finish right on this, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister will get a chance to come back in but other Deputies will not as their time will be up.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: This will be my final sentence, if I may.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is fine.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I promise the House that the briefings that were provided and the access to the HSE and public health officials are going to be recommenced. They stopped over the past number of weeks and I want to get them going again as quickly as possible.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I do not mean to interrupt the Minister but I am going to be strict on time because the Deputies wish to come in and out. If I do not stick to the time, they will not get the chance. Bogaimid ar aghaidh go dtí Sinn Féin. Are there two speakers?

Deputy David Cullinane: Yes, there are two speakers. I am sharing time with Deputy Mark Ward. We will take ten minutes and five minutes. I will use four minutes to put questions and will give the Minister four minutes to respond. I will then use two minutes for a supplementary question.

I am all in favour of political solidarity in dealing with this crisis in healthcare and with Covid-19 care. That political solidarity has to be underpinned by real solutions. If I was a doctor, nurse or patient listening to the Minister's speech today, I would be very underwhelmed and disappointed because he knows that we are and have been facing, even before Covid-19 came along, an unprecedented crisis in healthcare, with far too many people left on hospital trolleys day in, day out, or having to wait 18 months or more to see a hospital consultant. Covid-19 has caused an even bigger crisis on a scale that we have never seen before. What is facing front-line workers and patients over the next number of weeks and months is scary and dangerous. They have to deal with Covid-19 care, which might increase in numbers, with all the non-Covid-19 care, with all the lost and missed care, for which we will need a catch-up programme, and with the loss of capacity. We heard of one 800-bed hospital in Dublin that will lose 200 beds. It is the same across the State because of the infection control measures that have to be put in place. We are also facing now into the winter flu.

Yesterday we had the comprehensive economic stimulus plan. It did not go far enough for me. There are nuanced differences and we can disagree on some of those but at least there was an economic plan. Where is the Minister's plan for health services? Where is his solidarity with the doctors and nurses who were on the front line and want to know where the capacity is coming from to enable them to deal with all that missed care and ongoing care that people will need in the time ahead? We all know that it cannot be done unless there is an accelerated urgent injection of capital and spend, with more beds and staff provided in hospitals very quickly.

We need the most unprecedented targeted spend in healthcare over the next number of months that this State has ever seen. That is the scale of what is needed here. Yet, it is not in the Minister's speech. The scale of the challenge before us is barely even mentioned. Where is that plan and when are we going to see it? The Minister owes it to all those front-line workers.

My second question relates to those staff who have worked so hard and who went above and beyond the call of duty. We know that today we are going to be asked to support a Bill to give pay increases to junior Ministers, and yet all we could give front-line workers is a round of applause, about which many of them spoke on social media. Are there any plans at all to reward those front-line workers with a one-off payment to deal with the pay increases they have been justly looking for, together with the pay inequalities for nurses and consultants in terms of the two-tier system? Where is the Minister's plan for that? That would show real solidarity for those workers. Has he any plans in that regard?

My third question relates to what happened in nursing homes and congregated settings. We had the HIQA report that showed the challenges faced by nursing homes and the nursing sector, both private and public, in dealing with Covid-19. It was a very damning report. The Minister set up an expert panel which is going to report very shortly as well. There needs to be a proper probing of all of those reports by the Oireachtas. What is the Minister's view on how that can be done? They cannot be just rubber-stamped. There cannot be just statements in this House on those reports. We have to know what exactly the Government is proposing to ensure we have proper scrutiny and examination of those reports. More important, we need change to ensure that as we go forward older people are treated with dignity, are protected in our nursing homes and are not left behind as they were when this pandemic struck.

Those are my first three questions to the Minister and I hope he can respond to them.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I thank the Deputy for those questions. On capacity, I agree 100% with the Deputy. We are in the middle of a very comprehensive planning exercise to bring in a winter plan unlike any that has been seen before. I agree fully with the Deputy that before Covid-19 arrived here, we had the longest waiting list anywhere in Europe, the lowest number of consultants, the second lowest number of hospital beds and all sorts of other capacity issues, which I am on the record as being critical of over many years. My position on that has not changed whatsoever.

On top of that, there has been a significant increase in the waiting lists because of the pausing of elective care. On top of that again, there is an undiagnosed amount in the community as well because referrals into the system are very low. I received a report this morning from the HSE on the reduction in capacity. It believes there will be a 30% reduction in operating theatres, a 30% reduction in scopes and a serious reduction in outpatient appointments.

The scale of this is like nothing we have ever faced before. Rather than coming in here with something that has not been thought through, what I did as soon as I was appointed was to meet the HSE and the Department and ask them to work together to put a comprehensive plan together and to plug Sláintecare firmly into it because its team have identified a very large number of innovations, some of which have already been brought in, such as e-prescribing. I will be discussing that at length with Members of this House, be that at the health committee or wherever is appropriate to do that.

I agree fully with the Deputy and the reason I did not go into that today is simply because this session in the Dáil was statements on Covid-19. I am very happy to come back to the House or meet the health spokespersons and get into that in much more detail. I fully accept the Deputy's push there.

On the pay issues, I agree there are agreed pay issues - for example, the nursing agreement from 2019, which not only included pay but an acceleration to safe staffing levels, much of which has not happened yet. Some of it should have happened and some of it did not happen out of necessity because of Covid-19. I met the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, INMO, the Psychiatric Nurses Association, PNA, and SIPTU to discuss these exact issues. I have already spoken to the Department and the HSE about how we can accelerate what has been agreed. Next week I am meeting with the Irish Medical Organisation, IMO, and the Irish Hospital Consultants Association, IHCA, to discuss exactly the same thing for doctors. I hear the Deputy loud and clear and I am giving the same message to the Department and the HSE, that the first thing we have to do is to implement what has already been agreed.

24 July 2021

That has not happened at the level that was agreed. On nursing homes, we have the HIQA report and I am sure we have all read it. The good news is that it found that the vast majority of nursing homes were green. They were in compliance across the various measures that were looked at, be it governance, capacity or ability to respond. There were, however, usually between 2% and 3% that were marked red and 2% or 3% that were marked as yellow, where they were not yet ready. We are working with the HSE, HIQA and the Department to see what needs to be done quickly to ensure that that small number get the supports they need. On top of that, I have written to HIQA. The HIQA report was on nursing homes that did not have Covid outbreaks. I wrote last week to ask HIQA to do the same analysis for the nursing homes that have had Covid outbreaks. It could not do so to begin with for infection control reasons. We need the same report for exactly that.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: No problem. That is fine. I will revert in writing on the rest.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy asked me to come back to him. I am trying to stick to his rules. Does he want the two minutes?

Deputy David Cullinane: I will allow the Minister to continue.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Go ahead, Minister.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: The expert report is coming next week. I have not seen it but understand it has a long list of recommendations. The first focus has to be on making sure that the nursing homes are protected. The public health officials are saying, based on how they see this disease work around the world, that we will have a second surge. We hope that it will be low and that it will be localised geographically but we have to be prepared within particular communities, counties and cities for the prevalence rate to go up. The first focus is on making sure that every protection that can be in place is in place.

With regard to the Oireachtas, I am happy to come back to do statements and questions and answers. It is a matter for the Oireachtas but as someone who spent the last three years on the Committee on Health, I imagine that it will take on both the HIQA report and the expert report and looking at them in detail. It is not for me to say but I imagine that will happen. The officials and I will be available for that if the committee so chooses.

Deputy David Cullinane: We are under time pressure and I do not want to take from my colleague's time. We do not need the Minister to come into the Chamber and agree with us for the sake of agreeing with us. It is okay to agree with us but we need action. The two big challenges facing this country are the economic challenge and the health challenge. We have an economic plan but not a health plan. Today, nurses, doctors and consultants will go into hospitals really stressed, trying to make sure that people can be treated. The Minister talked about miscare. Undoubtedly, people will die prematurely if we do not put the plan in place. This is urgent and we are going into recess next week. Is it the case that we will not see a plan throughout August? I do not think that is acceptable and I urge the Minister to come forward with that plan as soon as possible.

Deputy Mark Ward: I congratulate the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on her election and appointment yesterday.

More than 14 years after *A Vision for Change* was published, Ireland finds itself in the middle of a pandemic that is expected to place additional demands on already overstretched mental health services. We have many mental health challenges ahead of us and I was a bit disappointed not to hear any mention of mental health in the Minister's speech. Pre Covid, never mind post Covid, we had long waiting lists to access care, limited out of hours support and no crisis intervention, an over-reliance on acute care for adults and a lack of mental health services in our community. We still have children in this day and age being admitted to adult units for psychiatric care and there is little joined up thinking between mental health and addiction services. We are still over-reliant on NGOs to provide services that the Government should provide. I could go on.

Sharing the Vision is the new kid on the block. It is labelled as a mental health policy for everyone. The document was recently published and it has some good objectives but none of them is costed. The document will not be worth the paper it is written on unless it is financially or politically backed. Will the Minister tell me when this document will be costed and financed? There are 100 recommendations in *Sharing the Vision*, of which 40 are labelled as short-term, to be implemented within 18 months. When will these be costed? The programme for Government also states that it will examine the appointment of a national director for mental health. When will this examination happen? Will the new national director of mental health report directly to the CEO of the HSE, because it is vital that that happens?

Ireland is facing a tsunami, as has been said by numerous groups including in the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response, of mental health problems coming down the line due to the coronavirus pandemic. Early indications have shown an increase in suicide and self-harm. Data collection on suicides by Irish hospitals was suspended as a result of lockdown, meaning that there are no current figures on suicide and self-harm rates, according to the national self-harm registry. Is the Minister aware of this? What was the rationale behind this decision? There may be a good reason for this but I am wondering about the rationale behind that. Data collection is vital for future policy, as the Minister knows. Will data collection commence and will it be retrospective so that we have figures to influence policy?

We need to develop a 24-7 crisis intervention service and rehabilitation and recovery times within our communities. Mental health does not finish at certain times of the evening.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): As the Deputy quite rightly said, we have a new mental health policy called *Sharing the Vision*. It is a mental health policy for everyone. We must remember that is a ten-year policy that needs a whole-of-Government approach. It does not relate just to the Department of Health. There has to be a cross-sector approach relating to housing and social protection supports. What I like about this policy is that it envisages a mental health system that addresses the needs of the population through a focus on the requirements of the individual. The most important thing in this policy is service delivery. We will establish a national implementation and monitoring committee to oversee its progress, meaning that there will be oversight. The terms of reference for the monitoring committee are currently being drawn up and will come to Cabinet in September. We are looking at an independent chair with various subgroups and different terms of reference.

I will answer the questions about suicide and 24 hour crisis intervention in writing. Much good work has been done during Covid with the move to online services and e-health. Jigsaw was able to move many of its supports online during this time because of all the challenges. I know face-to-face engagement can never be replaced but when we had various challenges relat-

24 July 2021

ing to Covid, online services worked well and we could maintain many supports.

Deputy Ged Nash: My party leader, Deputy Kelly, could not join us this morning so he asked me to take these questions. I have not had the opportunity to wish the Minister well in his role but want to do that now. He and his colleagues have a major task ahead. Some of the suggestions that he makes are positive and we will support them, but we will also critique, analyse and provide alternatives to the propositions that he brings forward, as any constructive Opposition party should, especially in the face of the threats that we are facing.

I want to ask the Minister a series of questions in the first few minutes I have. Will he commit, as our party leader, Deputy Alan Kelly, has suggested, to providing the flu vaccine free of charge to everybody in the country? This would be a useful way to protect people from the flu virus and to ensure that our emergency departments are not inundated during the autumn and winter in the flu season.

There is stunning and shocking evidence, as provided by SIPTU and other health service unions at the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response this week, about the levels of infection of Covid-19 for healthcare workers across the system. There was concerning evidence that suggested that healthcare workers were in essence putting themselves and patients at risk through no fault of their own because they were showing up to work while experiencing symptoms, because of their dependence on premiums and allowances, given the low levels of core pay for low-paid health service workers in our public sector. Will the Minister commit that that issue will be addressed in the context of any future potential public sector pay deal that he may be considering?

The rate of infection for healthcare workers is one of the very concerning aspects we have seen over the last months. We have lost eight healthcare workers through Covid-19 since the pandemic started. I extend my sympathies to the family and friends of Dr. Syed Waqqar Ali who fell this week. I say “fell” because he fell in the line of duty. Dr. Ali put the public and his patients first. Clearly he contracted Covid-19 as a result of his work.

I am aware the Minister is developing a compensation package for the families of healthcare workers who have lost their lives as a result of Covid-19. What is the Minister’s view on extending this to contracted workers in the health service? At least one such worker, a contract cleaner, lost his life as a result of contracting Covid-19. These workers have no death-in-service benefit so it is important that we extend that to contract workers.

Will the Minister make a clear statement on his view on the classification of Covid-19 as an occupational illness? This would elevate Covid-19 somewhat with regard to the legal framework. It would allow healthcare workers who contract Covid-19 in the workplace to get better healthcare, it would provide a better focus around health and safety procedures in the workplace, it would provide a role for the Health and Safety Authority with an inspection regime and it would also provide access to compensation measures in the normal way that occupational illnesses do. I ask the Minister to consider this. The International Trade Union Confederation has demanded this. The policy has also been adopted by other, analogous European Union member states. I believe that Ireland should follow suit.

Will the Minister please consider a proposal made by the Labour Party leader, Deputy Alan Kelly, which is absent from the July stimulus programme, to provide a €1,000 bonus to health care workers. That would cost some €100 million, which is small beer in the context of

the €5.4 billion cash injection announced yesterday. It would be an appropriate recognition of the contribution made by our health service workers during this time. If it was considered, I ask that it would be extended to our nursing home staff who predominantly work in the private sector but who have made an enormous contribution, often in very difficult circumstances during the pandemic, keeping older people safe in very challenging circumstances, as we all know.

Will the Minister give his view on my persistent calls for a commission of inquiry into what happened at Dealgan House in Dundalk? The Minister will be familiar with this case, where 22 residents passed away as a result of Covid-19. I was very taken by the interview of the assistant director of nursing in Dealgan House by Pat Kenny on 10 July. She painted a picture of a very traumatic scenario in March and April when on some days two residents were dying each day. There were traumatised staff and traumatised families running around looking for support from HIQA and the HSE. The cavalry came far too late, in my view. It is a shame that staff, who are still traumatised over their experience, and struggling staff and families, are looking for answers through freedom of information requests and parliamentary questions from Deputies like me who represent Louth and Meath East. The only way we can get to the bottom of what happened at Dealgan House is to ensure we take the approach of a commission of inquiry to look at what happened in its totality and in a holistic way. If we are to learn anything about how we respond to crises such as this we need to front up, get all the information together, get all the key actors in the one room and hold a commission of inquiry-type approach. This could be done under the existing legislation very quickly and comprehensively. Families are entitled to answers.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I thank Deputy Nash for his questions and, while I acknowledge that he is stepping in for his party leader today, for his ongoing work on a lot of these issues.

On the flu vaccine, I will ask for a detailed response to be sent to the Deputy. I have a detailed note here but if I give it now it would take up all the time. Essentially, the advice from the national immunisation advisory committee is being followed. It did not advise the whole country, it advised at-risk groups. I am delighted to say that the HSE has already forward purchased a vast number of the vaccines. The proposal and the plan are that the vaccine would be provided free to the at-risk groups. I have the detail here but in the interests of time I will get it to the Deputy. In addition, there are 600,000 nasal doses, which are for children. A lot of work has been done. The advice from the people who understand this best is to take that approach. It does not mean that the Deputy and I, for example, will not be in the at-risk group, and if needed that he or I should not get the jab. We should. The advice is to proceed as we are. It will be the most comprehensive provision and, obviously, it is being taken in the context of keeping people well and out of hospitals for the reasons we all understand.

I thank the Deputy for raising the pay points and especially of low paid workers. Let me take it away, reflect on it and we will get back to the Deputy.

On infection rates, I was a member of the committee when the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, INMO, gave us exactly these rates. I discussed them at length subsequently with the INMO. The rate described is the percentage of all the positive tests in Ireland and the percentage of these cases that is healthcare workers. From memory, I believe the number given was 43%. The INMO, very fairly, said that when they compared that figure with other organisations around the world it was the highest of any who were involved. I looked at this in detail. The figure is highly variable on what each country tests. If a country focuses on testing healthcare workers and at the same time the community rates are very low, then obviously one

24 July 2021

will get a much higher percentage. The feeling is that this is what has happened. As important, we have looked at the percentage of healthcare workers who have tested positive. On that metric Ireland is way below and is doing very well by international standards. While there is no acceptable number, compared with other comparable countries we are doing well. I will get a detailed note to the Deputy on how all of that is working.

I shall now turn to the bereavement compensation. It is intended that it be applied retrospectively and across the board to front-line workers. This includes HSE staff, nursing home staff, section 38 and section 39 staff, agency staff, home care workers and agency home care workers. It is very broad. Currently it is specifically for those people who work hands-on with Covid-19. I will take the Deputy's points away about other workers in the system also. We have to do right by anyone who has contracted this disease while working for the State in a healthcare system. I will certainly take it under review.

I am aware the Deputy has raised the matter of Dealgan House several times. My view is that the HIQA report has come in, the expert report is coming and I imagine these issues will be discussed.

Deputy Ged Nash: When is the expert report due?

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: Early next week. I will get the remaining information to the Deputy in writing.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I gave the Minister notice of two issues in the House yesterday. The first relates to international travel. Earlier today the Minister said that every protection is in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19. A response to a recent parliamentary question said that almost 62,000 passengers arrived through Dublin airport in the first two weeks of July. Currently, the Department of Justice and Equality is responsible for the follow up with those passengers. I was curious to know the level of follow up. The Minister and the Department of Justice and Equality have made it very clear that in recent weeks, with an increase in the numbers of people travelling, their resources are being diverted into immigration services. When I drew them out on the actual figures, they disclosed that of the 62,000 passengers who have come into the country in the first two weeks in July, the Department conducted follow up phone calls to only 7% of those travellers. Of that 7%, only half of them actually answered the calls. In the reply the Minister for Justice and Equality stated her Department awaits hand-over of this follow-up process to the Department of Health. Is there a turf war on here? Why is it that the Department of Health has not taken on that responsibility? The low levels of incoming passengers getting follow-up calls is absolutely indefensible. Only 3.5% of international travellers coming through Dublin Airport are answering phone calls. We cannot allow the country to be exposed to that level of risk. When will the Department of Health take responsibility for ensuring adequate follow-up in these cases?

My second question, about which I gave notice to the Minister yesterday, concerns disability services. Earlier in the year, there was an announcement that there was going to be a cut of €20 million from disability organisations. That was pre-Covid. In the light of Covid, we know the fundraising capacity of disability organisations has been devastated. Due to this, there have been major cutbacks in the services provided to the most vulnerable citizens. The Minister's predecessor indicated clearly and gave an assurance that he would reverse that cut. As the main Opposition spokesperson at the time, the Minister gave a similar undertaking that he would reverse the cut.

I am concerned, however, that one disability organisation was informed just this week by its CHO that the €20 million cut is going ahead. Will the Minister clarify absolutely here today whether that €20 million cut is going to be reinstated?

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I thank the Deputy for her questions. I am looking to see what led to this 7% level. I do not believe it is acceptable. Deputy Shortall also believes it is unacceptable. There are several things happening. The number of people who are going to be tasked with following up on this is going to be significantly increased. It is not going to be the Department of Health but the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. That was what was agreed by the Government earlier this week.

What will help with that is the electronic form. There is a huge amount of work going on in the background to put out a form on an electronic basis. It is already mandatory. Everybody who comes in has to fill it in by law. People are going to be asked to fill it in before they travel. My understanding is it will be two days before they travel.

I spoke to the WHO exactly on these issues several days ago. It stated the single most important thing in terms of people coming into one's country is not quarantine or block-booking hotels but being able to contact people coming in and knowing where they are. That is where the focus is going to be. We are really working hard to get this electronic form into place. A team is being set up in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to make sure that the people who come into the country are called. That is what is happening on the issue. I agree with the Deputy that it needs to be better. A 7% call rate is not acceptable.

With regard to disability services, I cannot give the Deputy a definitive answer right now. It is additional funding that, as she will understand, has to be agreed by the Government. What I can tell her is that I absolutely stand over what I said when in opposition. I did not agree with the cut pre-Covid. I did not believe it was the right thing to do, regardless of Covid. I imagine I am on the record on that and I stand over that. It certainly is not the thing to be doing with all the additional strains the disability services have gone through.

I have asked that the case the Deputy raised is looked into. We were discussing it here last night and we are here this morning. I do not have an answer for the Deputy but I will get back to her about that. My understanding is that it should not be happening. I will be seeking agreement that the proposed cut of 1%, given everything that is going on, is not applied.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Both of these issues are too serious to use the kick-to-touch approach. I did give the Minister notice about these issues.

How can the Minister defend a situation where 62,000 people are coming into the country, many of them coming from countries or states which have high rates of the virus, and that of those only 2,000 are actually followed up comprehensively by the Department of Justice and Equality? The Minister said he was going to find out what is happening. The Department of Justice and Equality is clear. It is awaiting hand-over to the Minister's Department to take responsibility for this.

It is not good enough to say we are going to do something at some point in the future. The numbers coming into the airport are increasing rapidly. In the absence of a proper hand-over to the Department of Health, the country is actually being exposed to high risk. We cannot afford that. The priority has to be to open our schools and open up businesses completely. We cannot continue to have a situation where high-risk situations at our airports are not dealt with. This is

24 July 2021

going to put everything else in jeopardy unless the Minister and his Department ensure there is proper follow-up. Suggesting that something is going to happen in the future by putting a form online is simply not good enough.

We are also told that next week we are going to be asked to approve testing at airports. Who is responsible for that? Surely that is not the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The Minister needs to give us an assurance today that he is not going to continue to allow the country to be exposed to this level of risk and that his Department will take its responsibilities seriously, get its act together and ensure there are adequate numbers of follow-up calls.

On the second question, it is simply not good enough to say the Minister does not know. Either the €20 million cut is going ahead to disability services or it is not. The Minister has given an assurance previously. His predecessor has given an assurance. On the ground, however, the HSE is telling those organisations that the cuts are going ahead. Will the Minister give clarity to both those issues?

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: With regard to the second question, the Deputy asked me the same question again. I have answered the question. My answer is exactly what it was five minutes ago. With regard-----

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Is the HSE to proceed with those cuts?

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I have answered the question.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Minister did not.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I did. The Deputy may not like the answer but I have answered it.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I am telling the Minister that the HSE is proceeding with those cuts. Is he going to take any action to stop those happening? They will have real implications for the clients of disability organisations.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I agree and I have comprehensively answered the question. I told the Deputy exactly what I will be doing. The answer to the same question is as it was when she asked it the first time.

With regard to the Department of Justice and Equality, the Deputy keeps on stating my Department is taking over the follow-up. It is not. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport is taking over the follow-up.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: That is not true.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: It is true.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We cannot hear the Deputy because there is no microphone on. Now the time is up. The Minister will have to reply in writing to clarify the specific questions which have been asked.

I am going to move on because this session will be over at a particular time and I want to ensure all Deputies get an opportunity to ask their questions. I call the Deputies from Solidarity-

People Before Profit.

Deputy Gino Kenny: I am sharing time with Deputy Paul Murphy.

I congratulate the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on her surprise win yesterday. We were all delighted.

A Deputy: It was not a surprise win.

Deputy Gino Kenny: Well, it was a surprise for a few of us.

I am sure the Minister was seriously alarmed by the HIQA report published on Tuesday. It gave a terrible insight into the challenges and the failures of nursing homes during the public health emergency. I understand from the media that the Covid committee will recommend a review of all deaths in nursing homes. I read the report this morning. It is damning. In fact, it is beyond damning. One statistic, which I will not cite because it is quite a long section, is that 60% of the nursing homes that were assessed had weak governance and management during the public health emergency. The alarm bells are going off, not only for Deputies but also for the residents of those nursing homes and their loved ones. There must be an urgent review. I hope that the Minister will support this call.

I spoke a number of weeks ago about the St. Mary's Centre nursing home, also called the Telford Centre, on Merrion Road. I sent the Minister correspondence on this issue two weeks ago. It is run by the Sisters of Charity and some of its residents have been there for more than 20 years. At the end of the year, however, the facility is due to close down. That is a terrible shame. The staff are upset by the potential closure and its 35 residents are worried about the situation. Will the Minister comment on its potential closure and give a commitment that the facility will be taken over by the State and run by the HSE? It is a great facility that has existed for more than 150 years, but if it closes down, it will be closed for good. In view of the HIQA report, there has been a juxtaposition during the Covid emergency between the 80% of nursing homes that are run by for-profit companies and facilities such as St. Mary's, which will close down if the State does not intervene. The Minister needs to intervene and St. Mary's should be taken over by the HSE.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I thank the Deputy for raising those points. I read the HIQA report carefully. I understand the Deputy's alarm, but my reading of the document in terms of the level of compliance is different. I am more than happy to discuss that with him after this debate. The report gave a green grade, which denotes full compliance, to 90% plus of nursing homes in respect of the various governance issues. It identified approximately 5% or 6% of homes that needed extra work. We must ensure that we engage with those nursing homes that were graded as yellow or red - not fully in compliance or not in compliance at all - quickly so that we can understand what they need to get up to speed and what HIQA needs to help them do that.

The HIQA report raised a serious issue for the Government and the House, namely, the lack of a regulatory framework for nursing homes. This was one of the main red flags that HIQA raised in its report and the Government needs to work on it. I am certainly working on it. It will be a matter for the House to debate and, I imagine, pass primary legislation on.

I take the Deputy's point. I wrote to HIQA last week to ask that the same review and a thematic review be done in respect of the nursing homes that were not included in this one. The nursing homes included in the HIQA report are those that have not had Covid cases in them.

24 July 2021

Obviously, the same assessment needs to be done of the other half, which are the ones that have had Covid cases in them.

The Deputy will understand that I cannot comment on individual nursing homes, but I am happy to look into the matter he raised. I was recently made aware of two residential centres in Dublin that, unfortunately, have notified the HSE that they are no longer in a position to continue operating. I am acutely aware of the value of residential care and the HSE is in the process of engaging with these services to ensure continuity of care for their residents.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I have two questions. If it is possible to follow up on the nursing homes issue that Deputy Gino Kenny raised, I will start with one and get an answer.

The Minister underplays the HIQA report. The rate of non-compliance with infection prevention and control regulations was 50% across all nursing homes inspected. The regulation on suitability of premises had a non-compliance rate of 32%. Some 21% of homes had staff shortages. One of the key findings was about how infections got into the homes. It reads: “inward transmission into nursing homes by staff is a key likely source of its introduction to these settings.” However, it does not analyse why it got into some homes and not others or the relationship between staffing structures, the use of agency staff and inward transmission of infections. The inadequacies revealed in the report suggest that these problems cannot be resolved within our current for-profit system and that the care system needs to be integrated into the public healthcare system.

I have a general question for the Minister that he might be able to answer quickly before I ask my question on schools. Does he agree that there needs to be a full public inquiry into Covid-19 in nursing homes as well as the structure of the system of care for older people?

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I thank the Deputy for his question. To be clear, I do not mean to underplay the HIQA report. We are taking it very seriously and have examined it in detail. The matters that HIQA has flagged are being taken seriously. I accept the Deputy’s points on the various details in the report.

Regarding a public inquiry, we have the HIQA report. I have sought an additional HIQA report, which will essentially be the same piece of work but in respect of the other half of nursing homes, which are those that had Covid cases in them. We want to get that information quickly. In addition, I understand that I will get the expert review early next week. I have not seen it and I do not know what the recommendations will be, but my understanding is that there will be a comprehensive range of recommendations covering what has happened and what needs to be done to protect nursing homes in case of the second wave that the public health officials tell us is likely.

I suggest that there is a way for this to proceed. The HIQA report and the expert report will be published and I imagine we will have a session in the Dáil at that point. We could also have an informal session with Deputies, if that helped. It will then be a matter for the health committee, if it decides to look into this matter, to take on the HIQA and expert reports. It can run sessions specifically on nursing homes if it wants. Such sessions are held in public. It is a matter for the Oireachtas to choose whether it wants to kick something off. The Deputy is not suggesting that that should be it, but that there should be a wider inquiry into the issue. I suggest that we wait to see what is in the reports and to hear from the nursing homes, residents and people affected and then determine what the most appropriate course of action is. I am certainly

not ruling anything out, but our focus right now has to be on ensuring that the nursing homes, residents and staff are protected. If there is a strong case for a further investigation of some description, we will look at doing so. I am keen to avoid, as, I am sure, the Deputy is, pulling a large number of people away from protecting nursing homes and into an inquiry in a way that could lead to them being exposed. Neither of us wants that.

Deputy Paul Murphy: My next question is about schools and their reopening. We are sitting in a massive venue, which the public pays for, so that we can work in a safe environment. Will the Minister give a commitment that he will not force teachers and students back and endanger communities by having schools return and operate in conditions that are less safe than those in which Deputies work?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister has only a few seconds left.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I will revert to the Deputy in more detail. The very short answer is that there can be no double standards. There cannot be one level of health and safety for us and another for the nation's children and school workers.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We should be moving on to the Regional Independent Group, but I am unsure as to whether any of its members are present.

Deputy Cathal Berry: I am.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I beg the Deputy's pardon. Tá sé deacair.

Deputy Cathal Berry: I am up in the cheap seats here at the very top. Ar dtús báire, déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Leas-Cheann Comhairle as a post nua. Is rud iontach é. Go n-éirí an bóthar léi ina hobair agus sa phost as seo amach.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Cathal Berry: I thank the Minister and his team for coming in to update the House on the Covid-19 emergency and the Government's response. I thank him for his compliments to the Opposition this morning. I, for one, will continue to engage constructively with his office and the Government as part of the huge national effort to combat the virus.

I compliment the front-line workers and members of the public for getting what might have been a potential surge in the virus under control in the past fortnight. As the Minister outlined, the figures are moving in the right direction. The R number is coming down, as is the rate of community transmission, and the rate of community compliance is going up rapidly. I was in Dublin city centre last night, in several shops and fast food outlets, and there was not a single person who was not wearing a face covering. It shows that the public is completely on board with this and we should commend them on their compliance.

I agree with the Minister and Deputies on the importance of reopening the schools. Everything in society hinges on the schools reopening in a few weeks. I look forward to the Minister, Deputy Foley, publishing her plan on this next week. I hope it is early in the week so that we have the opportunity to scrutinise it fully before we break for recess.

I have four short questions for the Minister and which I will group so that the Minister can answer. First, how many community testing facilities are operating here and do we have the means to scale up this testing in the event of a significant surge in cases? Second, on laboratory

24 July 2021

analysis of samples, are we still using the international laboratory in Munich or is all the analysis taking place in Irish labs? If the Minister does not have the information to hand, a written reply would be sufficient.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I will get a detailed answer for the Deputy. I raised the issue of the German lab myself. I understand we are in contract with the laboratory, which was an important measure when we were trying rapidly to scale up capacity. I will ask the HSE for an update. I will give some of the latest figures on testing. We now have capacity for 100,000 tests a week. We are in a positive position of not needing the full capacity, but that is what NPHE recommends we should be able to scale up to. The testing and contact tracing operational resource model has been designed to go up and down. As of midnight on Monday, we have had 574,487 tests with a 5% positivity rate overall. In the past week, more than 51,000 tests were carried out, an average of 7,300 a day. Of the 51,000, 137 tests were positive, which is less than 0.3%, or 0.27%, which is very useful. In 90% of the cases the turnaround time from referral to contact tracing is three days or less. There is an important nuance here. It is not three days or less from when a person refers to when he or she gets the test result. That is down to one day. The three days, which is impressive, includes the person having the test, getting the test result, which is taking an average of 1.1 days, and all the person's close contacts being followed up as well. We should be very proud of the HSE for having done this.

The number of testing centres has gone up and down. Flexibility has been designed in the process. I will get a detailed update for the Deputy on the current status.

Deputy Cathal Berry: My third question relates to contact tracing. How does the Minister anticipate the contact tracing system working in the next few months? Does he anticipate that the contact tracing app will take over or that the manual contact tracing by telephone will continue?

The Government's second priority after schools is to reopen the healthcare system to non-Covid illnesses and conditions. There is a massive backlog. Will the Minister outline in general terms how he sees that happening in the coming months?

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: On contact tracing, the view expressed by the WHO and international groups is that Ireland is doing very well. Our contact tracing app has been, and continues to be, a great success. The latest figure is that more than 1.4 million people have downloaded it, which is about one third of the target population. It is much higher than many other countries. The team that developed the app told me that because the infection numbers are thankfully very low in Ireland, they thought it would take several weeks for the app to be used to start notifying close contacts who otherwise would not have been told. In fact, the app started working within 24 hours because of the enormous buy-in of the people. I encourage everybody who can to download that app. Every single person who downloads that app becomes part of the front-line response to this. The 1.4 million downloads is fantastic but we need to push this to get it further. It will not replace contact tracing. It is only one part of the system. The team has been significantly bulked up to deal with people coming into the country, for example. Everyone coming into the country will be asked to download the app. They will be asked for a verifiable phone number so that we can contact them. It is mandated by law that they fill in the form about where they will be so that we know where they are and can contact them. The app protects them and everyone else. At the same time we will continue with the really successful work which has been done to date on contact tracing. The app works with the contact tracing team.

I will outline the process. When a person takes a test and it is positive, they will be telephoned with the result and asked to self-isolate, which is what they should do as soon as they are known to require a test. They will be asked if they have the app, as the State holds no record of who has the app or the phone numbers associated with it. If they have the app, they will be asked for permission for their phone to let the other phones know. If permission is given, they will be given a verified code that uploads the information. The number of contacts are examined in terms of the symptomatic time. Those phones are pinged and people are informed they have been identified as a close contact. If those people have provided their phone numbers, they will be called for a follow up conversation. If they have not provided their number, they will be given a phone number that they can call themselves. The app is critically important and very much part of the full contact tracing regime.

The reopening of health for non-Covid is our single greatest challenge. An enormous amount of work is ongoing to protect the country from Covid. The waiting lists prior to Covid were the highest in Europe. The additional list has gone up significantly because non-essential services were paused. On top of that, there is a large undiagnosed care need in the community because referral rates have gone down. The HSE capacity is also heavily reduced in terms of operating theatres, scopes, outpatients and there are much greater pressures on HSE staffing because some of its staff will also have to go off. Furthermore, winter is coming. Putting this very comprehensive plan together is one of the core parts of work to get the services back open and to do so in a way that addresses the deadly serious issue of winter and the need for the system to work.

Deputy Michael Collins: I am sharing time with Deputies Mattie McGrath and O'Donoghue. I have a number of questions and, given that time is short, I might ask them all together. I begin with the issue of nursing homes and congregated settings. I note, thankfully, that in west Cork to date, and please God it will remain the case, there has been no Covid-19 case in any of the nursing homes. Nevertheless, there is no point skirting around the issue of the community hospital in Clonakilty, where, sadly, many people passed away. I am a member of the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response, as was the Minister initially, and I have been trying to ascertain why the then Minister for Health signed a statutory instrument in 2016 pushing out the deadline for being compliant with HIQA standards of 80% single-bed occupancy in community hospitals. The deadline is now 2021, a delay that must have led to a loss of life in hospitals such as that in Clonakilty and other community hospitals. We often talk about nursing homes and the same may be true of them.

Is the Minister going to do the very same, that is, sign a statutory instrument and push out the deadline further? I would like him to tell me, although I accept he may not be able to do so because I am asking the question on the floor, when Clonakilty Community Hospital will be fully compliant. Works were to commence there but will they do so or will there be a hold-up? We need to know that for the sake of the people who work there and who worked through an horrific difficulty in that hospital. I know they did so tremendously well because I have spoken to patients and their families who told me the staff are very good. Unfortunately, I have noticed in community hospitals a complete lack of beds for elderly patients who need beds. They have been refused them in my constituency of Cork South-West, where there are fabulous community hospitals right out to Schull, Castletownbere, Dunmanway, Skibbereen, Kinsale and Bandon, but there is a need for additional beds. People are waiting in Cork University Hospital and cannot get a bed in a community hospital.

There is also the issue of Bantry General Hospital, something I have raised quite often. It is not mentioned in the programme for Government and I have serious concerns about it. The

24 July 2021

HSE is doing its best to close the back door on hiring a full-time anaesthetist. Bantry General Hospital is our hospital to protect us from Covid, and I would like to know where it stands in regard to securing an anaesthetist.

Why can there not be community testing for people who need a test, whether because they are flying out of the country or whatever? Where should we send them? Deputies who are contacted about the matter regularly have nowhere to send them. There is a provision if the person is ill, and there is a procedure in that regard through a person's doctor, but not through a person's own channel, which needs to be explored because people are seeking Covid tests before they enter other countries. As for the issue of same-day testing at the airports, I have raised that for two months with the Tánaiste. It is a no-brainer and it should have been worked on. It is a failure.

Local hubs have been mentioned in the context of CoAction and there was a promise that they could be opened. Why is funding not being made available and why has there been a hold-up in that regard, given that it was initially meant to be the case?

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: I congratulate the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on her appointment. She has made history and yesterday was a great day for women and for the House as she is the first woman ever to have been elected to the position.

When GPs refer people for swabbing and they do not turn up, what can be done? Should penalties be put in place? When people are supposed to turn up for a swabbing but do not do so, there has to be some consequence.

To continue on a point made by Deputy Collins, what are the Minister's plans for engaging with nursing homes, both in my constituency and throughout the country, in which I believe there are 400 of them?

Finally, I raise something that I raised with the Minister yesterday. Can we audit hospitals on the basis of their turnover of staff? Certain hospitals in the country have a massive turnover of nurses and other staff and I want to know why that is the case. Is it that the workplace is not a safe environment for them? There has to be some problem within the structure to explain why there is such a high turnover at particular hospitals in the country. Can we find the problem and help fix it?

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: To respond to Deputy O'Donoghue, we are acutely aware of the percentages of people who have not turned up for tests. There is a lower percentage of people who have not turned up for a second test, which is also required. My understanding is that people who attend their GP clinic and say they are symptomatic are referred for a test, and that there is a very high compliance rate in such cases because they contact their GP and say they are worried. The rate is lower for close contacts where they do not feel any symptoms. I imagine there are a variety of reasons for people not turning up. The single most important step we can all take as public representatives is to get out the message again and again that while it is an inconvenience if somebody is contacted and told he or she is a close contact, while it is nobody's fault, given that the person could have been sitting beside somebody in a café, for example, and while it may scare people who would prefer not to know the result, we are in this together and everybody really needs to do this.

Engagement with nursing homes is ongoing and I am talking on an ongoing basis with Nursing Homes Ireland, as are various other parts of the system.

With regard to acute hospitals, let me take that point away and revert to the Deputy. It is an interesting question and it is something we would like to know. If existing information is available, I will ensure it is sent to the Deputy.

I might continue responding if I have enough time.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank the Minister but his time to respond is up. I call Deputy Mattie McGrath.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Psychiatric and general student nurses have joined the front line and helped out. They paid their way through college by the time they began their placement, which might last eight or ten weeks and for which they get paid. Now they cannot get that because of the circumstances of Covid-19 and there is significant hardship, therefore, on families, especially those who do not get grants.

St. Brigid's Hospital in Carrick-on-Suir is a wonderful district hospital. Three hospice beds there are funded mainly by the people of the community. Respite services in the area are totally closed. The hospital was taken over to accommodate Covid patients but it was not used. We have had promises and promises as to when it will open. I want the Minister to outline a definite date for when those hospice and respite beds will be returned to use. If he cannot do so today, he might do so in the coming days.

What went on in nursing homes was shambolic. There will have to be an independent public inquiry, without the involvement of the State, into what blackguarding went on there. Deputy Shortall and I attended briefings with the Department, the then Minister for Health, Dr. Tony Holohan and everybody else. I wish Dr. Holohan's family well. The Minister, Deputy Donnelly, also attended. The shoe is on the other foot now. We want answers, not waffle. The whole matter of the airports was also shambolic. I class this pandemic as a scamdemic. People are being scammed and deceived. Some 62,000 people have come into the country and fewer than 2,000 have even been asked to fill out a form or been followed up on.

This is disgraceful. We would not allow pubs to open, no more than 200 people can attend GAA matches, and above all, we will not allow more than 50 people into a church. We have had a wonderful holy mass, which I have mentioned previously, at the Holy Year Cross near Clonmel every year for the past 60 years, but it cannot be held outdoors because of the number restrictions. There are usually 500 or 600 people on the August bank holiday Monday morning. It is a wonderful occasion but it cannot happen, yet people can come in from all over the world and there is no testing, no tracing, nothing.

It is a deceit and the people are being conned. I accept there is a new Minister but he was on the other side and he knows. We are being conned. Ordinary people are being told on television to stay in their homes. I heard Deputy Berry talking about Dublin and the compliance with masks. That is great but the airports are a farce. I have been saying this since the first briefing. The Minister attended all of them, along with the then Taoiseach, when we were told we had to be good Europeans and we could not close the airports. Hungary could do it, but the then Taoiseach could do nothing but criticise that country, as the current Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, has done too.

The people are being fooled. The poor people who own pubs, many of them pensioners who are not getting a penny of any payment, were misled last week in regard to getting stock and were led to believe their pubs could reopen. Now, by the sounds of it this morning, they will not

24 July 2021

be allowed to open on 10 August either. Anybody can come in from anywhere, whether Saigon or anywhere else, and walk through the airport. Although there is to be electronic tracing, it will be overseen by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. When Deputy Shortall asked a question about that at one of the briefings, no one could tell us who would do it. Nobody is doing it and it is not being done. It is open season for anybody to come in from any hotspot to this country, and that is a disgrace. It is an injustice to our people, front-line workers, staff, the Garda Síochána and everybody who is trying to keep the virus at bay and beat it. The people are being blackguarded and deceived and it is a total scam from that point of view. Small businesses are being pushed out of business. There are ordinary people trying to live their lives in the country while this blackguarding is going on. It is just unthinkable.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. As there is no time for a reply, we will move to the next speaker.

Deputy Joan Collins: I raise the matter of capacity as we have seen how hospitals have had to deal with people getting very ill from Covid-19 and going into intensive care units, etc. We still have our need for ordinary surgeries, consultations and treatment of ill people so what are the HSE and the Minister doing in this respect? Will the Minister give us a breakdown of the current position?

It was mentioned recently by Dr. Rita Doyle that the required legislation to allow non-consultant hospital doctors to train to be consultants, which was introduced in the previous Dáil, has not been implemented. It is sitting there waiting to be acted upon. It is the Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill 2019. Why are we not moving very quickly on that in order to get doctors trained for badly needed consultant positions? We know there are 500 consultant vacancies and 160 registered doctors have finished training and are available for consultant positions. Why is this not being acted upon?

We need at least 1,600 additional consultants, as mentioned by Dr. Anthony Staines recently. We know we need many more beds in the system so how will we cater for that? Will we bring in Portakabins, etc., to try to meet those accommodation needs in hospitals? Could this be done? It is the sort of capacity we must start building before winter. Wherever we can, we must try to maintain the employment of doctors and nurses who came home to answer Ireland's call. At least 200 of them came home but are they still here? Have they been given positions within the health service?

The measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 include the wearing of masks, washing hands, keeping 2 m distance and coughing etiquette. These form part of the act of protecting ourselves and others. We have set it as public health policy to wear masks on public transport and it will become mandatory to wear a mask in shops. I raised the matter with the Tánaiste yesterday of homeless people who cannot access masks and I thought his response absolutely pathetic. Are they supposed to wear rags around their faces? How do we ensure homeless people can have access to face coverings and ensure people on low incomes can get them? They are expensive but people want to have the best protection possible. It is not good enough to say we do not need masks and all we need is to cover our face. We are supposed to have three layers of face protection in masks if we follow the recommendations.

We are not supplying people with the necessary means to wear masks as part of the health policy. I specifically refer to pensioners and people with disabilities, who badly need good face coverings to protect themselves. Single parents are normally on a low income but masks can

be expensive at up to €50 for a pack of 50 blue masks. It can be €24 for three cloth coverings. People across the board need them. We must get masks to the people who need them so they can feel protected by them.

I may come back to the Minister with more questions in a few moments. We know the UK Government has struck a deal for 190 million doses of coronavirus vaccines, including the vaccines being worked on in Oxford and the United States. Has the HSE taken a similar approach in buying vaccines that seem to have good potential? When will the flu vaccine be administered to the general population?

Have hospitals got stock and a store of personal protective equipment, PPE? Have they ventilators if a second wave emerges? The Minister said the percentage of healthcare workers being affected is low compared with other countries but we all know PPE is crucial. Do we have that stock where it can be easily accessible to nursing homes or home help workers on the front line in case of second wave?

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I thank the Deputy for those very pertinent questions and I will do my best to go through them. I could not agree more with the Deputy on the capacity issue. Before Covid-19 arrived we did not have enough capacity. We had the lowest number of consultants *per capita* in the OECD and second-lowest level of acute beds. There were non-safe staffing levels for nurses and midwives. The Deputy and I have spoken together at length about the lack of capacity and even if Covid-19 had not arrived, we would have a massive capacity challenge. That is what Sláintecare is meant to be doing. There will be 2,600 beds and various additional capacity components.

It has become infinitely more important and pressing now because we have lost significant capacity due to Covid-19. The HSE's latest estimates are that the capacity for operating theatres and outpatient appointments could be down by 30%. Our capacity for diagnostics and scopes could be down by more, at up to 50%. In real terms it is like losing three in every ten of our operating theatres and half of our scoping and diagnostic ability, along with three in ten of our consultants who do outpatient appointments. This is at the same time our waiting lists have gone up and we have additional Covid-19 needs, and also while we face a domestic and global recession. The scale of this is unprecedented.

In response, one of my first actions when appointed was to sit down with representatives of the HSE and the Department to say we must put together a plan that is unlike any winter plan we have seen before. It must include many of the elements raised by the Deputy. We must ask what we will do with the temporary community facilities and how we will roll out the flu vaccine across the country. We must consider how to lock in telemedicine and ensure e-prescribing can stay with us, etc. The HSE and the Department is in the middle of putting together a comprehensive plan to address exactly what the Deputy is talking about and more, as we have a long-term capacity problem as well.

We are kicking off what Sláintecare is calling the "citizen care master plan" to consider what level of care is needed, where we are in different parts of the country and what is the gap. This leads to consideration of the workforce, capital, bed and diagnostic plan. There is a much shorter-term piece, as the Deputy quite correctly mentions, which is what we will do right now for this winter to protect people across the country.

On the matter of non-consultant hospital doctors moving to becoming consultants, I am

24 July 2021

very happy to be wrong but my understanding is there is no current legislative impediment to non-consultant hospital doctors becoming consultants. The Bill mentioned by the Deputy is on the legislative agenda and we are looking for a slot for that. That Bill not being passed is not stopping those non-consultant hospital doctors being promoted to consultant level. That is my understanding but I am very happy to be wrong on it.

There are different issues, including pay inequality, working conditions and professional progression, including missed opportunities. There are fantastic non-consultant hospital doctors but because of the countries they come from, they are barred from progressing to consultant level. That does not make any sense to me. We need to address many issues in getting to the right number of consultants and if there are legislative concerns we will deal with them. My view is that whole-of-profession issues must be addressed.

With regard to face coverings, I will revert to the Deputy in writing with more detail. I know I am out of time but I completely agree with her that there can be no financial burden to anyone accessing face coverings. I will take that message back to the Department today and we will revert to the Deputy on it. I will revert to her in writing on the other issues if she agrees.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard Durkan): The next slot goes to Fianna Fáil, whose speakers are Deputies Jennifer Murnane O'Connor and Niamh Smith. The Deputies have 15 minutes between them.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I welcome the expansion of entitlement to GP services for children from age 6 to 12. I ask the Minister to revert to me on the timescale for that.

One of the biggest issues I have been contacted several times about is the availability of GPs. We have heard from the public health official that many people are not returning for their follow-up Covid-19 test after being identified as a close contact to a case. I want to highlight my experience for the Minister, which is that if someone does not have a GP it is nearly impossible to get one. The requirement to be assigned a GP is three refusals, which is unacceptable. Will the Minister examine that issue because it could be a contributing factor, not to mention how people are expected to contact their GP with symptoms if they do not have a GP? Are we doing everything we can to boost employment in this area? GP clinics in my area of Carlow are full to capacity, and it seems to be getting worse. What does the Minister intend to do to make sure that we get additional GPs?

In the debate last night the Minister mentioned the medical card threshold increase for those aged 70 and over. That is very welcome but a serious issue has been raised by people coming into my clinics, particularly elderly people who have medical cards. Some of them are being charged €15 for a blood test and others are being charged €20. Some doctors are not charging but there is a great deal of confusion about that. I have contacted the HSE and I understand, and the Minister may be able to clarify this, that if a doctor requests a blood test one can claim back the fee from the HSE. If one goes to a doctor seeking a blood test, one has to pay for it. We need clarification on that. Many elderly people tell me that they cannot go in to get the test because they do not have the money. The Minister might be able to clarify that with the HSE and revert to me on it.

I want to ask about carers employed by the HSE. Will there be a widespread mandatory mask protocol for carers dispatched across counties who are treating older persons in non-hos-

pital settings in the community? I have had several calls from constituents who are concerned about that. These carers are doing a fantastic job but some of them are not wearing masks. The Minister knows that carers work very hard, as I do because I know many carers. They might go into four or five houses a day. What plan is in place to offer them supports? It is very important that we give carers working in those front-line services our help. Will specific funding be made available for that?

Furthermore, family carers heard at the meeting of the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response last Friday that it might be January before day services for adult children with intellectual disabilities can return fully. Can the Minister give those family carers more help? Can he tell me what we can do to make sure these people are not forgotten? It is very important. We cannot use the pandemic as a reason to leave anyone in society behind. I am aware that Linda Comerford will hold a major protest outside the Convention Centre Dublin next Wednesday. It is important that we give our support to families. Families have gone through a very rough time in the past few months. They need all the support we can give them.

I read a newspaper article yesterday that doctors are warning of increased numbers of domestic abuse victims being admitted to medical facilities since the pandemic began. We need to put in place as many supports as we can in that area. It is a very serious and worrying problem.

We have been speaking about the importance of looking after people in nursing homes. I, too, want to ask about centres for older people with regard to section 39 organisations. Some people in section 39 organisations in my area of Carlow have contacted me. What measures do we have in place to help care homes that need extra funding through the HSE because everybody has been affected by this? It is very important that we make sure that we put funding into the areas where it is needed. The Minister might revert to me on that.

I am aware that the UK is doing a lot of what is called home testing. In rural areas in particular where there is no transport people are finding it difficult to travel to see a doctor. Are we considering putting some plan in place that will see Ireland start to do home testing? We all know that Covid-19 will be with us for a while so it will be important to have plans and support in place. I thank the Minister. He has two and a half minutes in which to respond with answers to my questions.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I thank the Deputy. Her questions were being put quicker than I was able to write them down so I ask her to bear with me. I will revert to her in writing on the ones we cannot reach.

In terms of GP expansion and capacity, we brought legislation through the House last night to expand free GP care for children from the age of seven up to and including those aged 12 years. It is being done in three phases: six and seven year olds, eight and nine year olds; and ten, 11 and 12 year olds. However, we have to be very careful that it is done at the same time as capacity is increased for GPs. I put something online last night saying we had just brought the legislation through the House and the response from GPs, who had not heard the debate here, in which we went to great lengths to provide assurance on this, was very negative. They were saying, "For the love of God, you cannot just increase demand without increasing capacity". Our message is that we agree 100%, and we will be discussing these issues at length with the IMO and GPs to make sure they are done hand-in-hand. When it is done, however, it will apply to 300,000 boys and girls in the country. That is something everyone in the Oireachtas should be very proud of as we will all have to sign off on the money required to make it happen, but

only at the same time as capacity is increased.

With regard to the follow-up on the Covid tests, I agree that the numbers are lower than we would have hoped. It is for close contacts. There are myriad reasons people are not turning up. Quite a number are turning up for the first test but not for the second. We need to look into that. All of us as public representatives need to get the message out that it is critical that we download the app and that if we are contacted as a close contact we have to take it seriously. This is literally a life and death situation and all of us need to do our best. I agree it is inconvenient. It is not a particularly pleasant test and many people are afraid. They prefer to avoid it, and I understand that. All of us understand that but it is one of those things that we simply have to do together.

Day services for people with intellectual disabilities are a crucial element of the health service and the community care that we have to get back open as quickly as possible. I raised that directly with the HSE officials this week and I can assure the Deputy they are on it. They, and we, are acutely aware that there is no time period that is quick enough for these children or adults. There is no time period that is quick enough for their families because they are desperate, and they have been through so much. Respite and day services were closed down. It is complex from a Covid perspective. The HSE is working organisation by organisation to get them opened as quickly as possible. We are doing what we can, and every effort will be made, but I fully acknowledge that the situation for many adults, children and their families is very difficult.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: I congratulate the Minister, Deputy Donnelly, and the Ministers of State, Deputy Butler and Deputy Feighan, on their new roles. I know the Minister and the Minister of State, Deputy Butler, very well. If they bring the same vigour, enthusiasm and energy they brought as Opposition Deputies to their portfolios, and I have no doubt they will, we can look forward to a very busy and proactive team in the Department of Health.

I will use the few minutes available to me to have a brief question and answer session and I would appreciate it if the Ministers would respond as I put the questions. My first is to the Minister, Deputy Donnelly. I have spoken previously about the major concern about contact tracing, particularly in the Border counties. He is aware that, thankfully, as a result of the Good Friday Agreement, we have an invisible, seamless Border that people can move fluidly across from one county and one jurisdiction to another. However, the Covid pandemic has raised deep concerns, particularly for residents living in Border towns such as Castleblayney, Emyvale and Ballybay, who see people frequently visiting the North.

The reopening of public houses has led to people making frequent visits to such establishments in the North of Ireland and to residents back to their home towns and villages. The feedback I am getting from residents relates to their curiosity about how contact tracing works. I am aware that there has been good collaboration between the two jurisdictions. I ask that the Minister talk for a few minutes about this collaborative approach and how effective contact tracing has been in the Border region.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: I thank Deputy Niamh Smyth for her congratulations. I assure her that the work rate has not diminished since we were in opposition. It is fair to say that it has increased substantially.

I thank the Deputy for her question on the Border counties. This is a profoundly important

matter. It affects the Border counties most severely but it is a question for the whole island. There is absolute agreement that the best approach is an all-island approach, because this disease does not care a damn whether it is north or south of the Border. No Border controls will be put in place so there will be free movement of people all around the island, as is right and proper. That will continue.

What is the Government doing? I have spoken at length with my counterpart in Northern Ireland, the Minister of Health, Robin Swann, MLA. The deputy chief medical officer is in regular contact with his counterpart and was talking with him at length this morning. Many of these issues will be discussed at a meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council in Dublin Castle a week from today. The members of the HSE team that developed the app have been in communication with their counterparts in Northern Ireland. The app has been designed to be deployed as an all-island app. It is quite rightly up to the Northern Ireland Assembly to decide if and when to deploy it. I hope to see it deployed throughout the island, and if possible adopted by many more countries, to allow a very tight contact linkage. There might be different versions, but I hope there will essentially be a single app with very tight contact tracing. The response in this area and in many others should be aligned as tightly as possible across the island. That is to everybody's benefit. There are obviously complications but that is what we are working towards.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: I thank the Minister. I remind him, though I know he is very much on top of his portfolio, that Cavan-Monaghan was the worst-hit area in the country by number of Covid-19 cases. With that in mind, the area requires particular attention.

I would like to direct a question at the Minister of State, Deputy Butler. Covid-19 has presented huge mental health issues for the young and the old. In Cavan and Monaghan we have some amazing volunteers who run voluntary organisations like SOSAD. My own town has the Bailieborough Mental Health Organisation. These organisations are all run on a voluntary basis. Organisations like that and constituencies like mine need State funding and comprehensive support for the volunteers working on the ground. Jigsaw does amazing work throughout the country. I know the Minister of State has met representatives from that organisation in her short time in office. I would love to see Jigsaw come to County Cavan and County Monaghan. Unfortunately, we have had very high rates of suicide in the two counties. Could the Minister of State outline her vision for that? For fear of running out of time, I would like to pass a little message to Deputy Donnelly from Castleblayney Care Housing Association, particularly from Ms Sheila Cumiskey, who has spearheaded that amazing organisation, as the Minister knows. The association was delighted to receive him some time ago. Its members have asked me to relay their congratulations to him. They have big plans for their second phase of operations with Drumillard and its residents association, and they look forward to the Minister's help and support in bringing it to fruition.

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank Deputy Niamh Smyth for her question. Jigsaw is the national centre for youth mental health. It reduces pressures on specialist child and adolescent mental health services. As we all know, early intervention is of key importance for anyone who has mental health challenges. Jigsaw provides supports for those between the ages of 12 and 25. One thing that I really like about Jigsaw is the fact that a young adult or teenager can refer himself or herself to the services. He or she does not have to be referred by parents or a GP, although those referral pathways are also open.

New services will open in Thurles, County Tipperary, and Bray, County Wicklow, before

24 July 2021

Christmas of this year. That is very welcome. This will mean Jigsaw will have approximately 65% coverage throughout the country. I will speak to the Deputy about expanding the services in the area she has mentioned. Expansion will be considered in the light of the evidence underpinning specific proposals. I would be happy to meet the Deputy afterwards to discuss this matter. As she said, I spoke with Dr. Joseph Duffy last week. He is doing phenomenal work and I commend the work of Jigsaw, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, when a lot of the organisation's services were moved online because face-to-face interventions could not proceed.

Gnó na Dála - Business of Dáil

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Before moving on to the next business, I have to make an announcement regarding the appointment of committee Chairmen. I wish to announce for the information of the House that the Business Committee, acting as the Committee of Selection pursuant to Standing Order 34, has administered the allocation of posts according to the d'Hondt system, pursuant to Standing Order 104(2). A total of 18 posts have been allocated as follows:

The Chair of the Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment will be selected by Sinn Féin.

The Chair of the Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on Justice will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on Children, Disability, Equality and Integration will be selected by Sinn Féin.

The Chair of the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on Health will be selected by Sinn Féin.

The Chair of the Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on Climate Action, Communications Networks and Transport will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on Agriculture and the Marine will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on Public Accounts will be selected by Sinn Féin.

The Chair of the Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands will be selected by the Regional Group.

The Chair of the Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence will be selected by the Government.

The Chair of the Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht, the Islands and the Irish-Speaking Community will be selected by Sinn Féin.

The Chair of the anticipated committee on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will be selected by the Government.

Sitting suspended at 1.20 p.m. and resumed at 1.25 p.m.

Ministers and Secretaries and Ministerial, Parliamentary, Judicial and Court Offices (Amendment) Bill 2020 [Seanad]: Second Stage

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The next item is the Ministers and Secretaries and Ministerial, Parliamentary, Judicial and Court Offices (Amendment) Bill 2020, all Stages of which will be taken today.

Minister without Portfolio (Deputy Simon Harris): I move: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

It is a great pleasure to present to the House the Ministers and Secretaries and Ministerial, Parliamentary, Judicial and Court Offices (Amendment) Bill 2020, which passed all Stages in the Seanad yesterday. This Bill establishes, for the first time in the history of the State, a Department focused on further and higher education, research, innovation and science. We will now have a Department whose chief remit will be the further and higher education needs of our economy and our people. While some people may view the new Department as one for universities or students, it is about much more than that. I see its establishment as an opportunity to shape our future. Our young people are our future and we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to remove the limits to their ambition. We have a chance to dismantle the barriers to third level education, real and perceived, and remove preconceived notions of what third level education is and should be. Crucially, we have a chance to ensure the experience of a third level education is available to all, regardless of age, gender or background.

There is an inherent bias in our system which presumes that tertiary education is for some and not for all. I want to change that. I passionately believe that we shut down conversations much too early in regard to the range of opportunities that are available to people to fulfil their ambition and realise their career goals. I see this new Department as an economic driver and an opportunity to future-proof the economy and build on the foundations in place. It will also provide a means to drive social inclusion and use education to better our country. We know what our challenges will be for the next decade and we need to equip ourselves to deal with them. We must offer the right education and the proper training and channel those skills into

24 July 2021

solving the problems not just of today but of tomorrow.

We have started well. This week we launched a €168 million package of supports for the third level sector and students. We published our reopening plans and announced the commencement dates for all first-year college students. These measures will help with the return of further and higher education in September and offer practical supports to students to address the digital divide, which is a major issue that is under-discussed and under-recognised in this country, and ensure nobody is left behind. I am pleased to inform the House that yesterday I met representatives from the Irish Universities Association, the Technological Higher Education Association and Technological University Dublin to discuss the reopening of our colleges. At the meeting, the three representative bodies confirmed that the induction of first-year students is a priority and that they are seeking to welcome those students from late September or early October, with the majority of third level institutions seeking to open for first-year students in the week beginning 28 September.

Today, as part of the July stimulus, I will be announcing a €100 million package to fund more than 35,000 extra places in further and higher education. I will also launch a special €12 million incentivisation scheme for employers to take on apprentices, the first time such an incentive has been offered, outside of the female bursary, for any employer to take on an apprentice. Under the scheme, employers will receive €2,000 up front for each apprentice they take on and, 12 months later, a further €1,000 if the apprentice is still on their books. The apprenticeship model in this country has huge potential. To be frank, our discussion around education has perhaps been too snobby in the past. Apprenticeships offer major opportunities to people in the crafts field and well beyond it. If we look at other European countries, a huge amount is being done to develop apprenticeships. I intend to bring forward an action plan on apprenticeships, in consultation with the Apprenticeship Council, early next year. I will update Government on that consultation process next Monday.

These measures are just the beginning. As part of the budget process, I will be working with my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Niall Collins, to examine how we can reduce the cost of third level education over the next five years and remove some of the barriers to accessing it. I firmly believe that there is no policy more transformational than widening educational access and, alongside that, broadening our view of what education is. In my previous role, I saw at first hand how important innovation, science and research were in our response to Covid. I want Ireland to continue to grow in strength as a global centre of research and innovation. I want to give our research community the opportunities to foster their greatest skills and imagination in dealing with the biggest problems of today. We have made a start in that regard with the new €5 million fund to examine Covid-19 and why some people are immune but others are not, identify antibody testing and rapidly deploy it. I wish the crew in Trinity College Dublin who are working on the project all the very best.

I wish to develop research centres across the country and invest in science and medicine. I have only been in this role for four weeks, but I am excited and energised by all those I have met and I very much look forward to working with all Members of the House. The Government and the Oireachtas have an opportunity to develop this Department into an engine to advance several of the priorities of Deputies across the political divide. I look forward to working genuinely with them in that regard.

The purpose of the Department becomes clear when one visits places such as An Cosán in Jobstown, as I did the week before last. I met people who are in direct provision and travel

from Carrick-on-Suir to Jobstown to complete their studies. The Government wishes to shut down direct provision and come up with a much better model, but, in the meantime, community education is providing an opportunity for people in direct provision. I met a woman in her 60s who decided to go back to education having previously been a family carer. She completed her degree through An Cosán. People who were lacking in confidence have overcome that hurdle and many others through community education and flexible learning. I have no doubt that the sector for which I now have political responsibility has the opportunity to be transformational in every sense of the word for families and communities in rural and urban Ireland.

The name of the Department is long as we could not come up with a snappy title, but the Bill is short and quite technical in nature. It allows for the creation of the Department. It provides for the body of law which relates to ministerial powers and Departments to apply to the new Department. It also allows for certain orders to be made in respect of the new Department and my office as Minister. These orders include transfer of functions and alteration of name orders. As Deputies will be aware, the transfer of most legal functions into the Department will take place through transfer of functions orders from the Departments of Education and Skills and Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Work is under way on these issues with a view to an expeditious transfer of responsibilities. I hope most of that work will be completed before the House resumes after the summer recess.

It is a great honour to be the first holder of this important post. I am very excited by the opportunities we will have to make a difference and implement the ambitious range of measures relating to this sector which are outlined in the programme for Government. I and the Minister of State, Deputy Collins, look forward to hearing the contributions of Members and having an opportunity to engage substantively with them on the many issues in the areas of further education, higher education, training, skills, research, science and innovation.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We now move to the Sinn Féin party. Is Deputy Conway-Walsh sharing time?

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: No, I will take the full ten minutes.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): She will have it all to herself.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I could do with longer. I and Sinn Féin welcome the establishment of the new Department. It certainly has a big job of work to do, both in breadth and in depth. I am pleased to be the Sinn Féin spokesperson on these matters. I look forward to working with the Minister and his team in a collaborative and constructive way. We have a significant job of work to do.

As I discovered in recent weeks, there have been many reports and a significant amount of analysis on the vital reform and investment needed for third level education. I refer to the Cassells report, the National Skills Strategy 2025, the further education and training strategy, the gender action plan, the Partners in the Recovery: Enabling Irish Universities to Support Re-booting Ireland document published in May by the Irish Universities Association and many other papers and submissions on what needs to be done. We do not need to commission any more reports. We have enough reports to pave a road from here to County Mayo. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 was produced in 2011. Its preface outlines exactly what needs to be done in the context of new structures to better reflect diverse learning requirements, the critical mass that is needed in research capacity to develop world-class capability in higher

24 July 2021

value niche areas, the funding of higher education in a sustainable and equitable manner and the required structure changes in the higher education system to ensure greater effectiveness. It also refers to the need for co-operation and collaboration between the various institutions. It is all there. Now we just need to make it happen. It is time for rapid action and serious investment.

I truly hope that the establishment of a dedicated Ministry will mark a step-change in how third level education is delivered. There is a real opportunity for us to envisage an all-island approach to higher education and that very much excites me because I have always believed that students from the Shankill Road or east Belfast should have the same access to educational opportunities as those from Belmullet, my area. This is a small island. We have significant expertise in the education sector, but we need to work together better to ensure that there is access right across the island and, for those who choose to study abroad, beyond. If we are to truly share this island and cherish all of its children equally, there is no better place to start than with education. That is why I am delighted to be involved in this portfolio. Nelson Mandela stated that education is the most powerful weapon one can use to change the world. I believe in education. If we do this properly, we will be able to change the island on which we live. Our aim must be to provide an educational infrastructure that will enable people of all abilities and ages, as the Minister stated, to fulfil their potential and contribute to a prosperous and progressive Ireland.

I refer to people with disabilities and, in particular, people with autism. I have long believed that we are missing out as a nation by not investing in the acute and exceptional skills of young and older people with autism. I have encountered many such people. I very much wish to work with the Minister on that issue in order that we invest in it rather than treating it as a cost. We must invest in it such that it can contribute to innovation and science and everything we need to do. That will be my overarching ethos in my role as main Opposition spokesperson on further and higher education.

There have been many decades of underfunding in this area. We spend 50% less per student now than we did in 2008. I welcome the Minister's recent announcements regarding the extra funding that will be available. The Cassells report was published four years ago, but it has been ignored until now. It identified the need for a spending increase of €600 million in third level education by 2021, which is not too far away. Successive Governments have created what has been referred to as a ticking time bomb. I agree with that assessment.

Brexit and Covid have exacerbated the situation. I am glad that the dates are being finalised with the universities. I encourage the Minister to engage further with the Higher Education Authority as well. There is a need to consult the staff and students' unions of third level institutions regarding the guidelines and complying with medical advice.

The balanced regional development of third level education has often been at the sharp end of underfunding and that must end. We need real investment and vision to address the geographic inequalities that exist. Being from Mayo, I must bring to the Minister's attention the investment that is needed by the Castlebar campus of Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology. The Department of Education and Skills never really wanted that institution to be established. Through the years, it has done everything possible to make it fail. I am asking the Minister to challenge the official attitude towards the campus, to work with its president and her excellent team who, despite all of the obstacles put in their way, do everything possible to create a responsive and dynamic campus.

It is not just the institutions that are close to buckling under pressure. Students and their families are also struggling. That is no wonder, given that we have the highest fees in the EU. I ask the Government to consider these issues, including the fact that families are struggling with the high cost of third level. If the current situation continues, even more inequality will come into our education system and more young people will be excluded from certain forms of education. All forms of education should be equally valued. Everyone should have the chance to follow the path that best suits them. Improving access to further and higher education needs to be a priority.

The SUSI system needs to be reformed. That should be done immediately by the Department. The thresholds are too high and the amounts are too low. People with disabilities who wish to study part time are excluded. That must be addressed, as must the problem in respect of adults living away from home being excluded because they are assessed based on their parents' income. I am glad to see attention being given to apprenticeships because they have been undervalued in recent years. I will work with the Minister on that because I absolutely believe in apprenticeships and what we need to do there.

The Minister stated that our recovery and future economic performance lie in a well-trained and educated population. That is all very positive. I was so looking forward to coming in here today and then I saw the amendment that came in at 11 o'clock on Wednesday night which provides for giving €16,288 to a super junior Minister who is already earning €2,384 per week. It is really repugnant to hard-working people of this State. To put in perspective the €16,000 bonus, in the real world, third level students and their families will say it is as much as the annual pay of an apprentice. It is the annual pay for a full-time PhD student. It is five times the full SUSI maintenance grant for a year, which is supposed to cover accommodation, food and travel. We want to work with the Minister to improve third level education and he has put us in the impossible situation whereby we cannot vote for the setting up of this Department today because he has thrown in that amendment. People throughout the State are looking at that amendment and saying surely to God €2,384 per week is enough for somebody to live on. They see all of the cuts. When I speak to parents who are trying to send their children to third level education and to the youngsters who do not have employment because their summer jobs are gone for this year, they are really concerned about how they are going to access education, yet we put this provision in with the setting up of this Department when we have all agreed to work together to make it work. That is why Sinn Féin is forced to vote against this. We have an amendment coming through on Committee Stage and I implore the Minister even at this late stage to back our amendment, remove that provision and work together in a positive manner. Let us work together and not try to pull the wool over people's eyes by putting in the extra €2,384 a week for a Minister of State when people across this island are struggling so much at this time.

Deputy Ged Nash: I welcome the Minister to the House and congratulate him on the establishment of this very important Department. The Department has to address some fundamental issues in the third level education sector very quickly. Key stakeholders in the sector have been calling for increased investment for higher and further education for many years now. Third level research is a fundamental part of our growth engine and is essential to our future prosperity. The Labour Party supported calls, which I reiterate, for a fully publicly funded third and fourth level system as per the Cassells report. In our recent manifesto, we committed to developing an implementation strategy to increase university funding for both teaching and research, building in the recommendations of Cassells. This will be needed now more than ever with the gaping hole left in our universities, given the funding situation and stresses that our third level

24 July 2021

sector is under in terms of the near-evaporation for the foreseeable future of fees that we could ordinarily expect from international students.

The Labour Party's July stimulus package calls for an immediate increase in funding for third level under the new Department, which should pave the way for a lowering of student fees. In addition, we called for enhanced student supports and increased SUSI payments to ensure that no one drops out of their studies due to Covid-19. We know how negatively impacted the under-25s in particular have been and we cannot sacrifice their education and prospects because of our experience around the pandemic and its economic impact. I hope the establishment of the new Department is a sign of a fresh focus on both the immediate Covid-19 related measures that are required and the long-term needs of higher and further education.

Now is the time to start a conversation on what the post-secondary and higher education sector should look like into the future. This not only includes universities but also the network of institutes of technology, which we have to develop, and the new necklace of those operations. I have been working hard with the various stakeholders in Louth, east Meath and across the north east to develop technological university status for Dundalk Institute of Technology, DKIT, and to develop those relationships that will make it happen with partner institutes. Post-leaving certificate courses, PLCs, apprenticeships, lifelong learning and adult learning will also play a crucial role. The Minister will agree that these areas have been left behind for far too long as a Cinderella service. In his previous statements, the Minister has acknowledged that they have been left behind with less of an emphasis placed on them. This leads to inequality and a certain snobbishness, as the Minister said earlier. Education of any description is no burden. We are all in a process of lifelong learning. We take up those opportunities when they arise and we need to go after them. We need to make sure there is an equality of treatment in terms of further and higher education insofar as we can achieve that. We now have an opportunity to have a national conversation about our collective vision for the post-second level educational landscape.

The Labour Party's July stimulus package also includes a strong youth guarantee that was at least by definition absent from the Government's July stimulus programme notwithstanding the fact that we do welcome commitments around apprenticeships, lifelong learning and further education which were announced yesterday. The youth guarantee would have given a guaranteed offer of decent work and meaningful training, whether through an apprenticeship scheme, voluntary placement in an appropriate community setting, in-work training and-or remote study for everyone under 25 not currently in an educational or training programme or in employment. It would have supported those young people I referred to earlier who have been the hardest hit by the economic fallout of the pandemic. Now, unfortunately, there is a very real risk of another generation being left behind. In addition, our focus on lifelong learning, one of the five key tests that the Labour Party has established around our judgment of the effectiveness of the July stimulus, would not only have supported workers through this crisis but also increased Ireland's shockingly low rate of in-work training. Compared with a rate of 33% in Denmark, in Ireland we have a shockingly poor level of consistent in-work training, coming in at about 5.5% of our workforce. The Labour Party stimulus package seeks significant investment in retraining, upskilling and lifelong learning to make sure people are ready for the jobs of the future and that their skills constantly evolve and update. We committed to tripling investment in State training services and schemes.

There is a real opportunity to reshape our economy and take the necessary steps to reorient our labour market towards even higher levels of productivity and value creation, which in turn will create higher paid jobs and address income inequality. Lifelong learning is critical to pav-

ing the path towards a high-road economy with a highly skilled, highly productive and highly paid workforce. The crisis has shown both the value and the risk of neglecting investment in our educational sector. During the Covid-19 crisis we have had the manifest benefit of researchers across a broad range of disciplines based in many of our higher education institutions contributing to our national effort to fight the pandemic. The NPHE group of experts has led us through these past six months or so and the bulk of them have come through our own higher education institutes. We are proud of the role they are now playing. They are not just the scientists and medical experts but also those specialising in behavioural change, economics, medical ethics and law. However, this expertise and our long-standing reputation for quality research has been at risk for some time now. Our previously world-class universities have plunged down the rankings in the past five years. This is unfortunate. The slide is directly related to concerns around inconsistent funding and so on. We really need that question of consistent funding and multi-annual envelopes to get over the line. That needs to be a priority for the new Minister and his Department.

I hope the new Department does not neglect the arts and humanities. The broader societal impact of the crisis needs to be assessed and understood across a wide range of disciplines, including cultural, sociological and historical ones. As the Minister knows, the arts have suffered greatly during recent months, yet live stream initiatives such as Other Voices, Courage 2020 and the Irish National Opera live streams as well as initiatives in my own constituency have provided free entertainment for people in their homes when venues have been shuttered. Investment in the arts is called for. The national campaign for the arts needs to be included in this fresh approach to further and higher education and life-long learning. We have to be conscious of the function and role of the arts and creative industries in our economy. That cannot be neglected.

In the coming months and years, we need a collaborative approach to navigate our way through the uncertainty. Everything is subject to change but clarity and reassurance must be provided to all the stakeholders involved, including students, lecturers and others such as trade unions. Trade unions must be to the fore in leading this change, as they want to be, and not left out in the cold as has all too often been the case in the past.

I wish the Minister, Deputy Harris, the best of luck in his new role and I congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Niall Collins, on his appointment. I also wish the officials in the new Department well. It is exciting to be at the helm of a new Department at this point in our economic situation. I hope that the engagement which the Minister plans to have with stakeholders is positive. That stakeholder engagement needs to be inclusive and we need to learn from what they have to say to us and to work in a partnership and collaborative way to make sure that we get bang for our buck while putting further and higher education at the centre of not just our economy but our society.

I echo the points made by Deputy Conway-Walsh. It is unfortunate that Government has seen fit to include an amendment in the legislation to provide for an additional allowance for an additional super junior Minister at Cabinet. This appears to be a move to keep all Government parties sweet. I recall a time when we made do with two super junior Ministers - a Chief Whip and a super junior Minister given a particular job at a particular moment in time on a particular policy matter. This proposal is most unfortunate to say the least. It does not sit well with the public in these very straitened times when families across this country are going through immense difficulties and facing a very uncertain and anxious future. Will the Minister confirm that we will not revert to the days of the largesse of Charlie McCreevy and Bertie Ahern when

24 July 2021

every junior Minister had a press adviser and a policy adviser costing millions of euro per annum to the Exchequer? We abolished that in 2011, as should be the case. There is, of course, an argument for it - I benefited from it myself during my spell as a super junior Minister. As a super junior Minister, I attended Cabinet and had particular responsibilities that required me to have advice and additional support but I do not believe a case can be made to provide additional special adviser support to Ministers of State in their roles, particularly at this time of economic constraints for our country. Can the Minister clarify that that will not be the case?

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Social Democrats welcomes this legislation and the establishment of the new Department. It is a good move. The guiding principle in regard to education across all levels must be seen as a means of achieving a fair society and ensuring that people have the opportunity to reach their potential. Everybody, regardless of background or means, should have the same opportunities for further and higher education. It is not just about equality of opportunity. The objective should be to aim for equality of outcome because as we know current levels of participation in third level by people from low income backgrounds are poor, with participation levels in some areas in single digit figures. Not a whole lot of progress has been made in recent years in those participation levels. There are many reasons for this. I reiterate that it is not enough to set equal opportunity as the objective. We need to be all of the time seeking to ensure, as much as possible, that we put in place the kind of supports necessary for people who for cultural or traditional reasons would not have participated in third level education. It is important to identify those barriers which prevent people from full participation and that we attempt to achieve equality of outcome. Opportunity in education and equality of outcome are central to a progressive and fair society. This has to be our objective. We know that education can be the gateway to a fair and equal society. It is about people reaching their potential, greater quality of life for people who participate in third level education, greater earning potential and a greater contribution to society and to the economy. We should be aiming to achieve this for all of our citizens. We should be setting that as a very clear objective.

Currently, there are major funding challenges which pose a real threat to our third level institutions. This has been the case now for a number of years, as reflected in Irish universities slipping down the international rankings. Increasingly, our universities are seeking to supplement their income by taking in more international students, who are required, and are in a position, to contribute substantial fees. Sometimes that is at the expense of our own students in terms of disciplines being very competitive and Irish people not getting that opportunity. It is not a good basis on which to calibrate the funding of our universities. Increasingly, universities have been doing this but it has been very much impacted by Covid, which poses even greater challenges.

The Cassells report shows that significant investment is needed in third level education. As a small country in an increasingly globalised and competitive world Ireland's education system can be a great competitive advantage. It is fair to say that the high level education of many people who have gone through the education system in Ireland has given us a great edge and that has been recognised internationally. The third level sector needs strong Government support if it is to continue to maintain high standards. While planning for third level financing the Government needs to ensure that equal opportunity is the priority. This means funding third level predominantly through State funding, phasing out student fees, which continue to act as a barrier, and ensuring that Ireland never has to rely on income from students from abroad. We undoubtedly need to reduce costs and improve supports for students. We need to reduce third level fees by phasing out the student contribution charge and to reduce the no maintenance sup-

port for students' commute from 45 km to 25 km and to consider increasing funding to the SUSI grant scheme by a minimum of 7% and to eliminate delays in payments which cause significant stress and hardship for students. We should also reinstate maintenance grants for postgraduate students because, increasingly, postgraduate qualifications are seen as very important in terms of high level jobs. We need to reinstate maintenance grants for students to ensure that a postgraduate qualification is not seen as the preserve of those who are well-off. Postgraduate qualifications impose an even bigger burden on people coming from low income households. We also need to recognise the work of postgraduate research students and guarantee fair pay and working conditions for them.

On apprenticeship schemes, in my view, Springboard+ needs to be adapted to include school-leavers. We also need to promote digital apprenticeship programmes through initiatives such as the UK Tech Partners scheme. I would encourage the Minister to have a look at it. We have a high number of tech companies in Ireland. It is reasonable to expect those companies to start to run apprenticeship schemes.

If they do not manage to do that, or are not prepared to do that, we should consider the introduction of an apprenticeship levy to encourage major companies to contribute to a tech apprenticeship scheme. There is no doubt that greater funding for apprenticeships in State bodies and companies is also required. We need to consider ensuring improved participation in apprenticeships for women and for people with disabilities also.

In the whole area of research and development we know increases in this area bring in great returns - in fact, a twofold return on investment - with an increase in university staff and investment in basic research to balance applied research. That should be a priority.

Greater investment in Teagasc to support farmers in the changing world environment is required and needs to be looked at.

As a previous Minister for Health, the Minister is probably aware of the need to ensure that decisions on research funding are based upon the needs of broader society and the economy. Too often, because the main bulk of research funding has been controlled by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the main criteria applied to decision-making in that area are the number of jobs created. That is a very narrow perspective to have. We should be looking at what is needed in the health area and its priorities. Research should be based on those sets priorities rather than the narrow jobs perspective.

An area the Minister will be familiar with in the health area also is the need for proper skills planning. Too often we identify the need for more staff in particular areas but when one tries to recruit those staff, they are simply not available. Skills planning is absolutely key.

The decision to include the salary increase for the super junior Ministers is a mistake. It is a negative in terms of what should be a very positive Bill. Will the Minister reconsider the inclusion of that unpopular move in this legislation? Will he consider putting that to the House on another occasion and not seek to include it in this otherwise very positive legislation, which I think the House would be very happy to support in its entirety were it not for that provision?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I thank the Deputy and call the next speaker for Solidarity-People before Profit, Deputy Paul Murphy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I will be brief and will focus my remarks on what is the scandalous

24 July 2021

inclusion of the extra €16,000 a year for a super junior Minister, on top of an annual salary of €124,000.

Before I discuss that point, I wish to make one point about higher education. There is a crisis of funding in higher education right now which is a consequence of a model of relying on non-EU students as a cash cow. Very quickly, the same sorts of pressures we saw for many years will come to pass again where universities will be rightly crying out that they do not have enough funding. The Government then, instead of investing to ensure they have the funding needed to properly run our third level institutions, will increase the so-called student contribution or will attempt to return to full fees. The student movement needs to have its eyes and ears very much open to this attack which could come down the line in the course of this Government and to prepare to resist and defeat it.

Debate adjourned.

Gnó na Dála - Business of Dáil

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I apologise to the Deputy for having interrupted him to facilitate a special announcement by the Government Chief Whip. Deputy Murphy will not lose any of his time.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Jack Chambers): It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders or the Resolution of the Dáil yesterday, that (1) the Dáil on its rising today shall adjourn until 9.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 28 July 2020 when it shall consider Second Stage of the Residential Tenancies and Valuation Bill 2020 which shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 2 p.m. and if a division is claimed on a Second Reading motion it shall be taken following the Order of Business; and (2) the Dáil shall sit in the Convention Centre, Dublin North Wall Quay.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Is that agreed. Agreed.

Ministers and Secretaries and Ministerial, Parliamentary, Judicial and Court Offices (Amendment) Bill 2020 [Seanad]: Second Stage (Resumed)

Question again proposed: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

Deputy Paul Murphy: The point I was making was that a return to fees or an increase in the so-called student contribution charge could be on the agenda in the course of this Government and the student movement needs to be awake to that and needs to be prepared to mobilise to defeat it, as has happened in the past. We have a situation where the student movement has been on the front foot and has demanded correctly the scrapping of this nonsense of a student contribution charge. Commitments have been given by various political parties in the past about that but then, when in power, they have done nothing about it. We need to be fighting for free at-the-point-of-access education at all levels to be properly funded by progressive taxation.

I will speak now on the scandalous decision to include in this Bill the provisions for an extra €16,000 a year for a super junior Minister, who is already on a salary of €124,000 a year. This is happening at a time when one in four people in this country is currently unemployed, and at a time of great crisis. As a socialist and as a general principle, I would say that all elected representatives, Deputies, junior Ministers, super junior Ministers, senior Ministers and the Taoiseach, should be on the average wage of the people they are supposed to represent as opposed to living lives that are different and separate from the lives of the people who vote for them. On top of the whingeing and campaigning by various Deputies looking for an extra €40,000 as a junior Minister or an extra €80,000 as a senior Minister, it really adds insult to injury to have a situation where an extra €16,000 is going to be provided to a super junior Minister, someone who is already going to be extremely well-paid. People asked on social media, very appropriately, whether a clap would not do. Would a round of applause on a Thursday night not do it? It is meant to do it for our healthcare and Debenhams workers, and from the point of view of those who are facing potential eviction.

It says a great deal when one looks at the actions of this Government and of the majority of Members of this Dáil over the past week or so. There is the decision to go ahead with cuts to the pandemic unemployment payment to people who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and whose incomes will be further cut in a series or progression of cuts over the next six months or so. There was a vote yesterday by the majority in this Dáil - Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party - to effectively gut our motion to support the Debenhams workers. There was another vote yesterday against the provision of affordable childcare and there was the miserly decision to only extend the eviction ban to 1 August.

Presumably, if the Chief Whip can get enough people to vote for it, the Government and the majority of Members of this Dáil will vote through a pay increase of €16,000 for an already very well-paid person. This goes to the heart of the priorities of the Government and who it represents. It is outrageous and mind-boggling to people who see this crisis and the unfolding economic depression and then see the Government voting to pay itself more money. There is an added layer of gross hypocrisy with Fianna Fáil's position in this. Fianna Fáil did very little in the previous period in government, when it pretended to be out of government but was actually in government. Occasionally, it would pick an issue to make a stand on to show that it was different to Fine Gael. On one issue, when Fine Gael was in government in 2017, Fianna Fáil decided to make a stand on an important issue. The press release on Fianna Fáil's website was titled: "FF Will Block Any Effort To Fund Additional 'Super Junior' Position – Byrne". It continued: "Thomas Byrne TD has confirmed that his party will block any attempt by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar to introduce salary top-ups for another 'super junior' position". Fianna Fáil took a principled stand that it would not stand for another super junior being paid.

Yesterday or the day before, the Minister, Deputy Michael McGrath, who is a member of Fianna Fáil, drafted or had his Department draft the relevant section to say that they will get the extra money. What is different? It is who has their snouts in the trough. Fianna Fáil now has access to this money. One of the three will be from Fianna Fáil. It therefore wants this to go through. It is the kind of thing that rightly makes people deeply cynical about politics. They are right to be deeply cynical about establishment politics. Fianna Fáil is capable of opposing one thing when in opposition and making out that it has a principle against it, then when it can benefit from it, it is not just willing to vote it through but positively drives it through to ensure that all three super junior Ministers get not just €124,000 a year, but have it topped up to €140,000 each year in a time of global economic crisis, mass unemployment and so on. It

24 July 2021

disgusts people and, assuming that the Government goes ahead with this, people will take note. In the grand context of the global budget, Ireland's tax haven status and so on, €16,000 is not much compared with the many billions held by the very wealthy, but it will be seen as an emblematic example demonstrating the approach of the Government, its out of touch nature and what its priorities are.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I will be sharing time with my colleagues, Deputy O'Donoghue and Deputy Michael Collins, if one of them arrives.

I congratulate the Minister and the Minister of State, Deputy Niall Collins, and wish them well on their new roles, as well as their whole teams. Education is so important from the cradle to the grave. I know we are dealing with universities here but it is still important. I hope the funding for this area and the new innovative section in the Department will do well. I am glad to have got news in the last hour that the Taoiseach has said there will be a Cabinet decision on Monday about all schools reopening. They are all expected to reopen, which is wonderful, because it has been a trying time for families, students, teachers, boards of management and parents' councils.

We dealt with a Revised Estimate relating to education last week with the Minister, Deputy Foley, and there was not a shilling in it for the Covid provisions. That is a significant worry, as a person who has served on boards of management at all levels of education, including a naíonra, a national school and a second level institution. They worry because of the shoestring budgets, and I welcome the funding last night for the minor works schemes for all schools. There are always jobs to be done in schools, and the boards of management are faced with decisions about how they can spend money or are not able to spend money. They should not have to worry about basic repairs. It should be done by the Department of Education and Skills.

I want to ask the Minister of State about the new role. The Minister, Deputy Harris, was on my local radio this morning in Clonmel. He mentioned some health projects that he was involved with. We set up a third level institution 20 years ago or more, the Tipperary Rural and Business Development Institute. That has since been moved into Limerick Institute of Technology Tipperary. We are the tail. We are not getting the recognition, supports or investment that we deserve in Tipperary. There were promises with the amalgamation but they are not happening. We have difficulties with relocating from the present site. The building was built in three months and is not suitable. It would be more suited to being a farm or an industrial building than a university. We hope to move to the old site at Kickham Barracks in Clonmel. The present site and the bypass can be used for many other things. We need to have proper leadership. I have paid tribute in the past to the lecturers and people who do great work there. We need to have the supports. We have a brain drain of lecturers and such. When there is not a proper emphasis and focus on having the Tipperary section of LIT being equal, people will vote with their feet and move to where there are the resources, recognition and so on. We need to be acutely aware of this.

There are many issues that debar people from going into third level education. Being from rural Ireland, people are at a significant disadvantage. I thank the people who handle SUSI grants. They have been helpful after being thrown in at the deep end to run it. Students are often disqualified because of 1 km or because of how the travel distance is measured for access grants and travel grants. There are significant anomalies and it is unfair on the students who want to go to third level education. Their parents want to send them there and the community and country need them to have these degrees and the education, but because of sheer financial

constraints, they cannot do it. We need recognition that people in rural areas are just as entitled to have a third level education as the people in cities. I do not begrudge people in cities with all the choice and the transport services that they have. We do not have the transport services and we have a meagre grant system to give them assistance to go half a kilometre. It is often measured differently and there are disputes about it, then they are ruled out. This is a substantial setback to students who want to further educate themselves and to play a part in our ever-growing economy. That anomaly needs to be sorted out because it is putting significant pressure on parents, especially if they did not get the grants.

I addressed a matter earlier in my comments to the Minister for Health about student nurses, whether they are general or psychiatric nurses, who came out to join the front-line services in this crisis and have not got funded. They have received some belated funding at assistants' rate of pay, which I recognise, but they are also losing out, as are students in all colleges this summer, on Easter work, summer work and evening work, because everything is closed down. Significant pressure is placed on parents, especially parents who do not take any grants to try to pay and support their children in college. There is significant peer pressure too. It is awfully frustrating. The stimulus fund could not deal with that but we need to have an education fund announced next week or when we come back to Revised Estimates. I am surprised that the Minister had not included the Covid fund in the Revised Estimates because they need to be supported, because they will go back to college empty-handed in September, if they do go back to college in September, which we hope they will. Students cost a lot of money when they are at home and cannot get out to work, because they are an extra expense on the family home. It is well known from surveys that they spend more when they are off and they have to eat and to live when they are at home. It is not free.

I hope and pray that the Minister of State will deal with the matter of apprenticeships in an aggressive fashion. In the aftermath of the so-called crash and the recovery and the boom, we no longer have apprentices. A school building programme is being rolled out and there is funding for minor works but small builders cannot get the carpenters, plumbers, bricklayers or electricians - or sparks as we call them. It is the whole range, and we need them badly. Teagasc must be brought in, as stated earlier, to deliver courses in mechanics for machinery operators, for example. There is a huge problem in the contracting business because one cannot get skilled operators. The mechanisms in tractors are computerised now and a person would need to have a third level degree to drive and understand them. We need apprenticeships. The contractors of Ireland have been looking for a number of years to get people back into that. Not all people will be working behind a desk or at a computer. We need people also to work on machinery, on construction sites and with construction equipment, and we need to understand that.

Teagasc needs a total revamp. I hope the Department of Education and Skills and Teagasc can link with each other to spend the money more prudently and wisely. We have to be new and innovative, and we must challenge ourselves and our young people. No one relishes a challenge more than young people. Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí is the old adage. I am not saying that they are all young but younger people are going into business. We need those people in research and development and we need them in all kinds of positions.

I received a CV from a young man in Tipperary who attended Trinity College and who was looking for an internship or some temporary work. His CV was mind-boggling in terms of the number of extracurricular courses he took and degrees he was awarded when in Trinity College. He had also done various jobs in the students' union with student representatives, summer work and placements. He excelled in all of them. Employers value these students and know they

want to learn and get ahead.

As I have said, Teagasc must be completely reformed. Agriculture is ever-changing, especially now in light of the green economy. Young people and young farmers are up to the challenge. Farmers in general have been up to the challenge of dealing with carbon issues and so on, but they need the supports. I put it to the Minister of State that, like it or lump it, this is one of the many issues in the area of education.

We now have three super junior Ministers. There was a furore when this happened back in the 1980s, and a more recent furore when one super junior was appointed. Now there are three, and one of them is not even a Member of this House. I am aware that the particular location in which we find ourselves is only a temporary home, but I am referring to the Dáil. One of the new super junior Ministers was appointed to the Seanad. While there is scope in the Constitution to do this, attempting to insist on a higher salary sticks in the craws of people who are trying to survive. It sticks in the craw of those people we have spoken of who want to send their children back to college and who are under enormous pressure because the children could not get the summer or night-time jobs they would normally have had. This is a major issue. We might think it will all be lost in Covid payments and everything else, but we want to show example to the people who are suffering out there, people who want to engage in and embrace the change during these new times. We must be very careful with this. It is just not fair or right. I will not single out who she is, but she is a member of the Green Party and a Senator, and along with the two other super junior Ministers at Cabinet, she will receive an increase of more than €16,000, which does not sit right with me, my constituents or the people.

Deputy Marian Harkin: I congratulate the Minister of State on his appointment. I look forward to working with him in his role in the new Department which is the subject of the Bill and which will be known as the “Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science”. This title reflects the importance of the new Department.

I fully support the Bill and I do not see a reason to amend any of the sections as proposed. What is important is the work the Minister of State and his Department colleagues will carry out. In his statement when he was setting up this new Department, the Taoiseach said: “The single most important decision in delivering progress for modern Ireland involved a decisive move towards expanding educational opportunity.” I fully agree with him. It is in this context that I want to raise with the Minister of State the progress towards the setting up of the various technological universities across the State. The one I wish to specifically speak about relates to the Connacht-Ulster alliance, which comprises a number of campuses across the north west, and the colleges of Sligo IT, Letterkenny IT, and GMIT. I have raised this issue with the previous Minister for Education and Skills, and I have raised it with the Taoiseach.

It is important to reiterate that I agree fully with the Taoiseach’s statement that the single most important decision in delivering progress for modern Ireland - and for the regions that make up modern Ireland - involves a decisive move towards expanding educational opportunities. This is under way and one of its manifestations is the setting up of the technological universities. If we read the programme for Government, we can see the commitment to these technological universities. We can also see that the technological university in the south east is specifically mentioned. When I read through the programme for Government I got a fright when I saw that it was mentioned a second time. Yes, the technological university in the south east is very important and I wish them success and luck but it sends out a strong message that this technological university is the priority. There was no mention whatsoever of the Connacht-

Ulster alliance. The only other third level college mentioned in the programme for Government is Magee. I will come back to that matter later. There is no mention in the programme for Government of any of the campuses that make up the Connacht-Ulster alliance. The previous Minister of State with responsibility for higher education, former Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor, allocated a multi-annual fund of €90 million to assist the progression and development of the technological universities. I have a question for the Minister of State to which I expect a written response as I do not need to hear it today. How much of that fund has been allocated to the individual consortia that make up the different technological universities?

I am fully supportive of the enormous work and real progress by all involved, including Sligo IT, Letterkenny IT, and GMIT, in progressing the Connacht-Ulster alliance and in their progress towards meeting the criteria. This is a process and there is, rightly, an independent assessment as to whether or not the applicants meet the criteria. It is not a political process, it is an educational one. I have read the process and criteria for designation as a technological university. For the preparation of the plan to meet the criteria it states: "The establishment of a technological university requires the consolidation of two or more institutions." This means that if all the three colleges I mentioned are not in a position by autumn to apply for technological university status then two out of the three can proceed. I understand that the third college can join up at a later stage when it meets the criteria. I want to put on the record of the House that I absolutely and fervently hope that all three institutions will meet the criteria by the end of this year.

I was privileged to represent that entire region for 15 years in the European Parliament. I know this is not a parochial issue and that it is an issue for the region. In the unfortunate circumstances, however, that this is not the case and only two of the three colleges reach the criteria, it is absolutely crucial that those two can proceed and the third college can link up when it is in the position to meet the criteria. Again, if we go back to the process, once the application is submitted, a decision will be made within six months. However, if the application is rejected because it does not meet the criteria, then there is a five-year wait. That simply cannot be allowed to happen.

The reason I emphasise this is because I do not want any chance to arise that the Connacht-Ulster alliance would not go ahead successfully in its application by this autumn. In my time as a politician, I have seen too many important issues slip off the agenda. There has been an economic gap between the regions with a consistent underspend in the north west, year by year, sector by sector. That underspend is across the board. It is documented in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly report from several months ago. It occurs in health, education, roads - national and local, as well as research and development and fewer jobs created. All those figures are *per capita*.

We are looking to the future, however. I do not think anybody set out to have this happen. It just happened by default or by the fact that people were not as proactive as they should have been. I want to ensure that our higher education institutions can make the application and play an important role in the educational, social and economic growth of the region.

Earlier I referred to Magee College. I would be delighted to see cross-Border collaboration between the Connacht-Ulster alliance and Magee College. This would be vital because cross-Border collaboration is important. However, the Connacht-Ulster alliance must go ahead under its own steam. It will provide us with a centre of excellence and innovation, and one that will be able to respond to the needs of the entire region.

24 July 2021

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly has provided statistics that show that between 2013 and 2018, the level of general capital funding provided per undergraduate student in the north west was €141 while the State average was €197. The spend in the other regions was much higher. That is why I want to ensure that the Minister and the Department are aware of this, that it does not continue, and that we get our fair share. Part of that process will be about ensuring a successful application for the Connacht-Ulster technological university.

Deputy John McGuinness: I congratulate you, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle, on your election. It was certainly a turn-up for the books that you secured the vote against the odds. I wish you well in your position. I have no doubt from watching you in the Committee of Public Accounts and doing temporary Chair that you will do an excellent and fair job.

I congratulate the Ministers on their appointments because this is the first opportunity I have had to speak in the Dáil since they were appointed. I wish them well in their various roles and the work they have to do on behalf of the State.

It is unfortunate, however, that the section which does not refer specifically to universities but to Ministers of State and their payments should be taken in this Bill today. The Bill itself is a positive step forward. It is one that needs to be fleshed out and debated properly without having the drawback of having to pass also the section of the Bill which relates to Ministers of State. It is unfortunate in a second way because there is a need for a full debate on the appointment of Ministers, Ministers of State and super junior Ministers. It would not be in a negative way but in a way that would give a greater explanation and depth of understanding to just exactly what goes on in the various Departments as well as the work that has to be undertaken by modern governments which expands right across the spectrum of activity in society and in the economy in a much deeper way than before.

The cry before the appointment of Ministers is always about needing a special Minister for one thing or another. Why do people feel left out when they do not have a Minister for a specific sector? That greater debate should be undertaken on another day so people can have their say as to what a small or big Government looks like and what it costs. There is a cost to democracy but we have to be extremely careful that it is not excessive and can stand up to scrutiny.

A previous speaker mentioned the university for the south east in the context of the next up-and-coming recognition of a regional university. There was a meeting earlier this morning, which I could not attend because I was here, about progressing that particular project and bringing it to fruition to the benefit of not just Waterford but all the counties that make up the south east. The south east is an area which has been held economically and socially in terms of its development. Its qualities may be recognised but its true ability to move forward and what it has to offer have not been given the appropriate recognition in the State.

It is not today or yesterday that we have spoken about the university for the south east. It dates back in history with the proposed university for Kilkenny covered in a book written by Michael Conway. In more recent years, Mary McAleese, before she was President, began the conversation about having an outreach from Armagh based in Kilkenny to further the interests of universities in regions around the country and making them more accessible to people. To make them accessible, it is not just about geographical location. It is about funding, ensuring that the courses are meaningful and the qualifications are not dumbed down but beefed up. It is about everyone having the opportunity to attend university and to better themselves educationally, regardless of age or from where they come. That is important because education and

furthering education through university is a great way of breaking that cycle of people being kept at a particular level in society, as well as ending poverty traps.

As legislators we need to do everything we possibly can to ensure that not only the financial aspect of this is pushed out to support others but the structures are there to ensure easy access. The Minister needs to look at the strength of a region when considering universities. I hope that the university for the south east is established soon. I encourage Waterford and Carlow institutes of technology to come together quickly to avail of the €90 million which is available to ensure they can complete their application and move the project forward to the delivery stage. Any delay in the project whatsoever will delay possibilities for people. We cannot allow that to happen.

Regarding the strengths of the south east, I have always put forward the view that we should build on what we have in terms of education and tourism. I encourage the Minister of State to take the lead in each region and, in the south east in particular, to consider the possibility of Norman studies within the university. It would be a specific draw for the university, given that Norman studies is a major subject across Europe. There is also a significant tourism aspect to this. A Norman museum and study centre for Kilkenny city would not be unusual. Instead, it would be a proper home for such a project and could be attached to the university under discussion. It would not be alien to the location either. There is Kilkenny Castle and various monuments around the city, the county and the south east. The knowledge of that period of our history that people bring with them will inform us and perhaps give us an understanding of where we have come from and how it formed. It is essential that we develop this type of approach to our educational establishment and what we deliver. The €90 million for the project is there and the Minister of State needs to encourage the speedier and appropriate use of that money in order to conclude the application process and get it started.

Regarding what apprenticeships might add, we are losing quite a deal of our history in terms of how our built heritage was constructed and maintained. I am referring to stonemasonry and the use of limestone and various other materials. We are losing knowledge about that part of our history. The apprenticeship scheme should be undertaken by the OPW. The Minister of State should encourage that. The OPW has a range of fantastic in-house skills and it should ensure that they are passed down to the next generation through the apprenticeship scheme. This would supply qualified people who understood our built heritage and would be in a position to pass on their knowledge and skills to ensure that it is maintained. This is an essential part of the apprenticeship scheme.

The scheme must be used constructively within the agencies of the State where there is a basis for its usage. That would be important. The Minister of State could easily link up with the OPW to ensure it happens. For example, the weirs on our rivers form part of our built heritage and are an essential part of the River Nore. They could be reconstructed and put to proper use. That is a skill in itself. Mr. Alan Sullivan, who assisted the OPW in the building of a weir in Kilkenny, used a technique found in Germany, but professionals with the skill sets necessary to build weirs are few and far between. These skills are essential. There is considerable opportunity to address such issues.

I will turn to legacy issues in universities. Critically, there are financial issues in all universities and they were often discussed by the Committee of Public Accounts. They arose and were not resolved. For example, some related to companies within universities needing to be accounted for properly, to be transparent and to form part of the reconstruction process that is

24 July 2021

under way in terms of this Bill and the work of the universities and the Minister. There are also HR issues that need to be addressed. For example, there are outstanding whistleblower cases in CIT, which were raised by Deputy MacSharry, Deputy Kelly and others, including me. We asked for them to be addressed so that legacy issues attached to the university's status could be concluded.

Given the new Department and the two new ministerial positions, I suggest that we now have an opportunity to have legacy issues, in particular the one that I referenced, dealt with comprehensively and immediately so that established technological universities can move on in a positive way without having to look over their shoulders because they must account for past issues.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy should conclude.

Deputy John McGuinness: I believed I had 20 minutes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Ten minutes.

Deputy John McGuinness: No one is sharing time with me.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy's ten minutes are up.

Deputy John McGuinness: I understood the slot was 20 minutes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No. I do not mean to interrupt, but the Deputy had a ten-minute slot. That is what was agreed. I am sorry about that.

Deputy John McGuinness: Will the Minister of State take note of what I have asked and deal with the issue as soon as possible? Will he do all he can to ensure that the application for the south-east university is made and is progressed quickly?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The next slot is Sinn Féin's. Is Deputy Gould or Deputy Doherty offering? No. I will move on to Deputy Lawless. He has ten minutes. I do not wish to interrupt Members, but we will proceed in this way. At 3.53 p.m., I will stop the Second Stage debate and we will move on to Committee Stage.

Deputy James Lawless: I am proud to see a Government led by a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach initiating a new Department of higher education and research. Actually, I believe the Minister has renamed it to the "Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science". It follows in a tradition. I am proud of my party's history in this area, in particular higher education and research. In 1940, Eamon de Valera, another Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, established the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, DIAS. People like Seán Lemass and T. K. Whitaker opened the door to foreign direct investment, FDI, in the 1960s and Donogh O'Malley opened the door to secondary school education in 1969. The Lemassian FDI economy that opened up the doors for the first time to newcomers and economic expansion, coupled with Donogh O'Malley's investment in second level education, drove on the next wave of our economic activity and success in what I call a graduate pipeline, in that we began to develop the school leavers and third level graduates who would go on to work in those FDI centres. This helped to attract to our shores multinationals and investment in technology, pharma, electronics and many other sectors.

No more than now, the DIAS was established at a time when dark clouds were gathered

around the world. We were on the brink of the Second World War. Now, we face the Covid pandemic. The parallel is that a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach took the initiative to invest in a research centre as well as research-driven activity and incentivisation at a time when there were economic pressures and competing demands for that money. Then as now, it showed foresight. I hope that our foresight now will bear fruit if we follow through on it.

I will trace all of that through to the creation of Science Foundation Ireland in 2001 or 2002. I pay tribute to the former Minister, Mary Harney, who was involved in that development. That began to move us from a graduate pipeline for multinationals and new technology firms to the next level in terms of higher end activity, research and innovation. The higher up the chain we go, the more added value we create and the more difficult it is to offshore, reshore or move around such activities and the more embedded they become. When I proposed the idea of this Department to my party leader, now Taoiseach, two years ago, I was delighted that he took the baton and ran. It was part of Fianna Fáil's manifesto, was a pivotal part of the Government talks and if today's motion passes, it will be part of the Government programme.

When I was Opposition spokesperson for science, technology and research, I was intensively engaged with the universities, agencies and research sector. I was struck how despite early advances, the lack of attention given to the sector in the last decade had seen it suffer. Statistics can be trotted out to suggest that Ireland is in the top ten or top five of various things which different agencies do. There is some merit in those claims but some of the rankings are based on long-term activities and some of the citations represent the tail end of the investment in the early 2000s and before that. Were the decline in the channelling of funding to the research sector to continue, in five or ten years we would see the rankings trail off. Indeed this is something we are already beginning to see. Our universities' plight is at the centre of that. In the last two years, no Irish university has occupied a place in the top 100. That is an awful indictment on the land of saints and scholars. We had two or three at one stage, with UCD and TCD ordinarily in the top 50 until recently. Trinity College Dublin is at 101 and hopefully it will get over the line again. Those rankings are indicative of the decline. Statistics tell one story, the community will tell another.

It is also the case that the funding that was available in recent years was channelled in a particular, narrow way. Funding was targeted at things that could generate jobs and that had a short-term economic potential. That is an important part of the strategy but should never be the be all and end all. The pursuit of knowledge is a public good in its own right but it is also the foundation of a successful society and nation and will drive longer term dividends.

The last time there was a programme for research in third level institutions, PRTLTI, was in 2010 when, at the height of the fiscal crisis, the then Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, committed over €350 million into the broad-based fund that went across all the centres across all the higher level institutions to allow the renewal of laboratories and libraries and the bread and butter type activities. That fund is yet to be refreshed. I asked for that several times during the last Dáil without joy. I strongly suggest that the new Ministers examine PRTLTI or a similar successor to channel into the sector. We need to fill that funding gap.

I mentioned the economic implications for Ireland to compete on the world stage. Ireland has gone from an agrarian economy to a post-industrial one in about 20 years through the Lemassian initiatives about which I spoke. Our direct economic rivals are not the BRICs, the Brazil, Russia, India, China economies, or the United States. We are part of the EU block, and I suppose part of that is our competitor, but our competition is the small advanced economies,

24 July 2021

such as New Zealand, Denmark, Israel or South Korea. Those are states that invest heavily in research and development, R&D. The last Government's R&D target was 2.5% of GDP but got nowhere near that; the height of it was 1.45%. If we are to compete on the world stage in the knowledge economy, which is where we should set our sights, we need to get to 2.5% and far beyond it which is where states such as New Zealand, Denmark and Israel are already. It is no coincidence that those are the states that were also seen as being successful in the pandemic. Presumably they had the science to back things up.

There are huge opportunities in the area if we do things right and capture them correctly to build value added activity. Life sciences, pharma, tech and Internet have many firms that are already here and many more will invest. Most importantly, indigenous firms will rise and spring up because we have the talent. We have no shortage of brainpower and raw talent, but we need to reward it, prioritise it, invest in it, foster it and keep it on these shores. We need to couple that with our existing strong position as being attractive to foreign direct investment. Our membership of the European Union, English-speaking population and tax regime have been strong points and are crucial to our economic offering, but it will be crucial to the recovery because we are looking to a digital recovery. It also ties in with the green recovery, with new technologies and digital methods of doing things.

Beyond the economy, it is important that we fund research across the board. The best discoveries happen by accident, not when someone is tasked with a lab report to find, say, a new strain in 12 months, but when people are sent into a lab or library to see what they can get. That is how they can go and discover, like Newton in the orchard discovering gravity, Euripides discovering volume in the bath or Tim Berners-Lee in CERN discovering the world wide web in the 1970s. These kinds of globally changing, epoch making initiatives happen because someone is curious and they are given the tools to satisfy their curiosity and then to build on that.

I referred to CERN. We need to engage internationally. We are members of the European Space Agency. In the last term we joined the European Southern Observatory, something I worked with astrophysicists to ensure happened. These may be small in their own sectors but they have massive ramifications and great opportunities flow from them in way of tenders, study opportunities, jobs and the ability to collaborate. There was cross-party agreement on CERN at the all-party enterprise committee in the last Dáil. I hope that continues into the next stage by the Government. It is a very obvious win.

As Opposition spokesperson in the last Dáil I found myself asking questions of up to five different Ministers. There was a Minister of State for higher education, Mitchell O'Connor, John Halligan, with whom I worked with on many issues, had responsibility for innovation and there were senior Ministers in two Departments and another Minister of State, Deputy Breen. Occasionally there were answers from the Department of Finance, or from the Department of Justice and Equality if a data protection issue arose. It seemed as though the responsibilities were scattered across multiple Departments. The Department of Education and Skills is squeezed and under pressure, particularly with the pandemic, and it is all about the schools. It makes perfect sense that such an economically and strategically critical part of the nation and society should have a home in its own Department and be centralised where it can build excellence, and to have one point of responsibility. This is what we are working towards with the new Department. I wish it every success. It is badly needed and it is an important part of the jigsaw that had been neglected until now. I hope the Department does come to fruition, as I am sure it will, and I am sure that it will with the passing of this legislation. I look forward to the huge opportunities to put Ireland on the world stage, elevate us and build our economic and

intellectual potential and our knowledge base in the decades ahead.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call on Sinn Féin, Deputies Doherty and Gould.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I welcome the establishment of the new Department. I particularly wish to emphasise the area of apprenticeships and having a co-ordinated strategy to engage with people and get more people to take up apprenticeships. In the past, Governments have allowed the private sector and some local authorities to manage apprenticeships in an *ad hoc* fashion, depending on the market. I am looking for a constructive plan to be put in place by the Department to give apprenticeships their place in the educational system. The system in Germany and the number of apprentices that are trained across all sectors is something we should establish here. I hope the Department takes that on board.

One of the Department's key jobs will be to encourage those who do not have traditional third level backgrounds or families without a history of going to third level.

Sometimes the supports are not in place, in either the schools or colleges, to make that transition possible. I did not go to third level when I left school. I went straight to work after I did my leaving certificate in the North Mon and a month later I had a job. That was the road I went down. It was not until I was in my early 30s that I went to Cork Institute of Technology, as a mature student. Even in the case of my wife, Michelle's, family, she and her brothers were the first generation to go to third level. When she went to college, she gave up after four months. We were talking about this new Department and she made the point that when she went to college, she had no friends there and did not know anyone. She felt lost and alone and she did not think the appropriate structures were there. When she gave up college after four months, no one ever checked up on her to see why or what had happened. In light of her and my experiences, we want the Department to ensure that no one will be left behind.

My wife, Michelle, went back to education ten years later, to University College Cork, where she graduated with an honours degree. She felt she was older, more mature and better able to do that at that stage of her life. She is a teacher now. She made the point to me that some young people do not feel they are good enough and they need that extra support and encouragement. Every person in this country should have the right and ability to go to third level if that is what he or she chooses. That is why this Department has major work to do to encourage that and to help accomplish it.

Accordingly, I really want to support the Department, but the problem is the increase in super junior Ministers' pay by €16,000 each, or €48,000 a year, which will be €240,000 over the lifetime of the Government. In the area of Cork North-Central, which I represent, there are significant issues with getting funding for different projects. People have contacted me, and will continue to do so, to ask how the Government can justify this at this time. I stood here last night and asked the Minister for Health when the increase in medical card limits will be rolled out. There is to be an expansion of the eligibility to anyone over the age of 70 and an increase in the limits, which will mean more people will be entitled to a medical card. The Minister could not tell me a date. People will see that a date for that cannot be given but that a date can be given for an increase in the salaries of super junior Ministers.

My constituency of Cork North-Central has seen the closure of dental clinics, both at the Cope Foundation in Montenotte and on Harrington Square. We are facing the closure of the

24 July 2021

Mount Cara residential house care setting in Redemption Road. There are considerable issues in Cork with traffic-calming measures because the northern ring road was never completed, which means articulated heavy-goods vehicles drive through residential areas. I have taken part in campaigns in recent months with many groups that deal with such issues, such as in Knocknaheeny, Killard, Garranabraher and right into Glanmire and Blarney, who are seeking traffic-calming, speed-reduction measures and signs. The money is not there to provide them, but now we are able to find this kind of money for the super junior Ministers.

I have been on the picket line with Debenhams workers for more than 100 days. They have been looking for just two weeks' pay more than is provided by statutory redundancy, but the Government cannot do that for them or support them in that. This week a motion tabled by Solidarity-People Before Profit to support the Debenhams workers was voted down, while the Government tabled an amendment that killed our motion last week, which sought to support maternity leave and childcare. These were good proposals that would make a real difference to ordinary people. It sends out the message that the elites can get additional money but ordinary people have to suffer on. To me, that is not the message we should send out from the House.

In my area of Cork city and my constituency of Cork North-Central, there are considerable issues with housing maintenance, with Cork city and county councils not having enough funding. There are also significant issues with trying to find funding to get derelict and vacant houses returned to use as quickly as possible. We want to support the Government's Bill, but as long as the increase in ministerial pay is tied in to it, we cannot do so. We think it is not right. What started as a good, positive idea for everyone, with the setting up of a new Department, should have been left at that. It should have been constructive. As our leader, Deputy McDonald, and our party have stated, we will work with the Government when we think it is making the right decisions. The setting up of this Department is a step in the right direction but we are really disappointed that the Government has chosen to add this pay component to it.

I hope the Minister will take on board the points we are making. Young people from communities I represent want to go to third level. I hope the Government will take on board the challenges they face, in terms of both the isolation issue and the financial issue, and the challenges regarding apprenticeships. There are significant issues with youth unemployment at the moment, and a proper apprenticeship scheme would help us to get more young people involved in education and training. That is what the Department should be all about.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am sharing with Deputy Carroll-MacNeill. I congratulate the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on her accession to her office and wish her a very satisfactory time there. I have no doubt she will discharge her duties with the usual distinction.

I am glad to have an opportunity to speak on this very important legislation. Education is always important but particularly so in the present times, when there is severe competition for places in both the manufacturing and services sectors, all of which require a higher standard of education than in the past. It is also a very competitive time insofar as job location is concerned. To judge by the debate earlier, some people seem to believe we should not encourage jobs here at all, or that people should come to invest in this country of their own goodwill or for charitable reasons. It does not work that way in the marketplace, unfortunately, nor has it ever.

We have the option, therefore, of attracting jobs here or going abroad to find jobs. In the present climate, given the circumstances of Covid-19, there are very few places one can go. What we have to do is provide expertise in education here and be able to locate global services

here. The opportunities are very significant.

In past recessions, we had the option of going abroad but that option is not there any more. Everybody is in the same loop and we have to accept what goes with that. I welcome the emphasis on third and fourth levels because, as time goes by, the requirements are getting greater. In my hometown, Professor Nolan has been chairing a special group on Covid in recent times. He and his colleagues have done a tremendous job in scientifically examining the circumstances that presented themselves and expertly guiding the country towards a better place. We owe him, his team and everyone involved in the Covid crisis a great debt of gratitude.

In past booms, on the other hand, there was a tendency for young people to go to where the money was. During the boom before the previous crash, many young students went for the money that was attractive and readily available, and left the opportunity of going for further education, which, when the crash came, was very important. Unfortunately, this limited them in the opportunities that were available to them.

The Department will lay the foundations in a different way. It is very positive and welcome. We need to emphasise the opportunities that will be available, including those in education in both the technical and academic areas. When we invest in education, we must do it in the clear knowledge that we are investing in the country's future and that of our population, young and old. Every euro we invest will be repaid at a later stage.

We must also recognise that our population is growing. We have a bigger population now that is almost double what it was in the 1950s. This is positive and most countries cannot say that. Of course, this country was decimated by generation after generation emigrating because doing so was the only means of getting opportunities. It is great to be able to see opportunities arising at home now, and long may that continue. With the proposed investment and the emphasis being placed on education in this Bill, we need to review our targets and raise our sights. Incidentally, the Covid-19 emergency has affected the confidence of our younger generation to some extent, certainly those in primary and second level. We should recognise that when discussing third and fourth level education. We must ensure that any required incentives are provided in order to encourage this coming generation of students to go in the right direction in order that they can get the opportunities both they and the country need.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: I thank Deputy Durkan for sharing time. I draw to the attention of the Minister of State the importance, in establishing this new Department, of remembering those people with intellectual disabilities and their participation in third level education. They should be given the same opportunity to participate as everybody else, which in turn can lead to full participation, where it is appropriate and wanted by somebody with an intellectual disability, in the world of work.

The Minister of State is almost certainly already aware of the excellent centre in Trinity College Dublin for people with intellectual disabilities. It may be a gold standard for that model but it is certainly something that is capable of being rolled out in other universities. It offers a two-year certificate programme for people with intellectual disabilities. They are full students of the college and have student cards like everybody else. They undergo an appropriate series of courses and preparation for work, including internships. That process is expanding. The internships are with commercial organisations, including law firms, CPL Resources, Ernst & Young and aircraft leasing companies. They offer the young person the chance to experience work and the employer is given the opportunity to work with Trinity.

24 July 2021

The process is set up in a structured way in order to minimise concerns or questions that may arise about the supports provided to the young person coming into the organisation. It provides a pathway, as so many other apprenticeship opportunities do, for the young person with an intellectual disability to come full-time into the world of work. In many cases, the positions are translated into permanent jobs. They might be five days per week or three days per week but they are appropriate to the ability of the person concerned.

This is a model of true inclusion where somebody can have the dignity of work. People can grumble about paying tax or working on a Monday morning, and they can have a badge and lanyard like everybody else. This structured model within the university gives confidence and appropriate preparation to settling into the world of work, not just with regard to the functions to be performed in the work environment but also just being in the work environment with colleagues, having had the benefit of a university experience before that.

In recent decades we have treated people with intellectual disabilities in a truly exclusionary and tragic way. This goes back to our shameful past of institutionalising people with intellectual disabilities. There was no reason for that. I appreciate there is a spectrum and not everybody will be able to or want to participate in the sort of model I describe, but for those who do, it should be available. There should be an automatic consideration for those who are interested in, able and want to participate. There are too few avenues for people with intellectual disabilities to real participation both in the third level educational experience and in getting long-term, inclusive employment.

This will be a measure of the new Department and it will be included in its remit. As a society we must ensure that we are really including people with intellectual disabilities as a matter of course. I commend the commercial organisations that have already embraced this model. It is something that adds so much to an organisation, including its culture, and I invite others to participate in the process. I congratulate the Minister of State on his appointment but I ask him to look into this at the earliest possible opportunity to see what might be done to take this model, or one very like it, to the other universities in the country so that they can provide supports, education and really inclusive opportunities for lifelong dignity for people with intellectual disabilities in this State.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: This legislation will create a new Department with responsibility for further and higher education, research, innovation and science. From a rural perspective, the support it would provide is vital in assisting not only the promotion of study in sustainable agriculture but the transition of rural students into highly populated university campuses and further research academies. The social and cultural experience of rural and ethnic minority students heading into third level education is only one area in which I hope this new Department will take the lead.

We should note that with the higher education courses in agriculture available, in 2019 over one in two students in highly rural or remote areas applied for the SUSI grant. Over 12,000 students sought counselling in 2019, a 50% increase since 2010. I look forward to the publication of the higher and further education roadmap. It is about time we had a Department solely dedicated to governing the future of our higher level education system. All students need to feel safe and secure during these unusual times.

Why are students from agricultural colleges currently excluded from the €15 million Covid-19 education fund? Was this an oversight and does the Minister plan to include them in the

fund? It was established to enable students to purchase laptops and tablets and obtain Internet connectivity fit for remote learning. The 6,000 students attending Teagasc colleges in Palskenry, Gurteen and Mountbellew have the same technology needs as students in universities and institutes of technology. Broadband in some rural areas is insufficient for remote learning, and that is why the national broadband plan must be expedited.

I have often said we must incentivise the farming sector. Looking at what has been published, it seems the farming sector, and students in that sector, are again being excluded. I hope this is an oversight that will be corrected. All students in every learning sphere should be welcomed and incorporated in all types of learning. The Internet services are not available in rural Ireland, including rural areas of Limerick. This must be addressed immediately. These colleges will not have the ability, if social distancing is implemented, to accommodate all these students, so rural and remote learning must be used. We must address this.

The Minister of State is from Limerick. I am delighted that we have two Ministers of State from the area. It is about time we all worked collectively to get what we need for Limerick. We must get the infrastructure, including rural broadband, in place by working collectively on behalf of Limerick. That collective response has been needed for many years. The Ministers of State are now in a position to make things happen. I look forward to working with them.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Ar dtús báire, gabhaim buíochas le, tugaim aitheantas do agus déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Leas-Cheann Comhairle ar a ceapachán úr. Chuir sí ionadh mór orm inné. Tá caidreamh maith agus dearfach againn thar na blianta agus muid ag obair ar son na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta, na hoidhreacht, agus an chultúir. Táim cinnte go mbeidh sí iontach féaráilte, mar a deir daoine san iarthuaisceart, i dTír Chonaill, agus í sa Chathaoir.

Chomh maith leis sin, tugaim aitheantas do agus déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Aire Stáit úr, Teachta Niall Collins. Bhí mé ag labhairt leis inné. Táim cinnte go mbeidh a phost iontach tábhachtach amach anseo ó thaobh an chéad ghlúin eile. Beidh rudaí nua de dhíth. Beidh sé freagrach as rudaí a bheidh tábhachtach don chéad ghlúin eile, mar shampla, scileanna agus oideachas. Caithfidh breathnú ar bhealaí úra agus ar na poist nua a bheidh ann sa toadhchá. Déanaim comhghairdeas leis arís. Táim cinnte go mbeidh sé gnóthach sa Roinn. Gúim ádh mór air sa phost sin.

In 2011, the Canadian Government signed off on 10,000 visas for Ireland at a time when there was a mass exodus of young men and women from these shores. Many of them went to Canada, Australia, England and other parts of the world. They were certainly a lost generation. Many of them have not returned home. Some came back to set up lives here but, to concur with my colleague, Deputy Durkan, in the times we are facing, the safety net in terms of access to employment will not be available in the future for the younger generation. There is a question mark over whether that will happen. I believe that not only will we be looking at new opportunities and different pathways for young people, we will also see them moving back here from some of the destinations I mentioned, be it Australia, Canada or wherever.

With regard to where we will be moving to in the period ahead, this is a critical time for the third level sector in the context of upskilling, retraining, empowering and building capacity for our young people. We have to be not just graded in our thinking, we need to look at this in a way in which we have not looked at it previously. If we look back to the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and 2011 in terms of the Canadian visas, we see a pattern of emigration because we were unable to provide the necessary avenues for young people at home. We have to reflect on the

24 July 2021

disadvantages and the feeling young people had of being let down over decades. We have to face into an uncertain future. Every country is grappling with that but we have to look at what we have and what we have done. As he gets into the job and gets a feel for it, the Minister of State will see the proactive measures that have been taken in post-primary schools. He will feel the energy and see the different pathways and the different inter-relationships between guidance counsellors, for example, and local companies and the various apprenticeships that are offered. There will be an energy and a welcome for him but now, more than ever, we should grasp that opportunity. His party was very much involved in ensuring the addition of guidance counsellors but we cannot stop at that. We have to move further in that direction. That speciality will be very much needed in the future.

At a juncture such as this, when we are faced with this pandemic and the economic crisis, fear can sometimes become the backdrop to every conversation because we do not know what life will be like in the future but what we will have, in an enormously positive way, is that energy coming from our younger generation.

We must look also at the work that has started at a pan-European level whereby universities across Europe, including those in Ireland, are working together. If somebody from New York travels across the United States to get a job in California, that is not seen as emigration; it is seen as someone moving to get a job. We have to look at the opportunities and pathways that exist and at what we can do to link with universities in different countries because there are many opportunities in that regard.

That is at a policy level but the bottom line for many parents is that they are anxious to know what will be the next step for their son or daughter in terms of their education and the opportunities that will be available to them. We must always reflect on the fact that there will be confidence issues for many young people, and many parents, in terms of feeling secure about the future. We have to continue with the empowerment process and the good work happening throughout our schools sector. I have no doubt that the Minister of State will tap into that energy. Again, I wish him and his officials well in that regard.

While we are talking in this very modern building in the capital city of Dublin, life as we know it is changing on a daily basis. People are making decisions, possibly in respect of the work they will be involved in and where they will live. As a politician who represents Donegal, I will continue to focus strongly on the opportunities available at a local level and it has to encapsulate all Departments. There is no point in talking about what we can provide for young people in Donegal without providing the proper resources and the capacity in the third level sector or in terms of facilitating young people to build a home on land in their own county if that is what they wish. We need a clever, creative and nuanced debate about how we can facilitate and keep our young people at a local level. That is why the new Connacht-Ulster alliance is such an important venture. The presidents of IT Sligo, GMIT and Letterkenny IT have been working very hard and are united in ensuring that they will submit an application on behalf of the Connacht-Ulster alliance later this year. I have no doubt that the Minister of State will be keeping a very close eye on that matter. Not only do we have that opportunity of a university on the west coast, we also have the great opportunity for the cross-Border alliances. I refer to the reference to the Ulster University Magee Campus in the programme for Government and further collaboration with that institution also.

I reiterate that we are in a new place and that the Oireachtas has to be responsive to what people are thinking and planning for the future. If we do not respond to that, we will be failing

another generation of young people. We have to ensure that they are given the most advantageous opportunities in the future.

Arís, déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Leas-Cheann Comhairle agus í ag obair ar son ár n-oidhreacht, ár gcultúr agus ár dteanga amach anseo. Tá mé cinnte go mbeimid ag obair ar na nithe seo trí chúrsaí oideachais, an tríú leibhéal fásta. Nascadar an dara leibhéal agus an tríú leibhéal agus tá an nasc sin iontach tábhachtach don chéad ghlúin eile. Ag éisteacht le daoine atá freagrach as na bunscoileanna agus na scoileanna dara leibhéal, tá an nasc sin iontach tábhachtach agus go mbeidh acmhainní ar fáil do mhúinteoirí agus na daoine eile a luaigh mé.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Congratulations again, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle, on your victory. I welcome the establishment of a Ministry responsible for higher education and research. It is a very positive move. If the importance of investing in research in medicine and other areas needs to be underlined, one need look no further than the lessons of the pandemic itself. There is clearly a deficit in these areas, but we have a lot of skilled and talented young people, graduates, postgraduates and so on. We need to invest in them and in research that will really benefit our society. I hope that lesson is more obvious than ever after Covid-19.

The purpose of this Ministry should be to ensure that access to higher education is as wide and unfettered as possible. One key aspect of that should be the elimination of all fees for students entering third level education or undertaking postgraduate degrees. They should not have to suffer some of the highest fees in the European Union; a €3,000 registration fee for undergraduates and a €6,000 fee for people doing masters degrees. That is completely unacceptable. It was unacceptable before Covid-19 and it is entirely unacceptable now. Many of the opportunities for undergraduates to take summer jobs to earn money for their fees are gone. Their parents may have suffered reductions in income or loss of employment. If we really see the importance of education and want to open it up, we should remove all the financial obstacles and eliminate all fees to provide the widest possible access.

Of course, people will say the socialists believe there is a free money tree and we do not have the money for that. Let me point out that as a proportion of GDP, our spending on education, health and just about every other key public service is among the lowest in Europe. Investing more in public services and in key areas like education is not a radical idea. It is standard across Europe. The problem is that we redirect resources away from higher education and third level education towards tax breaks for research and development available to wealthy multinational corporations that pay a pittance in tax. Rather than invest money in research in our public universities, we give nearly €1 billion a year in research and development tax breaks to some of the wealthiest corporations in the world. It seems to me that they have enough money. We should close those tax loopholes. We should redirect the €700 million or €800 million a year that goes to a handful of multinational corporations into our universities to remove fees and invest in more research and greater access to higher education.

I might have left my points at that and welcomed this Bill, but there is a big difficulty. This Bill and the setting up of this new Ministry are linked to something absolutely scandalous, namely, the plans to increase by €16,000 the already high salaries of Ministers of State, as if €124,000 is not enough. Last night, when I asked the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, how he could possibly justify this, he said it was fair to expect pay equality around the Cabinet table. I thought about this for a minute and realised the Government believes in pay equality in the public service. That is why people earning €124,000 could not possibly work beside other Ministers who are on higher salaries though they do the same job. They must be given a

24 July 2021

€16,000 increase. It is only fair. We must have equality.

Then one remembers that apparently the same principle of equality in the public service does not apply to teachers, who are on a fraction of that salary. It is okay for teachers entering education after 2011 to earn a substantially lower starting salary than the teachers doing exactly the same job beside them do. Inequality is okay there, but it is not okay between Ministers around the Cabinet table. It is also okay for lecturers in higher education to earn a starting salary of €38,000, though those who started before 2011 earned €42,000. That pay inequality is okay, but we cannot possibly have pay inequality for Ministers on €124,000. We have to give them an additional €16,000.

That is a scandalous double standard. Those double standards will be felt by our nurses and front-line health workers more than anyone. They were the ones who protected us and continue to protect us at great personal cost during the pandemic. What did those health workers get as their reward from the State for losing their lives and suffering the highest Covid-19 infection rates of health workers anywhere in the world? They got a round of applause. They did not get a pay increase or pay equality. I suggest we save the cost of this pay increase by just giving the Ministers a round of applause, the same thing they gave the nurses who protected us. That is hollow thanks for the workers on the front line who protected us.

Ministers must have pay equality and they must get €16,000. The double standard is frankly nauseating and it will not be lost on people. I have just come from a meeting of the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response which heard from taxi drivers who are financially on their knees. How will students who cannot get summer jobs pay the fees they are now being charged for attending lectures one day a week? They are still being charged some of the highest fees imaginable. Workers in the arts, music and entertainment industries have seen their incomes decimated but the Ministers of State must have a €16,000 pay increase on top of a €124,000 salary. It is absolutely shocking. We would like to support a Bill to create a new Ministry for an important area like higher education and research, but how on earth can we possibly support a pay increase for junior Ministers with already massive salaries? If they need pay equality around the Cabinet table, why not reduce the pay of the senior Ministers? That would be a better way to achieve pay equality. It would be a bit fairer. It would send a better signal to the people who are suffering because of the economic fallout of Covid-19. That is my suggestion. Let us give the Ministers of State a round of applause instead of a €16,000 pay increase.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Niall Collins): I begin by congratulating the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on her election. I wish her well in that office. As she said in her few words yesterday, it is historic. She is the first woman in the history of this Parliament to hold the office of Leas-Cheann Comhairle. It is a fabulous achievement and I wish her well.

We initiated this Bill yesterday in the Seanad, where a number of issues were raised by a range of speakers. I thank all the Deputies who contributed to the debate today. Several of the issues they raised were also raised yesterday in the other House. As my colleague, Deputy Lawless, pointed out, the inception of a new Department was an idea of the Fianna Fáil Party and the Taoiseach, who was previously Minister for Education and Science. My party adopted the proposal as policy while in opposition and I am very happy to say it was actively engaged with by Fine Gael and the Green Party as part of the talks leading to the formation of the Government. The legislation to enable the establishment of the new Department with responsibility for further and higher education, research, innovation and science is now before us. It is very

important that we have a dedicated Department with responsibility in these areas, for the many reasons articulated by various speakers. It is important even for practical reasons. At budget time, for example, which will be coming up later in the year, the Minister, Deputy Harris, and I will be able to make presentations to the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and seek funding and resourcing for the higher and further education sectors on a stand-alone basis. We will not be seeking those resources as representatives of a larger Department, as was the case previously, dealing with other parts of education which are also very important. We will have a dedicated focus on higher education, training, research, science and innovation.

A number of speakers referred to the need for sustainable funding for the higher education sector. That is without a doubt one of the biggest challenges that will face this Department. The Cassells report was published more than four years, has gone through the Oireachtas system and is now with the European Commission. Decisions will have to be made in regard to the future funding of third level colleges, as was rightly pointed out by several speakers, especially given the significant drop-off in the international student base that will be experienced this year.

I welcome the funding of €168 million announced earlier this week to support the third level sector. I also welcome the indication from higher and further education institutions throughout the country that they will be ready to open in September and receive first-year and other students. They are preparing for that and have confirmed to the Minister that they will be in a state of readiness for that date. The Government has stepped up to the plate and given €168 million in recognition of the contribution of the sector to the national front-line response to date, and to resource and equip institutions to make their campuses ready, make themselves digitally ready and prepare themselves for online learning. A sum of €15 million is being provided to resource students to purchase laptops, tablet devices and Internet connectivity. The student assistance fund has been doubled from €8 million to €16 million. An allocation of €3 million is being made available for student mental health, which is hugely important. In addition, €2 million is being given to the fund for students with disabilities and marginalised students, including those from the Traveller community. Research has not been forgotten, with €48 million allocated to fund ongoing research, which has been impacted by the Covid pandemic.

I want to be clear that the new Department will have a very strong focus on further education. Agencies like SOLAS are charged with driving, through the education and training boards, ETBs, the delivery of the further education and training provision which is required throughout the country. It is not all about institutes of technology and universities. Further education, training and apprenticeships will be an acute focus of this Department. We will shortly publish an apprenticeship action plan that will address the many issues around apprenticeships, including the need to broaden the range of apprenticeships on offer, address the gender imbalance in participation, resource apprenticeship programmes and make sure we do everything in that space to deal with a changing Ireland and the changing demand for skills in many sectors up and down the country. The need for action in this regard was recognised in the July stimulus.

I conclude by echoing what many speakers noted in the context of the evolution and development of this country over the years. We have such a strong foreign direct investment base, which provides gainful employment to people in every community throughout the country, not only because we are a member of the EU, we have a common law system and we have an attractive taxation policy, which has been part of a larger debate in the context of the Apple tax judgment, but also because of our research and innovation skills and capabilities and the skilled workforce which has come through our education and training framework. I thank Deputies for

24 July 2021

their contributions and commend the Bill to the House.

Question put: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 73; Níl, 45; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Berry, Cathal.</i>	<i>Andrews, Chris.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Browne, Martin.</i>	
<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Daly, Pa.</i>	
<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Costello, Patrick.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	
<i>Duffy, Francis Noel.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
<i>Flaherty, Joe.</i>	<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	
<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	<i>O’Callaghan, Cian.</i>	
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>O’Donoghue, Richard.</i>	
<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	<i>O’Reilly, Louise.</i>	
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>O’Rourke, Darren.</i>	
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Hourigan, Neasa.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>Ryan, Patricia.</i>	

Dáil Éireann

<i>Lawless, James.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
<i>Leddin, Brian.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>Matthews, Steven.</i>	<i>Tully, Pauline.</i>	
<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Wynne, Violet-Anne.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>		
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>		
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>		
<i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>		
<i>Noonan, Malcolm.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Joe.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Connor, James.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>Ó Cathasaigh, Marc.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>		
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>		
<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>		
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Ossian.</i>		
<i>Stanton, David.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Brendan Griffin and Jack Chambers; Níl, Deputies Denise Mitchell and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

Question declared carried.

24 July 2021

**Ministers and Secretaries and Ministerial, Parliamentary, Judicial and Court Offices
(Amendment) Bill 2020 [Seanad]: Committee and Remaining Stages**

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: In case there is any misunderstanding, there are 30 minutes for this debate from start to finish. The guillotine will be coming down after 30 minutes.

Section 1 agreed to.

SECTION 2

Question proposed: “That section 2 stand part of the Bill.”

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Sinn Féin Deputies are opposing this section. We have tabled an amendment. This section is silent and has not been referred to by any of the Ministers even though the Bill is only three sections long. What is happening is absolutely crazy. The Government has deemed it a priority to rush through an amendment to this legislation, legislation that Sinn Féin would otherwise be supporting and welcoming as has been pointed out by our spokesperson, Deputy Conway Walsh. Section 2 gives junior Ministers who are already on a salary of €124,439 an increase of €16,288. As I have said before in the past number of days, I do not understand how under God in the middle of a pandemic the Government believes this is the right thing to do. This was opposed by Fianna Fáil, which is showing the height of hypocrisy at this time. It is an example of why we cannot trust that party. The party website says that Fianna Fáil will vote against any legislative change which attempts to fund an additional super junior Minister post. However, every single one of them like sheep will walk in here and press the “Tá” button to ensure their super junior Minister gets an increase of €16,288. Deputy Eamon Ryan is no different. He is in the Official Report as the leader of the Green Party saying: “There are too many super-junior Ministers. I am sorry, it must be a very difficult decision and a hard call when some people have to lose jobs but there are too many people around the Cabinet table.” That is the reality of it. There are issues in respect of the constitutionality of the positions of super junior Minister in the first place. I ask the Minister to outline how the position of super junior Minister and indeed this section of the Bill are consistent with the principles of collective responsibility under Article 28 of the Constitution and in respect of the confidentiality of Cabinet deliberations.

4 o'clock

This point has been made many times. We have seen social media posts from those on the front line asking whether the super junior Ministers could not just accept a clap instead. That might be a throwaway comment but all the Deputies who are going to vote for this increase for somebody who is already on €128,000 should just think about what our front-line workers have done over the course of this year. They should think of a registered staff nurse on basic pay who would have had to work every single day up until last Friday to get the equivalent amount by which they are going to increase super junior Ministers’ pay this week. It is absolutely sickening. Ministers will give front-line workers all the plaudits, claps, nice words and all the rest. They should think of that staff nurse who had to go into St James’s Hospital, Connolly Hospital, Letterkenny University Hospital or anywhere else from January right through to Friday of last week to earn the increase they are planning to give to super junior Ministers in this legislation. It is obscene and wrong. The pay of Deputies, Senators and office holders should be cut, not increased. If ever there was a time to be taking decreases rather than increases in pay, the middle of a pandemic is it.

Deputy David Cullinane: Who would have thought the most oppressed section of Irish

society in terms of pay was three junior Ministers? It beggars belief that the Government would bring forward this proposal. The Minister is a former Minister for Health. Doctors and especially nurses, to whom all of us have rightly paid tribute over the past weeks and months and who have done Trojan work keeping us safe and operating on the front line of our health services, had to fight the Government tooth and nail for every single pay increase they have ever had. Even pay increases that were due have not been paid to their satisfaction. Either they have not been paid quickly enough or they have not happened in terms of the just claims nurses and doctors have made. Every time they raise these issues they are told the money is not there, they have to follow due process, there has to be a negotiation and all of what goes with that. Yet at the stroke of a pen this Government can just slip a pay increase into another Bill, one which is designed to do the right thing in terms of establishing the Minister's Department. The Minister knows I have an interest in this because of the need for a technological university for the south east. I wish him well in his role and hope he can get that job done for Waterford and the south east. To increase the pay of three super junior Ministers when they are already well paid and at the time of a pandemic is, as mentioned by Deputy Doherty, to give the impression that they are the most oppressed, marginalised group in Irish society because the only group of people to which, thus far, this Government has given a pay increase if this Bill passes today is those three super junior Ministers. How in God's name can anybody in this House stand over that? It is beyond shameful that the Government would do that. As others have pointed out, Fianna Fáil has done a U-turn on this issue, as we have no doubt it will do on many other issues over the next number of weeks, months and years, as it has already done. There is no justification for this increase. Any Deputy who votes for it can no longer look a front-line worker, nurse, doctor or consultant in the eye and tell them that their pay claim is unjust, that it cannot be done, that they have to go to the bottom of the queue or that Government does not have the resources for it because they will rightly throw back at him or her how at the stroke of a pen Government slipped into this Bill a pay increase for three super junior Ministers but not for those who have held the front line.

As others have said, members of Government were quick to clap those front-line workers but now it is a slap in the face in terms of this proposed measure. Surely Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Green Party members know this is wrong and sickening and that it should not be happening. Government knows it should not be doing this, but it does it anyway. Government should be ashamed of itself bringing forward this measure at a time of a pandemic, when so many people are suffering and when, as part of its July stimulus package, it proposes to reduce the pandemic unemployment payment for people who need it. The Government has the brass neck to introduce an amendment to increase the pay of three very well paid politicians. The brass neck of the people who will support this is galling. The hypocrisy is galling. Government knows that this is wrong and it should not be doing it. I hope at this eleventh hour it will support us in opposing this section of the Bill and do what is right on this occasion.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There are a number of speakers indicating. I will leave it to Deputies to be generous to their colleagues. I call Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I am disgusted at what is going on here today. I am newly elected to this House. Bringing forward this measure on Wednesday at 11 p.m. and pushing it through is the most devious thing I have witnessed to date. This Government talks about 22 million trees per year to tackle climate change. I am not quite sure how it proposes to do that but what I know for certain is that the money tree has landed firmly in the circle of greed between Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party. It is appalling, as others have said. The

24 July 2021

only excuse offered is that pay must be regularised. I agree it must be regularised but why not by reducing the salaries of the other two junior Ministers?

We have discussed front-line workers and care assistants. The care assistants who are on the minimum - some of them not in receipt of it - are the people who sat by the beds of people who were dying without any personal protective equipment, PPE, because we could not afford to give it to them. We could not afford to provide them with the PPE they were begging for. They are the same people who went home crying every night because we could not afford it. We sit here now and say that a salary of more than €2,000 per week is not enough. If it is not enough for politicians, there are others for whom it would be adequate. We tell the families applying to SUSI for grants that because they are €5 over the eligibility criteria, we have nothing for them and then Government does what it is doing here today. It is disgusting. Everybody who votes for this measure should be ashamed of himself or herself.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is nothing short of nauseating that the Government would consider it okay to increase the already staggeringly high salaries of super junior Ministers of €124,000 per annum by €16,000. How can it possibly justify that when nurses who were infected with Covid-19 on the front line did not get sick pay? That is the reality. Nurses recruited to the call for Ireland on agency contracts and on a fraction of the salary of these super junior Ministers did not get sick pay when they were infected with Covid-19 yet three super junior Ministers think they need an additional €16,000 per annum on top of their existing salaries of €124,000. It is unbelievable.

When I challenged the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donovan, about this yesterday and asked him to provide an explanation or justification for this pay increase for super junior Ministers who are already on high salaries he said that we need pay equality around the Cabinet table. People need to dwell on that fact. Our nurses have been fighting for pay equality for years now and it has been refused and resisted. There are nurses who, because they were recruited after 2011, have to work alongside other nurses who do the same job and are paid more. Pay and equality exists for super junior Ministers but the Government appears to think that it does not apply to workers on the front line, fighting to protect our health and our society. For a person on a salary of €124,000 per annum in the role of super junior Minister pay inequality is unacceptable. The double standards and hypocrisy of that are shocking beyond belief and an insult to our nurses, healthcare workers and front-line workers and others in the higher education area for which one of these super junior Ministers has responsibility.

Deputy Simon Harris: That is not true.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is. A lecturer recruited post-2011 starts on a lower wage than a person recruited pre-2011. That is a fact. That pay inequality exists for lecturers in third level education. It is unacceptable, apparently, for super junior Ministers to have to put up with pay inequality. The double standards are nauseating. It is a pity Government has tarnished a good Bill, which has the good objective of setting up a new Department of higher education and research, with this backdoor attempt to boost the salaries of three people who are already extortionately well paid.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The main purpose of the Bill before us today is a positive development. It is a proposal that across the board we would all agree with. It is regrettable and ill-judged that the Government would slip-in this amendment to provide for a pay increase for the super junior Ministers. It is regrettable that the Government is dividing the House in the

context of this legislation.

A salary of €124,000 is a very good salary. Adding €16,000 plus to that salary is an indication of how out of touch the Government is with the mood in the country. It is a slap in the face for people who have had a really hard time over the past five months, people who have lost their livelihood, their income and, in some cases, whose homes are in danger. It is also a slap in the face to the business community which is struggling to survive. It is an indication of just how out of touch the Government is and how insular thinking it is.

This proposal contributes to bringing politics into disrepute, in my view, and it is a breach of trust with the public in circumstances where people have in the main been pulling together over the past five months. It is a serious error to make. Even at this late stage, I would appeal to the Minister to think better of this move. It is wrong. The Minister will know in his heart that it is wrong to do this. There is no justification for an increase of €16,000 for people who are already very well paid. I appeal to the Minister not to divide the House on this matter and to withdraw this section of the Bill.

Minister without Portfolio (Deputy Simon Harris): This amendment is about ensuring that the Government can allow anybody who is entitled to the allowance already by virtue of attending the Cabinet as a Minister of State to draw down that allowance. There is a real stench of hypocrisy from some speakers in this House. Deputy Doherty argued that Ministers should be reducing their salaries. Sinn Féin Ministers in government in Northern Ireland accepted a pay increase in April. During the height of the pandemic their pay went up. I presume Sinn Féin Ministers will be marching into Stormont on Monday to rush through legislation because it wants to reduce the pay of Ministers. Sinn Féin MLAs did not turn up for work from January 2017 to October 2019 and claimed €4.7 million in a closed Parliament.

In 2014, BBC's "Spotlight" programme investigated and reported that over a ten-year period Sinn Féin MLAs claimed £700,000 for Research Services Ireland, a company run by two persons who are also in charge of Sinn Féin's finance department in Northern Ireland. The BBC "Spotlight" investigation was not able to find any evidence whatsoever of any research being carried out, and one Sinn Féin MLA, who I am sure got into trouble for this, when asked had not even heard of the company until it turned up on the Member's expenses.

When one talks about equality, the Sinn Féin Chief Whip in this House receives an allowance almost twice that paid to the Whip for the Green Party, the Labour Party, the Social Democrats or Solidarity-People before Profit. I am sure that this information will not make the party's Twitter video, but let us at least be honest and not hypocritical.

This is legislation to set up a new Department, and within the legislation the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has asked for the arbitrary figure of two to be removed in order that anyone who attends Cabinet as a super junior Minister can draw down allowances. Sinn Féin can use this to slur the Government if they wish. The objective here is very clear and, unfortunately, Sinn Féin has been silent on all of the inconsistent stances that its MLAs, elected representatives and Ministers adopt in Northern Ireland.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: A lot has been said about this Bill by every other speaker here and I just want to add my voice to that. The Minister has his beef with Sinn Féin and he can outline whatever his concerns are with that party, but that does not take from the fact that what he is doing in this Bill is completely wrong. He can attack us, the Social Democrats and every-

24 July 2021

one else in this House who says this is wrong and this should not be happening. If Ministers are attending the Cabinet, however, it should be an honour for them to do so, to be there and to participate in running this country. That is what it should be about. There is no doubt that all of us in this House are extremely well paid. It should be enough for any of us to have a say and to be sitting here and participating in how this country is run.

Others can bicker across the floor and whatever it is they want to do, but it is a sad reflection on the Minister and his Government that they are bringing this forward in this way. Basically, it is because the three parties that are now in government having to have three Ministers of State who have to get super junior Minister wages. That is what this is all about and that is the bottom line. It is not about anything else. It is about facilitating the three-party system in government and that is it.

Deputy Marian Harkin: It came to my notice late in the day that this aspect to the Bill had been slipped in. I would have been very supportive of the Bill because it is an important one to set up this new Department, the new Minister and so on. To be honest, however, I really am flabbergasted that the Government would put this forward and would look for an increase of €16,288 for each of these new Ministers of State. If that is divided by 52, it gives a figure of €313 per week, and that is an increase, which is not a lot more than the pandemic unemployment payment, PUP, and is a great deal more than the carer's allowance.

This increase is such a negative message to people. What is being said here is that we can do this and we will. I am really surprised that all the parties in government would allow such a negative message to go out in the middle of a pandemic, looking for an increase in salaries. In my role as a Deputy, I regularly come across ordinary people who apply for different social welfare payments but are €5 or €10 over the limit or whatever. I know many people waiting anxiously on the new limits for the medical card. Once a person is over, however, he or she is over and that is it. Whether it is €1 or €100, it is a red line. Such people will look at this today and they will wonder how a Government could do this to its own image.

I hear the talk about pay equality, and that is a legitimate argument, but we have pay inequality already. I remember in the European Parliament trying to bring to the attention of the European Commission the fact that younger teachers who started in 2011 or 2012 – I do not remember the exact detail – were paid less than their colleagues. I tried to bring this up from the perspective of pay equality but I was unable to and I had no success with it. While I know the Government is moving to close that gap, that gap still remains and it has been there for many years. Section 39 workers are another group who suffer under the issue of pay inequality, and as far as I understand, and I hope I am wrong, there is no move there to bring up their salaries.

My objective is not to slur the Government. I am just really astonished that it is doing it, to be honest. I just want to represent the views I have heard. I got a couple of phone calls from people who are just shocked that this is happening and who are asking how it can be happening. It is really those views that I want to reflect here today, and my own sense is the same. For what it is worth, this leaves a sour taste, and it is not worth it.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I am not going to take time to respond to the Minister bar to say that he should be better briefed, especially in his Department. He would know that all five parties in Northern Ireland opposed the increases of £1,000 to MLAs and asked for it to be deferred. No Minister or party of any political view passed legislation to increase salaries in the North. What they, including Michelle O'Neill MLA, actually did was to call it scandalous and

outrageous and to say that it should not happen in the middle of a pandemic.

Deputy Simon Harris: Give it back. Why not give it back then?

Deputy Pearse Doherty: What the Minister is saying is that his Ministers of State, on salaries of €124,000, need an extra €16,000 and he is asking us to change the law of this State to allow that to happen. Perhaps we can have a wee whip-around if we get Deputy Michael Healy-Rae's cap to help out the poor Ministers of State who cannot survive on €124,000. That is the reality of this. The Minister is asking this House to change the law so that legislatively the Government can increase the salary for a Minister of State because he or she has the privilege of sitting at the Cabinet table, and for that effort and that alone, with no other responsibilities, he or she should get an extra €16,000. As the proposer of this motion, I ask that we move this to a vote.

Question put:

<i>The Committee divided: Tá, 72; Níl, 46; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Berry, Cathal.</i>	<i>Andrews, Chris.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Browne, Martin.</i>	
<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	<i>Daly, Pa.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	
<i>Costello, Patrick.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	
<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Duffy, Francis Noel.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Flaherty, Joe.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	

<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i>	
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	
<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
<i>Hourigan, Neasa.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Lawless, James.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Leddin, Brian.</i>	<i>Ryan, Patricia.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
<i>Matthews, Steven.</i>	<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	
<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Tully, Pauline.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>Wynne, Violet-Anne.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>		
<i>Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Eoghan.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>		
<i>Noonan, Malcolm.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Joe.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Connor, James.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>Ó Cathasaigh, Marc.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>		
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>		
<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>		
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Ossian.</i>		

<i>Stanton, David.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Brendan Griffin and Jack Chambers; Níl, Deputies Denise Mitchell and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

Question declared carried.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As the time permitted for the debate has expired I am required to put the following question in accordance with an order of the Dáil of 21 July 2020: “That section 3 is hereby agreed to in Committee; the Title is hereby agreed to in Committee; the Bill is accordingly reported to the House without amendment; Fourth Stage is hereby completed; and the Bill is hereby passed.”

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 72; Níl, 46; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Berry, Cathal.</i>	<i>Andrews, Chris.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Browne, Martin.</i>	
<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	<i>Daly, Pa.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	
<i>Costello, Patrick.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	
<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Duffy, Francis Noel.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Flaherty, Joe.</i>	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	

24 July 2021

<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i>	
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	
<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
<i>Hourigan, Neasa.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Lawless, James.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>Leddin, Brian.</i>	<i>Ryan, Patricia.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
<i>Matthews, Steven.</i>	<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	
<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Tully, Pauline.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>Wynne, Violet-Anne.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>		
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<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
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<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		

Dáil Éireann

<i>Smyth, Ossian.</i>		
<i>Stanton, David.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Brendan Griffin and Jack Chambers; Níl, Deputies Denise Mitchell and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

Question declared carried.

The Dáil adjourned at 4.55 p.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 28 July 2020.