

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM OIDEACHAS AGUS SCILEANNA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Déardaoin, 21 Meitheamh 2018

Thursday, 21 June 2018

The Joint Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Catherine Martin,	Senator Maria Byrne,
Deputy Tony McLoughlin,	Senator Robbie Gallagher,
Deputy Hildegarde Naughton,	Senator Paul Gavan,
	Senator Lynn Ruane.

DEPUTY THOMAS BYRNE IN THE CHAIR.

ELECTION OF ACTING CHAIRMAN

Election of Acting Chairman

Clerk to the Committee: In the unavoidable absence of the Chair, I now seek nominations for the election of a temporary Chair.

Senator Maria Byrne: I propose Deputy Thomas Byrne.

Deputy Hildegard Naughton: I second that.

Clerk to the Committee: Is that agreed? Agreed. I call on Deputy Thomas Byrne to take the Chair.

Deputy Thomas Byrne took the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): I remind members to turn off their mobile phones when attending. Apologies have been received from Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin, who is in Kildare, and Deputy Jan O'Sullivan.

I propose we go into private session. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 9.38 a.m. and resumed in public session at 9.48 a.m.

Management and Operations of Caranua: Discussion

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): I remind members, witnesses and those in the Public Gallery to turn off their mobile phones or switch them to flight mode as they cause interference to the sound quality of the recording for broadcast and for the reporting of the meeting.

The purpose of this meeting is to engage with two former members of the board of Caranua with regard to the management and operation of Caranua. On behalf of the committee and on behalf of the Chairman, Deputy O'Loughlin - who unfortunately cannot be here this morning and for which I apologise - I welcome Mr. Tom Cronin and Dr. Mary Lodato, former members of the board of Caranua.

I will invite each of the witnesses to make a brief opening statement, which could be a maximum of three minutes but as there are only two witnesses, there will be some latitude in the timing. The question time is probably going to be more useful. The opening statements will be followed by the question-and-answer engagement with committee members.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they are to give to the joint committee. If, however, they are directed by the Chair to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. Witnesses are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be

given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Opening statements to the committee will be published on the committee website after the meeting. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

Mr. Tom Cronin: On behalf of Dr. Lodato and on my own behalf, I thank the committee for allowing us the opportunity to address it today. We understand we are here to discuss our concern regarding Caranua. We will address some of these concerns but we are mindful that Caranua has announced that it is to close. In its place the Minister for Education and Skills has put forward proposals. We must look to the future and the committee will appreciate that our focus today must therefore be on the measures announced by the Minister. Caranua was meant to help some of the most vulnerable people in our society but it failed to do so. As a former member of the board of the organisation, I can state this with the utmost truth and confidence. It failed to listen to or even meet survivors. How could it help people if it refused to communicate with them, find out what their needs and worries were and help to alleviate them?

What happened to us as children was a shame on the nation but what has been done to us since is a greater shame. As a survivor, I have experienced the anger, hurt, despair and frustration of engaging with the redress commission and other State-established resources. As a survivor advocate for more than 20 years and a former board member of Caranua, I have personally witnessed many survivors experiencing the same. These schemes and the State's response to our past have failed on an ongoing fashion for one reason, namely, they never listened to survivor needs. We did not have a voice in the decisions that affected our lives in such a difficult manner. The committee today has a wonderful opportunity to put right the wrongs; it has a duty to do everything possible to get this mess fixed. Let this opportunity indicate that members have listened to survivors and have their interests at heart.

Dr. Mary Lodato: Good morning. I have shortened my submission because it would have run over time.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): Dr. Lodato should not worry as there are only two witnesses and we have much time to ask questions.

Dr. Mary Lodato: Thank you. In driving forward the redress and rehabilitation processes, it is essential that the voices and concerns of all survivors are heard so that a positive and lasting outcome is possible for all stakeholders. We support the detailed proposal on the establishment of an independent survivor consultation forum. For once, let us ensure survivors can exercise their individual human rights by having a say in their own well-being. The consultation process can then be grounded in the grassroots framework, whereby survivors are provided with the tools to direct and inform the agenda.

The forum, comprising survivors, family members, professionals, politicians and others should be developed immediately. This forum should be formed through collaboration with and agreement of all the stakeholders. It should comprise at least 15 individuals to represent survivor diversity, including those living in the UK. Right now too many survivors have been left out and every effort must be made to reach out and engage with the most vulnerable and isolated survivors and to end their distress from marginalisation and exclusion. Many are devastated by the decision not to extend eligibility to apply to Caranua. Survivors nationally and

internationally have been dismayed by the approach of Caranua and its poor track record in delivering on the promise of redress for the effects of past harm. Previous work done on behalf of survivors has not been sufficiently informed by survivors and for this reason has fallen short of the promises and assurances made to survivors. It is important to emphasise that the resources for reparations and rehabilitations, as recognised by the UN Committee against Torture, are still necessary to meet the real needs of survivors. These are needs that are yet to be identified and addressed by the State. Let us not lose sight of the way in which the experiences of institutional abuse have created enduring negative outcomes throughout survivors' lives.

Almost 20 years post apology there is still much to be done in terms of assessing and addressing the needs of the survivor community, as well as the schemes and the resources put in place to facilitate improved well-being. Although we cannot change the past, all of us in this room can work together to reduce the levels of adversity and hardship experienced by survivors now and in the future, improving their quality of life and well-being. This is members' opportunity to do what nobody has done before, to offer survivors the true justice, fairness and dignity they deserve. Members can do this by including survivors in the decisions that directly affect their lives and well-being, providing them with the platform to inform policy and initiate positive changes in survivor services and supports. We implore the committee to give the document serious consideration and listen to our voices and our shared concerns and issues. We ask that it support our recommendations to the Minister to ensure all survivors' voices are valued and properly heard and acted upon as a matter of urgency. Let us do this right and collectively establish and inform redress and recovery.

Senator Lynn Ruane: We probably should have done this in private session but as there are only two speakers, is it possible to ask questions individually rather than in groups?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): Yes, I will be very liberal in that regard.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I thank the witnesses for coming today and for their presentation. I have read all the reports.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): Will ten minutes be enough for the Senator for the moment? She can contribute again.

Senator Lynn Ruane: That should be enough. When I read the documentation I understood the need to look forward but we should also acknowledge the treatment of survivors throughout the process. I am keen to get a bit more understanding of the witnesses' experience of being survivors on the Caranua board. It is first-hand experience and not just part of a process. Will they elaborate on what that experience was like? I acknowledge that the consultation must be survivor-led and survivors' voices must be heard. My questions will be very much on how this is done.

When I read the report of the witnesses I contacted the Department to ask how it envisaged the consultation process would proceed. I have been back and forth with the Department in the past six months about the consultation process. Another group suggested having consultation processes but the issue went back and forth. When I contacted the Department this week to ask how it would ensure that survivors could be part of developing the agenda of the consultation process, it indicated it would set up an online element and a free telephone service. Perhaps the officials present will correct me if I took that up wrong. That element is intended to set the agenda for how the face-to-face consultation process will take place. I can provide the witnesses with the Department's full response if necessary. Apart from feeding into the consulta-

tion process and the free-phone and online channels to be provided in that process, what else do survivors need to become part of the process of setting the agenda for consultation talks, or consultation and review? Why will the involvement of survivors at an early stage be so important to getting the next phase of redress right? What must be put in place to get survivors to re-engage with the process? They trusted the process when they engaged first. To be oppressed and ignored all over again is hard and people become tired of fighting their way through a process that has not been easy to access. What do we need to do to re-engage them at this point? How can we acknowledge the value of what survivors bring to this process? How can we best reclaim and preserve the survivors' narrative throughout this process and in the future?

I will follow up with the Department on another issue that struck me while reading through the documents. It relates to who will be appointed to the interdepartmental committee. The witnesses can correct me if I am wrong but I understand their document refers to concerns that Caranua could be part of that process. The Department confirmed to me that Caranua will not be involved and that the interdepartmental committee will comprise officials from the Departments of Education and Skills, Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Health and Justice and Equality. As such, it will be an in-house exercise involving Departments rather than Caranua. I will ask the Department to confirm that Caranua will not inform the process, given the view that the organisation failed miserably and should not be part of the process.

The other concern I have relates to the extension of eligibility criteria and the decision not to take new applications from 1 August onwards. When the consultation has concluded and the interdepartmental committee completes its work, will a new body be established to consider eligibility criteria and do things right from that point onwards? Is it acceptable that to have such conditions in place considering that the process is so flawed? Must we first fix the process and then readjust the eligibility criteria and reopen applications? There is no point in establishing a consultation process and an interdepartmental committee if a new redress scheme and new supports and advocacy are not provided for the survivors who have engaged with Caranua.

Dr. Mary Lodato: One of the ways to re-engage with survivors, whether here or in the UK, is to have person-to-person contact, rather than a telephone line because the latter would create a barrier to communication. Personal contact with people is needed. It is a shame that the officials thought survivors could feed into the consultation process through a telephone line. We are people with needs, and those needs have to be recognised. To have the barrier represented by a telephone is disrespectful when we consider the complex trauma survivors are dealing with. The consultation needs to be on the ground with people to identify what are the views of the survivors and what they want and need. That will be a big exercise. Trust has been broken and survivors are being betrayed again. The process must get people to come forward. Their needs are so great that they do not know where to start. Sometimes we need somebody on the ground to support them. There is no support available in the United Kingdom from any of the organisations that understand survivors. That is where the big lack of provision is and it will be an uphill task to try to get survivors to re-engage. For me, this is about having people who understand the survivor community and genuinely reaching out to it.

Mr. Tom Cronin: Face-to-face engagement was mentioned. We must obviously go back before we can go forward. We are discussing Caranua, which has failed miserably since it was established. It has used one excuse after another not to meet survivors. That should have flagged to the Department or anybody else that there is something wrong. Caranua is supposed to represent survivors, yet it is failing to meet them. Why? There was a problem immediately and we did not know the extent of it until we were appointed to the board. We very quickly

became aware of the problem. The gap in mindset between Caranua and survivors was millions of miles wide. It could not be measured because Caranua was coming from a different planet. That is the starting point.

The involvement of the Departments of Education and Skills and Health in this matter has been a total failure. To push it back to the Departments again is a serious mistake. It is a futile exercise and a waste of time, energy and money. It is a non-starter. I am not saying this as a reflection on the officials in the Departments. They do not know how to handle the issue and have zero empathy, knowledge or experience. My experience of dealing with the various Departments has been that when I found someone who was sympathetic, lo and behold, within six months or 12 months, that person was moved sideways, backwards or somewhere else and the whole process had to start again.

The initial point must be face-to-face contact with the survivors to find out what their needs are. They are being disenfranchised and ignored in the current system under Caranua. In my view, Caranua cannot get rid of the funds it has fast enough in order that it can close down the whole operation down and say, "Thank you very much and goodbye". That will not happen because as long as there are survivors alive, this issue will come back to haunt them. Atrocities of this magnitude cannot be dealt with in the manner that Caranua continues to deal with them. That is my answer to the Senator's question.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I asked the Department to explain the consultation process and officials stated that various survivors' groups had indicated they wanted to organise face-to-face consultation. They also indicated the Department fully supported that approach. The witnesses are the experts in this field but I know it is not their job to figure out how face-to-face consultation should take place. In light of their experience, how should it take place? According to the Department, face-to-face consultation will take place and the phone line service will feed into the consultation. How will the consultation look in terms of driving it forward?

The Department says an independent expert will run the consultation. Should this be done through the survivor groups? The face-to-face consultations will have to take place in the UK as well. Do the witnesses have an idea of how the Department should organise these in order that the committee, in its report, can outline how the consultation should take place? We can ask for face-to-face consultation but should we propose holding a number of meetings here and in the UK? Should the Department go ahead and try to organise them, or should it do so on the basis of individual survivor groups given that one group will not cover all survivors? How do we cater to all the survivors? How do the witnesses envisage those meetings being carried out?

Dr. Mary Lodato: One of the things I have thought about is creating a forum where survivors can come and express their views. I proposed a forum like this throughout the United Kingdom. In the project in which I am involved, I got the survivors around the table and basically asked them what they needed and wanted to improve their lives. The responses were short and to the point. The survivors just wanted to have better quality of life, to be respected and to tell their story. They referred to simple things, such as their desire to return to Ireland to make peace with this land after the atrocities that they had experienced. They have the facility but the Government needs to put a model in place, although not like the one put in place through the Irish centres throughout Britain whereby the pots of money made available to facilitate and support survivors were never ring-fenced, meaning the money went everywhere except to the people who needed it. I propose a similar model to that in the UK but the money should be ring-fenced. Survivors should be spoken to and asked what they want. We should then try to feed into the committee or forum.

Mr. Tom Cronin: Survivor groups have failed for two reasons. First and foremost, getting funding became the main objective of those that were recognised and funded by the various Departments, and they forgot about their purpose. Second, there were groups that did not receive funding so, owing to one thing or another, including a lack of support and finances, they faded away. As far as I am concerned, the survivor groups are failed entities.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I apologise for exceeding my time but I have one more question. If survivors do not approach individual survivor groups because they are representatives of various cohorts around the country, how do we best contact all survivors to invite them to a consultation?

Mr. Tom Cronin: Reference was made to having meetings throughout the country. That is a good start. The media could be used and there would be an open forum for every survivor of institutional abuse, irrespective of whether they are in a supporter group. There would be representation from people like ourselves and officials from the various Departments, and perhaps some politicians. They could come along to the meetings and hear what the survivors are saying for themselves. They could then act and help those survivors.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): Before I call Senator Gavan, I have a brief question. Caranua and the Minister trumpet in press releases an alleged 90% satisfaction rating among survivors. Caranua says that was the figure in 2017. The witnesses were on the board for part of that year. It was said there was positive feedback in the order of 95% for the period, January to March. Could the witnesses comment on that because it challenges what they are saying?

Dr. Mary Lodato: At every board meeting between last June and February, I noted a big plaque on the back of the wall with many thank-you cards, but there was not one stating we did not get it right. The organisation is self-congratulatory and patting itself on the back.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): Is that what it is based on?

Dr. Mary Lodato: I have no idea but that is what one sees. At the board meetings, it is stated amazing thank-you cards were received but one never hears about the criticism and problems. The meetings are shut down. If one tries, as I have, to raise issues about people in the UK, one is told one cannot bring issues to the board to do with people in the UK. I do not know what the figure is about.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): Dr. Lodato does not know having been a member of the board. Does Mr. Cronin know what the 90% satisfaction rating is about?

Mr. Tom Cronin: I do not. I do not believe it is accurate or true. Most of the survivors I speak to – we will go back to a rating of 90% - are totally dissatisfied, first and foremost, with the contact they made initially with Caranua, the reception they got, the offhand manner in which they were treated and the bad manners. If they were shown a little respect and allowed a little dignity, many of the problems could have been sorted. Perhaps there was a PR problem initially. The mindset of these people, whom I met and at whose board meetings I have attended, is millions of miles from what a survivor needs or wants. It is a different world. If one does not understand something, one does not understand it, even with the best will in the world. One could be educated and study the subject for ten years but not get it. These people just do not get it. They are just light years away. I would be so happy if survivors said there was a great job done and that it worked and was fantastic. The opposite is the truth.

Senator Paul Gavan: I thank both delegates for the presentations. I am relatively new to the committee so I am getting up to speed. I thank my colleague, Senator Ruane in particular, not just for the work she has done on this topic but for her assistance in bringing me up to speed. I should not be shocked but I still am. I was struck by the statement: “What happened to us as children was a shame on the nation, but what has been done to us since is a greater shame.” I cannot help but think about how the State used all its machinery — everything at its disposal — when the banks were in trouble. Nothing was too much. No cost was too much. The State acted to do everything it could to rescue those in financial power at the same time as it left victims of the most horrendous torture in the State bereft of any support. What does that say about us as a country and state? What does it say about successive Governments who failed so many people?

The witnesses will appreciate from my accent that I have a particular interest in the United Kingdom. Why do they think Caranua did not want to meet survivors? It is quite a stunning revelation.

Mr. Tom Cronin: I cannot speak for the organisation. I do not know what goes through people’s minds but I believe the organisation was afraid of the backlash or response after initially dealing with the survivors over the telephone and the conversations it had. I believe the turnover of staff in Caranua is enormous. People are leaving it by the new time; that is a different matter. I believe Caranua staff were afraid to meet the survivors due to the tongue-lashing they would probably have received if they met them face-to-face. That is still not a good enough reason not to meet somebody.

Dr. Mary Lodato: They were fearful. There is probably something uncomfortable about us as a group and as a community. We are seen as “them over there”. There is a view that there is something about the survivors, such as that they are unpredictable or that they might become angry or aggressive or express their pain and suffering. That is uncomfortable to confront, especially if someone is getting a nice salary for being in that position. There is also a power dynamic. Unfortunately, that is the reality. They did not feel comfortable with us.

Mr. Tom Cronin: Let me elaborate on that. Another factor is that these people were not trained. They just did not have the training or background. That is not reflection on them, but they were not the right people to deal with survivors.

Senator Paul Gavan: Is that not very much a departmental failure?

Mr. Tom Cronin: Yes, indeed.

Senator Paul Gavan: On the UK, the delegates have given some information. I will, therefore, ask just a couple of questions. What are the most important issues right now for survivors based in the UK?

Dr. Mary Lodato: There is nowhere for them to go. There is no office and there are no people to speak to. They have been completely abandoned. They have such major issues in their lives but there is nowhere to go and nobody to contact to find help and support. They have housing needs, and issues arise over white goods. I hear of people who need a cooker, for instance. One woman told me she still has €7,000 in credit in Caranua. She has a telephone she can answer but she cannot make an outgoing call. A phone would change that woman’s life. She has €7,000 in credit yet they would not allow her to buy a phone, which would probably cost €50.

Senator Paul Gavan: That is unbelievable.

Dr. Mary Lodato: That is the reality. I know another woman who does not have a cooker and yet there are no services anywhere to support these people.

Senator Paul Gavan: I was going to ask Dr. Lodato what has been most helpful for survivors in the UK but what I am hearing is that there has not been any help. Is it as drastic as that?

Dr. Mary Lodato: It is as drastic as that.

Senator Paul Gavan: What an absolute failure. Could Dr. Lodato elaborate on the needs of the UK survivors right now and how they can best be met?

Dr. Mary Lodato: An office needs to be set up in the UK with some staff. The needs of survivors must be genuinely assessed, not as a group but as individuals. We are talking about the most vulnerable people who are difficult to reach. We have to work at just connecting with them and building a relationship of trust and then try to help them. It is difficult for them. People worked with me, volunteered and gave their time and they were trusted by the women, but when they left, the women were back to square one. They were back to isolation and loneliness. It is so sad what has happened. It has been said that the women can go into the Irish centres but they cannot. They have been in them previously and they did not get the support they needed.

Senator Paul Gavan: This is my last question. Is it fair to say there has been a complete failure to reach out to survivors?

Dr. Mary Lodato: A complete and utter failure.

Senator Paul Gavan: I thank both witnesses.

Deputy Catherine Martin: I thank both witnesses for attending. I am stunned following the contributions of the two Senators. There are no words to describe the lack of appropriate communication. That shows a lack of empathy. As has been said, the State has failed but, worse still and to our shame, as a State, we continue to fail. I commend the witnesses who are so brave in their advocacy for the women.

The Minister published the Caranua eligibility review on 29 May. The statement said the Department would like to get the views of survivors on how that consultation process should proceed and that to give their views a short survey form could be accessed at

www.surveymonkey.com. Was anyone consulted on the proposal to put the survey up on the Department's website? There is something gravely insulting about the next steps of an issue of that magnitude being reduced to a survey on the Department's website. Was there any consultation or was it news to the witnesses on the day?

Regarding the eligibility review, how can Caranua properly assist the interdepartmental committee process considering its imminent closure? Based on everything the witnesses have told us, Caranua does not have the information because it has not engaged with survivors. How can it assist? I just do not understand that because does not make sense to me.

It states on page 22 of the eligibility review:

One of the options for the next steps is for Caranua to continue with its current approach in managing the fund within the €15,000 cap, having regard to survivors' needs. Caranua

already seeks to manage the fund as fairly as possible and to respond to the needs of survivors.

How does a €15,000 cap have regard to survivors' needs because surely the needs are vary on a person-by-person basis? Is there not a conflict within that option? Surely the assistance must be tailored. There are so many contradictions that it is appalling.

Dr. Mary Lodato: The needs must be assessed on an individual basis. Some people will have needs that are greater than that. It is too bad, if one goes over the cap, that is it.

Deputy Catherine Martin: There is no way that option can have regard to survivors' needs once the cap is in place.

Dr. Mary Lodato: No.

Mr. Tom Cronin: Apart from the €15,000, there are survivors in this country, in the UK and further afield who have never accessed the scheme or been informed or have no knowledge of Caranua. They can neither read nor write and they have not been targeted by Caranua. They have not been sussed out or informed. I know people personally in this country. I have flagged them to Caranua many times and asked officials to visit them or get them to sign up the forms but to this day they have not had one ounce of help from Caranua. That is how successful that groups is.

Deputy Hildegard Naughton: I thank the witnesses very much for coming before us this and for having the bravery to come forward. It is not easy for the witnesses to highlight these issues. The common thread from the responses is that there is a lack of appropriate expertise in the engagement. Is that fair? In addition there is a difficulty with how Caranua has reached out to people in the UK and further afield. Is it fair to say there has been communication to say that supports are available but there is a lack of expertise when contact is made? Is it correct that in terms of the one-to-one engagement over the phone there has not been proper expertise in dealing with the individual cases? Is it the case that people have not had the right training?

Mr. Tom Cronin: That was just a starting point. It was probably a good idea to set up Caranua initially. More than 250 people representing survivor groups met at the Department of Education and Skills. The majority of them were not in favour of Caranua. Most of them were in favour of either giving the survivors a lump sum or if it was felt that was too dangerous and that they would not know how to handle such an amount, it was advocated that it should be paid in a pension and perhaps twice a year to the survivors. I thought that was a very good idea. That would probably have a much better option at that time.

However, the Department at the time decided that Caranua would be the vehicle to help those people. Perhaps nobody was looking at Caranua. It became self-governing. It structured the group for its own benefit and not for the benefit of survivors. The problems started to pile up early on and they were compounded as time went on. They worsened until we arrived at the situation we have today where survivors are scraping around for the crumbs of €15,000. That was never part of the policy initially when the documents were signed off in the Dáil. The policy was open ended. It was said to me many times that some people might be more greedy and that they would be looking for more money and others would look for less. That was a problem that should have been sorted out by the people in Caranua and the Department. That was never done.

When Caranua decided the fund was being depleted quickly, a ceiling of €15,000 was put

on payments, with the result that people who had looked for white goods, necessary stuff, as Dr. Lodato alluded to, they were told they had exceeded the €15,000 limit and they were not entitled to them. The same happened with people who were looking for burial funds. At an early stage, it was flagged up that many of the survivors did not have insurance, they had no people belonging to them and when they died, they would have nowhere to go. They did not have any burial insurance. The Minister indicated that he would facilitate such payments. However, those who had exceeded the €15,000 limit were excluded from the payment. There is no inclusion. The mistakes were compounded. It was one mistake after the other and then Caranua tried to cover up its mistakes or bad management. It was not survivor-friendly from day one. The mistakes were compounded and hidden away. The situation became intolerable. Now there is the position where there are survivors scratching around for €15,000. It was said at one of the meetings that I attended that it might be reduced down to €10,000 or even €5,000.

Deputy Hildegard Naughton: I make reference to Dr. Lodato's earlier point in regard to what survivors want. When they come back to Ireland, having lived abroad, they want to be respected, heard and valued. That would say to me that expertise would be needed to deal with them on a one-to-one, face-to-face level. That is another part. I am not taking from what Mr. Cronin has said but it is multi-faceted.

Dr. Mary Lodato: One of the good things that has come out of this whole process is that, as a group, we have come back together from those institutions, even if it is only briefly. We have also met others who have been in them, and reconnected to this land, even with this pain. People did not leave through choice; they had to get out of here because they had such a brutal experience this country. There is a longing in their old age to come home, even for a brief visit, but there is nowhere for them to come to. People here get a free bus pass when they reach 66 years of age and they can travel all over the country. Could that not be facilitated to help them in some way to return here, even if it is for one visit? Will they have somewhere to stay? That is the other issue. They have no connections. Families are completely broken.

They want to tell their stories as well. They feel very upset by the indemnity clause in the redress scheme and that their records have been hidden away for 75 years. That is a real bone of contention with many survivors. They want to be able to tell their story. How do we do that? We cannot keep hiding this. We have to confront the pain, the suffering and the atrocities that happened. Until we do that, we will never move forward.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: I would like to thank Mr. Cronin, Dr. Lodato and those with them for being here this morning and for sharing their experience with us. I find the entire presentation very depressing and heartbreaking. For what it is worth, I offer my deepest sympathy to the witnesses and all survivors. Some of my colleagues have touched on some of the subject matter that I was going to talk about. As I listened to the contributions, I was reminded in many ways of our leaders in these Houses, and how the media give great praise when our politicians and leaders stand up and apologise, and rightly so, for past wrongs. The media cover that and give it a great platform, which is only right. Sometimes, however, the words are not backed up by actions, and this is another example of that. We are very quick to clap ourselves on the back when it comes to social changes and we have had a welcome number of them in recent times in our country. We can stand up in these Houses and tell the world how we are the leading lights when it comes to these issues.

On the other hand, there is evidence to the contrary, which we listened to this morning and which was laid out in great detail. The witnesses are at a crossroads. Mr. Cronin said that he has been on this road for more than 20 years. It has come to a point where the State is either

serious about tackling and addressing this issue, and undoing this wrong, or it is not. The evidence to date, unfortunately, would indicate that so far, and I hope this changes, the intent has not been there, or to my eyes anyway. If we are serious about getting to the bottom of it and addressing it, somebody needs to lead on this. The most important people we have to listen to are the survivors. Unless we are serious about that, we may park this process and stop fooling people that we are serious about trying to address it. That is the first thing. Somebody needs to lead this process and somebody needs to have the intent to address the issue once and for all, and put whatever measures are practical and reasonable and which satisfy the survivors in that process.

The first thing that must be done is to lance this boil, to get that hurt out. As far as I am concerned, the survivors are the stakeholders in this process. Unless it addresses what they are hoping to achieve, this train will never leave the station. We have been parked at the station for a long time now.

Do we have any idea how many survivors we are talking about here? Do we have any idea where they are all located, in different parts of the world? Deputy Catherine Martin made the point earlier that for those who were unfortunate enough to go abroad and live their lives as best they could, despite all the hurt that was caused to them in their country of birth, I am sure there is part of them that would like to come back and put that to rest before the man above calls them off the field of play. We need to reach out to those people. I want to know roughly how many people we are talking about. For this process to be done properly, what kind of timeframe would we need to allocate in order to do this properly? If the Minister for Education and Skills or the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, was sitting in this room this morning, what would the witnesses say to him?

Mr. Tom Cronin: The number of survivors who went through the redress board would have been in the region of 15,000 worldwide, give or take a few hundred. In the intervening years, approximately 50% or maybe more have died. The figures we get from Caranua are that between 5,000 and 6,000 survivors have applied for help. One could think this is the number of survivors who are now left. In my estimation, there are certainly fewer than 10,000 survivors worldwide, and that is being quite conservative.

Dr. Mary Lodato: I would agree with what Mr. Cronin just said. It is an ever-diminishing group of people. Believe me, there are a lot of people who could not face the redress process. It was far too traumatic. The damage of going through that process was enormous. That was an abusive system all over again. The timeframe we are talking about here is probably ten years, because most of us are in our 60s or 70s. There are probably a few in their 50s, but there are not many. The majority are in their 60s and 70s. There are probably a few in their 80s. I would say ten years.

If the Taoiseach was in this room today, I would say Ireland needs to face up to its past. It needs to treat these people with the respect and dignity which they deserve, because there is a horrendous past connected to this country. It will never move on until we face it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): I thank Dr. Lodato.

Mr. Tom Cronin: A question was asked about the timeframe. Obviously it is to be as soon as possible. Time is going on. As Dr. Lodato has said, the life expectancy of most of the survivors is ten years. Sometimes, when I am becoming very negative, I think that this might be the agenda here and that they will all be dead, forgotten about; goodnight, goodbye and all the rest.

If that is the case we should know about it. If that is the mindset then let us know about it and have it on the table. Say “This is what we would prefer to happen”. At least we could then go away and have the truth and we would have something. At this point in time we have a situation of being given a little bit here and another bit being taken away. We are told “You can do this but you cannot do that.” The survivors are all over 60 years of age and they are being treated like children. They are told what is best for them and when to have or not have something. I spoke earlier about fridges and so on. They are being denied basic stuff. This is wrong. In any society it is definitely wrong. Reference was made to An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar and if he was here at this meeting today I would ask him to just come on and get some real work done here. We are not speaking about the past, we are talking about the present. More important, we are speaking about the future and about children who are not yet born in the State. If we do not deal with the past we certainly will not deal with the future.

Dr. Mary Lodato: This matter is inter-generational because it is not just about the survivors. It is also about their families, their children and their grandchildren. There is a whole line connected with the issue. It needs to be acknowledged and recorded so it never happens again. It should be put into schools. Ireland has to face up to this.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): I thank the witnesses. We shall return briefly to the members.

Senator Lynn Ruane: When I drew up a plan on consultation talks - and I might have been told this already by some of the groups I was involved with - the numbers in Ireland are broken up as: Leinster, 5,132; Connacht more than 600; Munster just over 2,000; and Ulster, 131. There are no figures collated for survivors who are in the UK. I may have been informed of this already because the figures are in an official report somewhere, but can the witnesses confirm if those numbers are based on the institutions that were in those provinces? I may be landing this question onto the witnesses, but perhaps someone knows where the numbers came from with regard to Caranua survivors.

Mr. Tom Cronin: The only record we have that would be accurate enough is the numbers of people who went through the redress board.

Senator Lynn Ruane: So this is the redress figure.

Mr. Tom Cronin: It could well be. A lot of what the Senator has said is correct; 48% or 45% were in the UK but it is very hard to put figures on it. As I have said, the age group is a big factor here because most of the survivors are well into their 60s and quite a number of those who were around last year are not around this year. This will continue and hasten as they age.

Senator Lynn Ruane: Dr. Lodato spoke about the indemnity clause and how people cannot tell their stories. What is in the indemnity clause that says people cannot share their experience or talk publicly about it? Or is it about taking a case based on their experience?

Dr. Mary Lodato: It is actually about them saying how much they got from the redress scheme. Many of the survivors, however, do not understand that. They will then say that they cannot tell their stories. They can tell their stories but it is about how this can be facilitated. They confuse the two processes.

Senator Lynn Ruane: Why are they told that they cannot say how much they received?

Mr. Tom Cronin: A gagging order was put on the survivors, which was part of the agree-

ment. Once they went before the redress board they were to sign a clause to say they would not go public. They could tell their family but they could not go to the media to say how much of an award they had been given.

Senator Paul Gavan: Two very interesting suggestions came from here. One was the idea of giving a payment in the form of a pension. It is a simple idea that would ensure benefits actually reached the people concerned. The second idea would be to look at a free travel pass for those survivors in the UK who come back to Ireland. It strikes me that these suggestions are eminently sensible and probably completely out of bounds. The one thing I see running through the Department's response in all of this is to ensure there remains a culture of dependency. God forbid that we would ever empower these people. Deputy Catherine Martin made a good point about the most recent suggestions, which tells us that they are still not listening. I have no doubt that I and everyone around this table will do our best through our report to make it clear that they have to listen. Perhaps the witnesses could explain why they think the State, including the people who run the Government and the people who run the Department of Education and Skills, are so determined to make sure they will not empower the victims of the State.

Dr. Mary Lodato: I believe that they have a vested interest in keeping us disempowered. Lo and behold if one becomes empowered one has a voice and then can challenge these people. While people are kept in a state of dependency and living in this State then they cannot challenge because they do not have power. It is a power dynamic.

Senator Paul Gavan: I think Dr. Lodato is right.

Mr. Tom Cronin: It could also be something to do with denial and the links between the political classes and the Catholic church in the State, which are totally entwined. There could be something of that in it also.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Thomas Byrne): I thank both witnesses for coming before the meeting and sharing their views on what has been an eventful year, which they probably did not expect to end as it did after they were appointed last year. It has been a useful engagement and the witnesses were able to speak generally without making specific statements. It was very helpful to the committee and other members have said this also. I really thank the witnesses for their engagement.

The joint committee adjourned at 10.47 a.m. until 3.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 26 June 2018.