

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM CHOMHSHAOL, CULTÚR AGUS GAELTACHT

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND THE GAELTACHT

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*Dé Máirt, 27 Samhain 2012*

*Tuesday, 27 November 2012*

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The Joint Committee met at 16.25 p.m.

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### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy,	Senator Fiach Mac Conghail,
Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan,	Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú.
Deputy Kevin Humphreys,	
Deputy Sandra McLellan,	
Deputy Tony McLoughlin,	
Deputy Michelle Mulherin,	
Deputy Catherine Murphy,	
Deputy Brian Stanley,	

In attendance: Deputy Michael P. Kitt and Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh..

DEPUTY NOEL COONAN IN THE CHAIR.

*The joint committee met in private session until 4.35 p.m.*

### **Plé le Cathaoirleach Ainmnithe Údarás na Gaeltachta**

**Vice Chairman:** Beidh an ról nua mar chathaoirleach d'Údarás na Gaeltachta á plé againn leis an Uasal Anna Ní Ghallchóir anseo inniu. Cuirim fáilte roimh Anna Ní Ghallchóir, cathaoirleach ainmnithe Údarás na Gaeltachta agus stiúrthóir, Ionad na dTeangacha, Ollscoil na hÉireann, Máigh Nuad. Gabhaim buíochas leí as teacht i láthair. Iarraim ar an gcléireach anois an gnáthfhógra a léamh a thugtar do ghach finné a thagann os comhair coistí Oireachtais.

**Clerk to the Committee:** Ba mhaith liom a chur ar aird an fhinnéithe go bhfuil de bhua Alt 17(2)(l) den Acht Um Chlúmhilleadh, 2009, finnéithe faoi chosaint ag lán-phribhléid maidir leis an bhfianaise a thugann siad don choiste seo. Má ordaíonn an coiste di, ámh, éirí as fianaise a thabhairt i leith ní áirithe agus má leanann sí dá thabhairt, níl sí i dteideal dá éis sin ach pribhléide cáilithe, i leith na fianaise aici. Ordaítear di nach dtabharfar ach fianaise a bhaineann le hábhar na n-imeachtaí seo agus fiafraítear di cleachtadh parlaiminte a urramú, nár chóir, más féidir, daoine, ná eintiteas, a cháineadh ná líomhaintí a dhéanamh ina n-aghaidh ina ainm, ina hainm nó ina n-ainm ar shlí a bhféadfaí iad a aithint.

Ba mhaith liom í a chur ar an eolas go ndéanfar na ráitis tionscnaimh a chuir sí faoi bhráid an choiste a fhoilsiú ar shuíomh gréasáin an choiste tar éis an chruinnithe seo.

Meabhraítear do chomhaltaí an cleachtadh parlaiminte atá ann le fada nár chóir dóibh tuairimí a thabhairt maidir le duine atá taobh amuigh de na Tithe nó le hoifigeach ina ainm nó ina hainm ar shlí a bhféadfaí iad a aithint.

**Vice Chairman:** Iarraim anois ar an Uasal Uí Ghallchóir labhairt os comhair an choiste.

**Ms Anna Ní Ghallchóir:** Go raibh maith agat. Fáiltím roimh an deis seo léargas a thabhairt don choiste ar an fhís atá agam d'Údarás na Gaeltachta sna blianta beaga amach romhainn.

I dtús báire, ba mhaith liom a rá gur mór an onóir agus an phribhléid í a bheith molta mar chathaoirleach ar bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta, mar oileánach, mar bhean Ghaeltachta, mar bhean teanga agus mar oideachasóir. Tuigim go maith an obair thábhachtach, cheannródaíoch atá déanta ag Údarás na Gaeltachta ó céadbhunaíodh é sa bhliain 1980, nuair a tháinig sé i gcomharbacht ar Ghaeltarra Éireann. Níl amhras ar bith ach gur imir Údarás na Gaeltachta ról lárnach i bhforbairt na Gaeltachta ar achan bhealach ó shin i leith agus tá curtha go láidir aige le saol eacnamaíochta, sóisialta agus cultúrtha na Gaeltachta dá bharr. Tugann an t-údarás faoi réimse leathan gníomhaíochtaí fiontraíochta agus forbartha chun a fheidhmeanna i dtaca le cruthú agus caomhnú fostaíochta sa Ghaeltacht a bhaint amach. Tá na fiontair a fhaigheann tacaíocht ag feidhmiú in earnálacha ar nós eolaíochtaí beatha, mar shampla bithleigheas agus cógaisíocht, teicneolaíocht faisnéise agus cumarsáide, déantúsaíocht nideoige, mar shampla earraí innealtóireachta agus tomhaltais, closamharc agus na meáin dhigiteacha, turasóireacht, fiontair mhara agus fiontair theangabhunaithe.

Le cúpla sampla sonrach a lua, is fiú smaoineamh ar nithe ar nós: an ról ceannasach a bhí ag an údarás i mbunú TG4, nó Teilifís na Gaeilge mar a bhí, ag tabhairt tacaíochta do chomhlachtaí teilifíse ar éirigh thar barr leo, cosúil le Telegael agus Nemeton, atá linn i dtólamh agus a bh-

fuil rath i gcónaí ar a gcuid oibre; an bonn láidir a chuir an t-údarás faoi thionscal an bhia, an smailebhia ach go háirithe, le comhlachtaí cosúil le Largo Foods; an infheistíocht shubstaintiúil atá déanta thar na blianta i bhfiontair mhara; agus an fhorbairt atá tagtha ar thionscail thábhachtacha in earnáil an bhithleighis, cosúil le Bioniche/Mylan, a bhfuil infheistíocht an-mhór le déanamh ar a shuíomh in Indreabhán, Conamara.

Tá cúis mhaith mhórtais ag an údarás as an mhéid atá bainte amach aige in aimsir an rachmais agus in aimsir na lag trá eacnamaíochta araon. Is é an t-aistriúchán Síniú atá ar “ghéarchéim” ná “deis chontúirteach” agus b’fhéidir gur bealach maith é le hamharc ar staid na tíre agus go háirithe ar staid na Gaeltachta faoi láthair. Tá contúirtí móra ann ach tá deiseanna iontacha ann fosta, má tá muid sásta iad a thapú. Tá deis ann machnamh a dhéanamh ar na rudaí is tábhachtaí dúinn mar náisiún agus mar phobal agus a chinntiú go dtiocfaidh an chuid is fearr dinn féin slán as an clábán seo. Tá dhá bhunaidhm ag Údarás na Gaeltachta: buanú agus forbairt teanga, agus forbairt fiontraíochta. Is cinnte gur dúshlán ann féin atá ann an dá thrá sin a fhreastal.

Caidé a bheadh sa Gaeltacht gan an Ghaeilge? Tá sé luaite sa Staidéar Cuimsitheach Teangeolaíoch ar Úsáid na Gaeilge sa Gaeltacht a chuir foireann as Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge agus Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad ar fáil dúinn go bhfuil saolré idir 15-20 bliain fágtha ag an Ghaeilge sa Gaeltacht má leanann rudaí mar atá. Cuireadh an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030, atá bunaithe ar an tsaineolas sochtheangeolaíochta is fearr ar domhan, ar fáil dúinn le cuidiú linn cosc a chur leis an mheath agus an teanga a chur ar bhealach a leasa. Rinneadh daingniú ar chuid de phríomh-mholtaí na straitéise nuair a tháinig Acht na Gaeltachta 2012 i bhfeidhm níos luaithe i mbliana. Tugann an tAcht seo feidhm lárnach d’Údarás na Gaeltachta, go háirithe i dtaca le próiseas pleanála teanga a chur chun cinn i gcomhar leis na pobail Ghaeltachta. Beidh ról lárnach ag an Údarás ag cuidiú le heagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe na Gaeltachta pleananna teanga cuimsitheacha a ullmhú agus a fheidhmiú dá gceantair agus is iad na pleananna seo a bheidh mar dhúshraith chun an Ghaeilge a chaomhnú agus borradh nua a chur fúithi chun go dtabharfar ar aghaidh don chéad ghlúin eile í. Treiseoidh an cur chuige nua seo maidir leis an phleanáil teanga an obair luachmhar atá ar siúl ag an Údarás i ndáil le forbairt na naíonraí, cúrsaí óige agus an fhorbairt phobail.

Creidimse fosta go bhfuil sé tábhachtach go mbeidh comhoibriú den scoith idir an t-údarás agus Foras na Gaeilge leis an obair thábhachtach seo a dhéanamh ar bhonn chomhtháite agus an luach is fearr a fháil as na hacmhainní atá againn cheana féin.

Mar oideachasóir atá ag plé leis na teangacha le fada, tuigim go maith na deacrachtaí a bhaineann le buanú agus forbairt na mionteanga. Ach is féidir liom a rá, gan lá amhrais orm, go bhfuil an saineolas sa tír seo againn le tacaíocht den scoth a chur ar fáil do na pobail Ghaeltachta sin atá ag iarraidh an Ghaeilge a bhuanú agus a fhorbairt ina gceantair féin. Chuige sin, bunófar ár gcur chuige ar thrí chrann taca: próifisiúnú, oiliúint agus tacaíocht, agus beidh an taighde atá déanta i réimse na sochtheangeolaíochta agus na teangeolaíochta feidhmí mar bhunchloch ag an chur chuige seo.

Ní bheadh Gaeltacht ar bith ann, ar ndóigh, gan a pobal agus is cinnte go dtéann buanú agus forbairt teanga lámh ar lámh le forbairt eacnamaíochta agus forbairt pobail. Is ábhar dóchais é mar sin go bhfuil bunfhostaíocht de 7,000 post sa Gaeltacht a fuair tacaíocht ón údarás. Ar an lámh eile de, tá buiséad caipitil na heagraíochta gearrtha siar go dtí €6 mhilliún sa bhliain. Ciallaíonn sé seo go gcaithfidh Údarás na Gaeltachta bealaí eile a aimsiú le bheith éifeachtach agus éifeachtúil agus é ag díriú ar a bhunaidhmeanna. Mar sin de, tá sé riachtanach a chinntiú go mbeidh níos mó comhoibrithe i gceist leis an Údarás Forbartha Tionscail, le Fiontraíocht

Éireann agus le Fáilte Éireann le fostaíocht a chruthú sna hearnálacha éagsúla. Beidh sé tábhachtach fosta scrúdú a dhéanamh ar na bealaí éagsúla ar féidir foinsí nua maoinithe a aimsiú chomh maith, mar shampla tríd an úsáid is éifeachtaí a bhaint as cistí an Aontais Eorpaigh.

Faoi láthair, ar fud na hEorpa, tá cuid mhór béime á leagan ar chuideachtaí beaga agus meánmhéide, mar gur mó seans go mbeidh siad inmharthana, i measc cúiseanna eile. Is sa mhúnla seo atá agus a bheas na cuideachtaí teanga-bhunaithe agus teanga-lárnaithe. Is í an Ghaeilge an acmhainn is luachmhaire atá againn sa Ghaeltacht agus chítear domhsa gur féidir linn i bhfad níos mó a dhéanamh chun tairbhe iomlán a bhaint as na féidearthachtaí uilig a bhaineann léi: an turasóireacht chultúrtha, na healaíona, earnáil na faisnéise, teagmháil leis an diaspóra, gan ach ceithre shampla a lua. Léiríonn suirbhéanna ar an turasóireacht go hÉirinn go meallann éagsúlacht, éagsúlacht chultúrtha, éagsúlacht theanga an turasóir. I mo thuairimse, is féidir níos mó a dhéanamh leis an tsainchultúr a chur ar a súile do na turasóirí.

Mar oileánach mná, is cúis áthais dom gur dualgas tábhachtach de chuid an údaráis é tacú leis na hoileáin agus leis na comharchumainn a bhfuil ról rí-thábhachtach acu ó thaobh na forbartha eacnamaíochta, sóisialta agus cultúrtha de.

Tá fis iontach dearfach agamsa don Ghaeltacht sa todhchaí. Le tacaíocht chuí ón Stát. tríd an Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta, an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna agus Údarás na Gaeltachta, ach go háirithe, creidim go bhfuil na pobail Ghaeltachta ag iarraidh go gcaomhnófar an Ghaeltacht mar fhoinsé ár dteanga dhúchais don chéad ghlúin eile. Is mór an dúshlán atá roimh Udarás na Gaeltachta chun an sprioc seo a bhaint amach ach tá mé sásta go bhfuil na scileanna go léir a bheas de dhíobháil orainn le dul i ngleic leis ar an bhord úr: scileanna fiontraíochta, forbairt pobail, oideachas, pleanáil teanga agus cúrsaí rialachais.

Tá mé buíoch de na comhaltaí gur ghlac siad leis an chuireadh ón Aire Stáit agus leis an fhreagracht úr a théann leis an chuireadh sin. Ó mo thaobh féin de, thig leo a bheith cinnte go bhfaighidh siad éisteacht agus ceannasaíocht thuisceanach. Tá mé ag súil go mór fosta a bheith ag obair leis an phríomhfheidhmeannach agus leis an fhoireann, daoine a mbíonn teagmhálacha proifisiúnta agam leo le blianta beaga anuas agus ar mór mo mheas orthu. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas pearsanta a ghabháil leis an Aire Stáit as an mhuinín a léirigh sé ionam; le Liam Ó Cuinneagáin, laoch de chuid na Gaeltachta, agus lena chomhghleacaithe ar an bhord dheireanach as an údarás a stiúradh fríd an stoirm mhór atá buailte linn le cúpla bliain anuas. Ar deireadh, mo bhuíochas leis an Chathaoirleach agus le comhaltaí an chomhchoiste as éisteacht a thabhairt dom anseo inniu.

**Vice Chairman:** Gabhaim buíochas don Uasal Anna Ní Ghallchóir as an ráiteas cuimsitheach sin. Go n-éirí an t-ádh léi sa phost úr atá aici.

**Deputy Michael P. Kitt:** Cuirim fáilte roimh Anna Ní Ghallchóir don chruinniú. Is pribhléid dom agus don choiste plé a dhéanamh leis an duine atá molta mar chathaoirleach ar bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil post tábhachtach aici in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad agus anois post tábhachtach eile mar chathaoirleach ar an údarás.

Bord nua atá ann agus ní thoghfár na baill. Conas a oibreoidh an bord nua seo? Chuir mé féin ceisteanna ar an Aire Stáit maidir le dífhostaíocht sa Ghaeltacht agus ceisteanna faoi The Gathering an bhliain seo chugainn, le fáil amach an mbeidh ról ag an údarás sa rud sin? Níor mhaith liom go mbeadh ísliú céime don údarás, go háirithe ar a chuid cúraimí fiontraíochta. Tá neart obair mhaith déanta ag an údarás go dtí seo agus a lán post ar fáil sa Ghaeltacht agus ba mhaith liom go leanfadh sin ar aghaidh.

Luadh bealaí nua le bheith éifeachtach ós rud é go bhfuil gearradh siar €6 mhilliún sa bhuiséad chaipitil. An féidir níos mó a rá faoi sin, go speisialta faoi na hearnálacha éagsúla? Cén chaoi is féidir sin a dhéanamh. Luadh cistí ón Aontas Eorpach. Bheadh sé suimiúil dá mbeimis in ann níos mó a fháil ansin.

Tá rudaí maithe anseo don údarás, ar nós TG4. Tá plé sa straitéis 20 bliain na Gaeilge maidir leis an gcaoi is fearr chun an Ghaeilge a chaomhnú. Tá a fhios agam ón méid atá ráite aici go bhfuil an-suim aici sa scéal sin. Is iad sin na ceisteanna atá agam. Is maith an rud é go bhfuil an-bhród ag Anna Ní Ghallchóir sa phost nua atá aici agus go n-éirí léi.

**Ms Anna Ní Ghallchóir:** Mar a dúirt mé sa ráiteas a rinne me ar ball beag, tá dhá sprioc nó bunaidhm ag Údarás na Gaeltachta - forbairt pobail agus forbairt teanga. Téann an dá rud lámh ar lámh. Nuair a bhíonn muid ag caint ar chúrsaí sochtheangeolaíochta agus ar chúrsaí na Gaeilge, ní bhíonn mórán rudaí ró-shimplí i gceist. Tá rud amháin atá iontach simplí maidir le cúrsaí Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht - gan pobal sa Ghaeltacht, ní bheidh aon teanga ann; agus gan an teanga, ní bheidh an Ghaeltacht ann. Is í an bunaidhm nó raison d'être a bhí ag Údarás na Gaeltachta ariamh ná an pobal a choinneáil sa Ghaeltacht - iad a chur ag obair oiread agus is féidir agus an teanga a choinneáil beo ag an am céanna. Ní dóigh liom go mbeidh an lámh in uachtar ag ceachtar den dá rud, mar go dtéann siad lámh ar lámh lena chéile. Is é sin an chéad rud a déarfainn. Measaim go bhfuil na scileanna go léir againn ar an mbord le polasaithe agus straitéis ceart a chur le chéile agus díriú ar na haidhmeanna sin a bhaint amach.

Beidh cur i bhfeidhm Acht na Gaeltachta 2012 mar ceann de phríomhaidhmeanna an bhoird nua. Beidh ról fíor-lárnach ag an údarás maidir leis na pleananna teanga san Acht sin. Déanann an Acht sin daingniú ar chuid de na príomhmholtaí a bhí sa straitéis 20 bliain. Iarradh orm freisin an bhfuil féidearthachtaí eile maoinithe atá níos éifeachtaí agus níos éifeachtúla. B'fhéidir gur ndearna muid dearmad beag ar cistí Eorpacha cosúil le Interreg - níor chuir muid an oiread sin suim iontu - in am an rachmais os rud é go mbíonn na hiarrataisí measartha fada agus measartha casta. Bíonn féidearthachtaí eile ann le airgead a thabhairt isteach do chúrsaí taighde agus fiú do rudaí praiticiúla ar leibhéal na Gaeltachta. Is féidir iad a chruthú.

Luaigh an Teachta Kitt The Gathering. Sa phost atá agam faoi láthair - tá mé mar stiúrthóir ar ionad na dteangacha i Má Nuad - tá scrúdaithe curtha le chéile againn don Ghaeilge. Tá ocht n-ionad againn ar fud na hÉireann. Tá ionad againn in ollscoil i bPrág na Seice. Tá ionad againn i Nua Eabhrac. Tá ionad in Ottawa. Tá ionad againn i dToronto. Bíonn muid ag plé le diaspóra na hÉireann ar bhonn rialta. Silim gur féidir cuid mhór a dhéanamh leis an gcaidreamh sin a chothú. B'fhéidir go gcuirfidh The Gathering tús le sin. B'fhéidir nach bhfuilimid ag déanamh go leor sa Ghaeltacht ar bhonn foirmiúil leis an gcaidreamh sin a chothú.

Mar shampla, tharla sé go raibh me i bPáras Dé hAoine seo caite ag bronnadh teastais ar 45 duine atá ag foghlaim na Gaeilge san ionad atá againn ansin. Is Francaigh thart ar 70% dóibh siúd atá ag tabhairt faoi na cúrsaí sin. Is Éireannaigh atá pósta sa Fhrainc, srl., an chuid eile acu. Síleann daoine i gcónaí nach bhfuil suim ach amháin sa Bhéarla ag na heachtrannaigh atá ag iarraidh teanga a fhoghlaim anseo, ach níl sé sin fíor. Tá suim ag daoine sa Ghaeilge agus i gcultúr na Gaeilge. Teastaíonn uathu teacht go dtí áit ina bhfuil cultúr difriúil i gceist. Tá tíortha an domhain ag éirí níos cosúil lena chéile; dá bhrí sin, tá daoine ag iarraidh rudaí atá difriúil. Sílim gur féidir le Fáilte Éireann agus grúpaí mar sin obair ar an ghné sin.

**Deputy Sandra McLellan:** I believe Ms Ní Ghallchóir is the first female chairperson of Údarás na Gaeltachta. I congratulate her and wish her well in her new role. Is she concerned that there are just two female representatives on the board? I understand her expertise is in lin-

guistics. As chairperson, she will be neutral. How does she think she can bring her expertise to bear while remaining neutral?

**Ms Anna Ní Ghallchóir:** I thank the Deputy for her questions and kind remarks. It is a great honour and privilege to be the first female chairperson of Údarás na Gaeltachta. There are three points to be made about representation. First, the board is representative in terms of the skills it will need for the future, for example, when addressing the issues of strategy and policy that will arise. All of the skills we will need in areas such as enterprise, governance, language ability and - I cannot think of the English phrase - forbairt pobail-----

**Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh:** Community development.

**Ms Anna Ní Ghallchóir:** -----are present within the board. Second, I am pleased to say the board is representative of every Gaeltacht in the country. That was not anticipated in the run-up to the appointment of the board. Third, it is a source of personal disappointment that the board falls short in terms of gender equity. I had absolutely nothing to do with the compilation of the board.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** I am somewhat embarrassed to have to address Ms Ní Ghallchóir in English, unfortunately. However, I wish her the best of luck in the massive task she faces. She has mentioned the reports suggesting we might have just 15 years to deal with this issue. I believe that to be true. I do not come from a Gaeltacht area and have massive difficulty in learning a language if I am not immersed in it. I got a “D” in pass Irish in my leaving certificate examination. I find it very difficult to learn a language by any means other than being immersed in it. Every person in my leaving certificate class found it equally as difficult. That is why Ms Ní Ghallchóir and other “seed savers” have such an important job. They have the seed which they need to help to grow. I need to go to places like the Gaeltacht to learn Irish. The same applies to my children. That is why it is so essential that people like Ms Ní Ghallchóir are successful. Some of the people here and many of the people with whom I went to school would have learned Irish if they had gone to school drunk because they had that type of brain, but that does not apply to most people who are like me. That is why it is so essential for Údarás na Gaeltachta and the other organisations to survive.

When I was growing up, brown bread was left for the poor people because it was unfashionable to eat it. Rich people ate white bread until there was news that eating brown bread was better. Now rich people are eating brown bread, while many poor people have to eat white bread. The same applies in the case of the Irish language. There was a time when it was spoken mainly by poorer people. I am not trying to create a class divide, but that is my experience. When I was in school, all of the rich children went to the Gaeltacht. Perhaps they did not think they were rich, but to me, my family and neighbours they looked to be rich. Many of them probably had the ability to learn it and they came back with a level of Irish that none of us could ever attain. I wonder what Ms Ní Ghallchóir thinks can be done to make sure everyone can potentially go to the Gaeltacht. For many, that is the only way the language can be learned. I discovered this when I went to Spain. I had never spoken Spanish in my life, but after six months there, I could pick up the telephone, order a taxi and tell the driver where to meet me. I was able to go into every shop and order absolutely everything in Spanish. After 13 years of Irish classes, with no opportunity to engage in immersion, only two of the 30 students in my leaving certificate class understood what the words “ní thuigim” meant. That has to change and I wonder what Ms Ní Ghallchóir can do to change it. I know she is genuine and was delighted that it was difficult for her to find the English word for something. It was refreshing to see this. What does she think can be done to help people like me whose intelligence does not match the way Irish is taught?



**Vice Chairman:** The Deputy is being very hard on himself today.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** I am not. I am telling the truth. I got a “D” in pass Irish after studying it for 13 years. Should we go down the Linguaphone route to get kids to learn Irish? What are her suggestions, as I would hate to see the language disappear? The world is becoming more and more homogenised. I have said on numerous occasions at this forum and in the Dáil that homogenisation is for milk, not people. What can Ms Ní Ghallchóir do to make sure everyone on the planet will not end up exactly the same? If some of us are able to speak Irish, we will be a little different.

**Ms Anna Ní Ghallchóir:** I am conscious that I forget to answer one of Deputy Sandra McLellan’s questions. I will come back to it.

If I may say so, as a teacher, Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan is being very hard on himself. I am not sure there is anybody who is incapable of learning a second language. There is nothing in any research to suggest that is the case. Research shows that motivation is key in learning. If one is determined to learn, really has to learn or wants to learn, one will do so. I have mentioned that the languages centre in Maynooth organises a suite of Irish language examinations. One of our best students this year was a Dutch lady living in England who had spent no more than a fortnight in Ireland but learned Irish to a very high level. There is no doubt, therefore, that motivation is key.

Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan asked about the role of Údarás na Gaeltachta in this regard. We are always aware that we have to give those who want to come back to Irish an opportunity to do so. I see this time and again in my job because we deal with many adult learners. We have to ensure the teaching of Irish is professionalised. That is a mantra I use when speaking about this issue. It is sometimes the case that those who teach Irish to adults are not qualified teachers. People need to be trained in that sector for this type of teaching and support must be provided for them. That is something we do at a relatively small level, for a number of reasons, in my current job. We offer a diploma in the teaching of Irish to adults, the only one of its kind in the country. There are 15 students scattered throughout the country taking the course which is sponsored by Foras na Gaeilge. The idea is that we will train them to train others. There are many excellent examples of good practice among teachers of adults. In some other cases, the teachers are very passionate about the language, but sometimes passion is not enough. One needs to be professional and receive proper training. I agree with the Deputy that many people have learned Irish badly or have had a very negative experience of learning the language. I assure him that many have returned to it and succeeded in learning it.

Deputy Sandra McLellan asked about my background in linguistics and sociolinguistics. Not too long ago somebody at work accused me of being an entrepreneur. When I took up my current job eighteen and a half years ago, I inherited a very small department with three full-time and ten part-time staff. My department currently has seven full-time and over 30 part-time staff. The exact figures tend to fluctuate. Some 80% of my budget comes from outside the university. I saw that there was an opening for the examinations we have introduced at eight centres in Ireland. The Irish College in Paris had just opened as the Centre Culturel Irlandais and I noted that there was an opening for people to study Irish at the centre. Likewise, we made tests available when people were starting to study Irish at New York University. My philosophy has always been to do something about it when I see a gap in language provision. While I would not like to overstate it, I am a bit of an entrepreneur also. I am certainly used to looking for money.

**Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú:** Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh Anna Ní Ghallchóir. Gabhaim buíochas léi as ucht teacht isteach. Tá sé thar a bheith soiléir go bhfuil sí an-chumasach agus an-oilte. Tá mé lán-cinnte go ndéanfaidh sí sár-jab mar chathaoirleach ar Údarás na Gaeltachta. Dar ndóigh, beidh sí ag brath ar an-chuid daoine eile, ar bhail an údaráis, ar mhuintir na Gaeltachta, ar na heagrais Gaeilge ar fud na tíre agus ar an Rialtas ó thaobh maoiniú, srl. Ní bheidh sí ina haonair. Tá súil agam go mbeidh sé ar a cumas aici an jab seo a dhéanamh. Tá mé cinnte go ndéanfaidh sí gach iarracht.

Má theipeann ar an nGaeltacht, is cinnte go mbeidh todhchaí na Gaeilge i bhfad níos laige. Glacann an-chuid daoine leis go mbeidh sé an-deacair go deo dóchas a thabhairt do dhaoine atá i bhfabhar na Gaeilge má theipeann ar an nGaeltacht. Níl mé ag caint faoi na heagrais amháin - tá mé ag caint faoi muintir na hÉireann go hiomlán agus an diaspora chomh maith. Tá an ceart ag Anna Ní Ghallchóir go mbraitheann a lán ar fostaíocht sa Ghaeltacht. Muna fhanann na daoine óga, go mórmhór, sa Ghaeltacht, ní bheidh an Ghaeilge ann ag an deireadh agus ní bheidh an Ghaeltacht ann freisin.

Ar an mbonn sin, ba mhaith liom cúpla ceist a chur maidir le infheistíocht. Cad é an bua is mó a bhaineann leis an Ghaeltacht ó thaobh infheistíocht a mhealladh isteach? B'fhéidir nach bhfuil an Ghaeltacht cosúil le gach réigiún eile. Cad é an rud is láidre gur féidir a dhéanamh chun infheistíocht a mhealladh isteach?

Ba mhaith liom labhairt mar gheall ar an stádas agus an tábhacht a bhaineann le turasóireacht cultúrtha. Bhí mé ag smaoineamh le déanaí ar neart na Gaeilge ar fud na cruinne. Tá craobh ag Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann i Moscó. Yuri is ainm don rúnaí atá ar an gcraobh. Tá Béarla an-bhriste aige ach tá an Ghaeilge ar a thoil aige. Tháinig sé go dtí an tír seo trí nó ceithre bliana ó shin. Bheadh éinne an-mhóralach as, i ndáiríre, mar go bhfuil a chuid Gaeilge chomh maith sin. Bhí an-díomá air mar bhí sé ag súil go mbeadh an Ghaeilge ag gach éinne nuair a tháinig sé go dtí an tír seo. Tá fear i gCeanada, Aralt Mac Giolla Chainnigh, a bhfuil an Ghaeilge ar a thoil aige, ag iarraidh Gaeltacht a bhunú sa tír sin. Tá an-spiorad aige chomh maith.

Taispeánann na samplaí sin go bhfuil an-suim go deo sa Ghaeilge i go leor tíortha. Tá baint nó ceangailt idir an suim sin agus turasóireacht cultúrtha. Is léir ó na staitisticí i gcóir cultural tourism don tír ar fad go dtagann na mílte daoine anseo gach bliain. Nuair a bhí oifigigh ón Roinn istigh linn trí nó ceithre seachtain ó shin, chuir sé ionadh ar an-chuid daoine a fhoghlaim go bhfuil na mílte daoine fostaithe san earnáil seo. Tagann na milliúin euro ón dturasóireacht cultúrtha. An dóigh le Anna Ní Ghallchóir go bhfuil aon áit níos tábhachtaí sa tír ná an Ghaeltacht ó thaobh turasóireacht cultúrtha de? Ní hamháin go bhfuil an teanga féin i gceist, ach tá saol faoi leith agus saibhreas oidhreachta, srl., i gceist. Cad is féidir le Údarás na Gaeltachta a dhéanamh chun e sin a fhorbairt? An bhfuil na háiseanna ann chun freastal ar na sluaite atá ag teacht cheana féin? Má thagann na sluaite, an bhfuil sí sásta go bhfuil an infreastruchtúr ann chun sin a láimhseáil, nó an bhfuil géarghá le plean cuimsitheach chun é sin a fhorbairt? Chun plean mar sin a chur i gcrích, is cinnte go mbeidh airgead ag teastáil. Muna féidir leis an údarás é sin a dhéanamh, beidh cailliúint an-mhór ann leis an seans atá ann é sin a fhorbairt.

Maidir leis an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an údarás anois ó thaobh na Gaeltachta de, bhí díospóireacht bhreá againn ar sin. Is minic freisin a bhí díospóireacht againn maidir leis an straitéis 20 bliain anseo agus táimid ag braith go mór ar an straitéis chun torthaí áirithe atá leagtha síos sa straitéis a bhaint amach. Is cinnte go bhfuil an Ghaeltacht lárnach sa straitéis, mar ní bheidh ar ár gcumas na mílte daoine breise ó thaobh labhairt na Gaeilge a fháil muna bhfuil an Ghaeltacht ann. Aontaím go mór leis an Teachta Flanagan maidir le dul go dtí an Ghaeltacht. Níl aon slí níos fearr chun an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim. Má bhuaileann duine le



scoláirí a théann go dtí an Ghaeltacht i rith an tsamhraidh, is beag duine díobh nach dtagann abhaile agus áthas croí air nó uirthi toisc gur bhain siad taitneamh as an saoire. Is cinnte freisin gur bhain siad tairbhe as an turas, mar go minic, ní easpa Gaeilge atá i gceist maidir le labhairt na Gaeilge ach easpa muiníne an Ghaeilge a úsáid. B'fhéidir nach raibh seans iomlán ag Iníon Uí Ghallchóir fós scrúdú a dhéanamh ar an straitéis, ach ceapaim go bhfuil an t-údarás lárnach don straitéis. An dóigh leí go mbeidh ar chumas an údaráis pleananna a chur le chéile a bheidh indéanta chun na spriocanna atá leagtha síos sa straitéis a bhaint amach?

An rud deireannach ná na meáin cumarsáide, níl aon amhras faoi ach go bhfuil Raidió na Gaeltachta agus TG4 ag déanamh sár jab. Ceapaim gur é TG4 an stáisiún is fearr teilifíse atá againn. An bhfuil ar chumas Údarás na Gaeltachta na meáin cumarsáide eile a bhreith leo ar shlí éigin? Más féidir sin a dhéanamh, beidh tionchar an-mhór ag na meáin cumarsáide ar mheon na ndaoine. Ón méid atá ráite ag Iníon Uí Ghallchóir, tá sé soiléir go bhfuil rud den tsaghas sin i gceist aici. Nílím ag caitheamh anuas ar TG4 agus Raidió na Gaeltachta, a mhalairt ar fad, tá siad ar fheabhas, ach déarfainn go n-aontódh sí liom faoi más féidir na meáin cumarsáide lárnach eile a bhreith leí, go gcabhródh sé sin go mór leis na rudaí eile a luaigh mé, turasóireacht chultúrtha, infheistíocht agus mar sin de.

**Vice Chairman:** Tá a lán ceisteanna ansin.

**Ms Anna Ní Ghallchóir:** Tá súil agam go gcuimhneoidh mé orthu go léir. Maidir leis an cheist dheireannach ar dtús, nílím ag labhairt ar son Raidió na Gaeltachta, ach mar a tharlaíonn sé, táim i mo chathaoirleach ar Raidió na Gaeltachta fé láthair. Beidh mo thréimhse mar chathaoirleach ag críochnú i mí Eanáir. Níl a fhios agam an bhfuil an coiste ar an eolas faoi seo, ach tá RTE i ndiaidh dréacht straitéis a chur le chéile don Ghaeilge agus tá sí sin thuas ar shuíomh RTE faoi láthair. Beidh an-tóir ar na meáin Ghaeilge chomh maith le na meáin Bhéarla ar sin. Tá RTE ag scrúdú an pholasaí Gaeilge atá aige faoi láthair agus is cinnte go mbeidh deis ansin. Is dóigh go bhfeicfidh daoine é sin mar dheacracht sa mhéid go bhfanann saol na Gaeilge taobh istigh do na meáin Ghaeilge barraíocht. B'fhéidir go bhfuil sin ann, ach is cinnte go mb'fhéidir gur chóir go mbeadh níos mó faoin Ghaeilge agus faoin Ghaeltacht ar na stáisiúin eile. Ach sin ceist do RTE, ach tá cúrsaí Gaeilge á scrúdú ansin faoi láthair.

Maidir leis an straitéis 20 bliain, tá sé léite agus athléite agam, mar atá Acht na Gaeltachta. An rud atá i gceist le Acht na Gaeltachta ná go gcuirfidh na pobail Gaeltachta pleananna teanga le chéile agus go mbeidh ról fíor lárnach ag Údarás na Gaeltachta sa phróiseas sin. An rud atá tábhachtach domsa mar bhean Gaeltachta maidir leis na pleananna teanga ná go dtugann siad freagracht do mhuintir na Gaeltachta fhéin as an Ghaeilge agus as cinntiú go mairfidh an Ghaeilge. Go dtí seo, an tuairim a bhí ag cuid de mhuintir na Gaeltachta ná go raibh straitéisí agus polasaithe Gaeilge agus araile ag teacht i gcónaí ón taobh amuigh.

Anois, tá deis acu féin a bpleananna féin a chur le chéile, le tacaíocht agus le cuidiú, an oiread agus atá siad ag iarraidh, ón údarás. Ach is uathu féin a thiochfaidh siad. Is iad féin a socróidh caidé mar a bheidh an Ghaeilge sa phobal acu amach anseo, caidé an seasamh a bheidh ag an Ghaeilge agus caidé atá le déanamh leis na spriocanna atá leagtha síos sa straitéis 20 bliain a bhaint amach. Céim mhór chun tosaigh atá ansin mar go dtugann sé úinéireacht dóibh ar an phróiseas. Ní rialacha nó orduithe iad atá ag teacht as Baile Átha Cliath, nó fiú as Gaillimh, ach go mbeidh siad féin i gcroílár an phróisis sin agus na bpleananna sin. Is iad féin a socróidh iad agus tá sin iontach tábhachtach.

Maidir leis an turasóireacht chultúrtha agus leis an méid a dúirt an Seanadóir faoi Chomhaltas, go minic i mo chuid oibre féin castar daoine orm as an Rúis, agus as na tíortha sin uilig

a bhfuil togha na Gaeilge acu. Sílim nach bhfuil muid ag teacht i dtír go hiomlán ar na féidireachtaí atá ann maidir leis an turasóireacht chultúrtha nó maidir leis an turasóireacht ghlas. Tá sé tábhachtach go mbeadh struchtúr leis an turasóireacht sin ach ag an am céanna, nach maith le daoine go mbeadh barraíocht struchtúir ann ach oiread. Is fearr le daoine rud beag fiáin den taobh Gaelach a choinneáil. Mar a tharlaíonn sé, bhí mé thar lear agus casadh duine orm as an Danmhairg an lá faoi dheireadh. Dúirt sé liom gur ceann de na saoire ab fhearr a chaith sé ina shaol ariamh ná saoire a chaith sé féin agus a bhean ag rothaíocht thart ar chósta Dhún na nGall. Dúirt sé nár chuala sé caint ariamh ar Dhún na nGall go dtí sin. Bhí a hiníon ag freastal ar bhainis anseo i nDún na nGall agus tháinig siad léi.

Tá féidireachtaí sa turasóireacht agus sin an fáth gur luaigh mé Fáilte Éireann níos luaithe maidir le teacht chuig an Ghaeltacht. Tá a fhios agam go raibh dreamanna ag obair sa Ghaeltacht go dtí seo, ach b'fhéidir nach bhfuil siad chomh gníomhach agus a bhíodh siad leis an Ghaeltacht a dhíol mar cheantar ina bhfuil turasóireacht de chineál eile le fáil inti.

**Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh:** Cuirim céad fáilte roimh Iníon Uí Ghallchóir agus tré-aslaím léi. Cé go raibh mé cáinteach go leor ar an bpróiseas cheapacháin a bhain le bord Údarás na Gaeltachta agus an athrú ar an bpróiseas toghchánaíochta, níl locht ar bith uirthi faoi sin agus ba mhaith comhghairdeachas ó chroí a ghabháil léi agus ar chuile duine eile atá anois ar bhord nua Údarás na Gaeltachta. Geallaim di go mbeidh chuile thacaíocht aici ón taobh seo den Teach maidir leis an obair atá an t-údarás ag iarraidh a chur i gcrích. Aithníonn muid an tábhacht mhór atá ag baint le obair Údarás na Gaeltachta agus an obair iontach atá déanta ag an údarás i rith na blianta.

Tá roinnt ceisteanna agam agus táim cinnte go mbeidh neart ceisteanna crua le cur as seo go ceann roinnt blianta. Is rud suntasach é gur bean í atá ceaptha mar chathaoirleach agus is fiú sin a nótaíl. Is maith sin, ach is ábhar díomá dom go bhfuil an céatadán mná atá ainmnithe íseal go leor. Tá súil agam go n-athróidh sé sin de réir imeacht ama. Ó thaobh shaineolais eile de, tá trí gné atá fíor thábhachtach ó thaobh bhoird an údaráis. Is iad sin go mbeadh taithí ann ó thaobh cúrsaí forbartha pobal, cúrsaí gnó agus cúrsaí pleanáil teanga de. An bhfuil a dóthain saineolais ag an cathaoirleach in éineacht léi ar an mbord don trí réimse sin?

O thaobh comhdhéanamh tíreolaíochta de, tá go leor daoine i nGaillimh an curtha amach mar go mbraitheann siad nach bhfuil an comhdhéanamh tíreolaíochta ar an mbord ionadaíoch go leor. Bhíodh ochtar as Gaillimh ar an mbord nuair a bhí sé mór agus tá beirt anois ann, in ainneoin go bhfuil an Ghaeltacht is mó i nGaillimh agus go bhfuil sí beagnach faoi dhó chomh mór ó thaobh daonra de leis na Gaeltachtaí eile. Tá, mar shampla, ceathrar as Tír Chonaill, nó de bhunadh Thír Chonaill, ar an mbord. Mar sin, tá daoine i nGaillimh ag rá nach é go bhfuil siad ag lorg aon rud breise, ach nach leor an ionadaíocht atá acu.

Fáiltím roimh an ionadaíocht ó na Gaeltachtaí bheaga. Tá sé sin fíor-thábhachtach. Ach sílim go bhfuil deacracht ansin don údarás mar gheall go bhfuil ionadaíocht ó Chontae na Mí le n-athrú gach re bliain leis na Gaeltachtaí beaga eile, mar gheall ar an chaoi a bhfuil an t-Acht scríofa. Níl a fhios agam cén chaoi a bhfuil sé i gceist ag an údarás dul i ngleic leis sin nuair a bhéas an tréimhse déanta ag an gcomhalta as Contae na Mí. Bhí sé in ainm is gur duine as Múscraí nó ón Rinn a bhéadh ag teacht i gcomharbacht air sin. Céard a tharlódh sa gcás sin? An mbeidh Contae na Mí fágtha gan ionadaíocht sa gcás sin?

Bhí an t-Aire agus an t-Aire Stáit ag cruinniú de cheann de na coistí seachtain ó shin agus thug siad le fios dúinn go bhfuil buiséad reatha ag an údarás de €9.8 milliún in aghaidh na bliana, agus go bhfuil €4.3 mhilliún de sin ag dul amach ar phinsin. Tá tuairimíochtaí ann go

forleathan go gcaitear i bhfad an iomarca airgid leis an údarás ach léiríonn sé sin go bhfuil an t-airgead beag go leor i gcomhthéacs an méid oibre atá le déanamh.

Chomh maith leis sin, bhéadh Iníon Ní Ghallchóir eolach ar thuarascáil a rinne Indecon cupla bliain ó shin ar chruthú fostaíochta san nGaeltacht. Dúradh sa tuarascáil go raibh gá le €12 mhilliún in aghaidh na bliana díreach leis an 7,000 post atá san nGaeltacht faoi láthair a choinneáil ag an leibhéal sin. Le sé nó seacht mbliana anuas d'ísligh an buiséad caipitil ó €25 milliún síos go dtí €6 mhilliún agus tá sé ag an leibhéal sin le cupla bliain. Cén chaoi is féidir an líon postanna sin a choinneáil, fiú ag 7,000, muna bhfuil a dhóthain airgid caipitil againn, agus b'fhéidir contúirt ann go mbeidh ciorraithe breise le teacht san mbuiséad?

Ó thaobh an sprioc atá ag an údarás, tá mé cinnte gur ceann des na clocha is mó ar pháidrín Iníon Ní Ghallchóir ná buanú na Gaeilge mar theanga phobail, mar is tuismitheoir Gaeltachta mé féin atá ag déanamh mó mhíle díchill le mo chlann féin agus an pobal timpeall orm. Céard é an rud is mó gur féidir leis an údarás a dhéanamh maidir le buanú na Gaeilge ins na pobail Gaeltachta? Mar tá a fhios againn go bhfuil sí ag meath.

Tá athrú mór, de bharr Acht na Gaeltachta, ar struchtúir bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta. Ní bheidh na coistí réigiúnacha níos mó ann, agus mar sin de. Dá bhrí sin, beidh an *modus operandi* agus an cur chuige a bhéas ag Iníon Ní Ghallchóir an-difriúil ón gcathaoirleach deireanach. Cad iad na hathraithe atá beartaithe aici maidir leis an cur chuige ó thaobh na cruinnithe boird, na glórtha réigiúnacha agus mar sin de?

Ceann des na laigí is mó a fheiceann cuid mhaith daoine, ó thaobh an chomhdhéanamh nua ar an mbord, ná go bhfuil go leor daoine ag teacht ón gcúlra polaitiúil céanna, ó pháirtithe an Rialtais go bunúsach, agus nach bhfuil an oiread glórtha easaontach ar an mbord agus a bhí nuair a bhí daoine tofa go díreach ag an bpobal. An bhfuil contúirt ann go mbeidh an bord i ndáiríre mar yes-men agus yes-women ag an Aire agus nach mbeidh siad ag labhairt amach muna bhfuil siad sásta, má bhíonn ciorraithe buiséid ann nó má tá brú ag teacht orthu ón Rialtas? An mbeidh siad neamhspleách go leor le labhairt amach agus dúshlán an Aire a thabhairt ar mhaithe le muintir na Gaeltachta más gá sin a dhéanamh?

Sin iad na ceisteanna. Tá mé cinnte go bhfuil neart tuairimí ag Iníon Ní Ghallchóir féin faoi sin. Arís, guím gach uile áth uirthi, agus sin ó mo chroí amach. Tá mé cinnte go bhfuil an-chumas innti agus go ndéanfaidh sí a míle díchill. Go n-éirí léi ins an obair.

**Ms Anna Ní Ghallchóir:** Sin naoi gceist, tá mé ag déanamh.

Maidir leis an saineolas, tá an chosúlacht air, ar pháipéar, go bhfuil na daoine atá molta agus ainmnithe ag an Aire go maith agus go bhfuil an réimse saineolais atá de dhíth orainn againn. Níl aithne phearsanta agam ar na daoine sin. Casadh duine amháin acu orm uair amháin, nó b'fhéidir dhá uair, agus diomaite de sin níl aithne ar bith agam orthu. Ach tá mé sásta go maith go bhfuil an saineolas acu a bhéas de dhíth orainn.

Maidir le comhdhéanamh tíreolaíochta an bhoird, ní raibh baint dá laghad agam leis sin.

Níl a fhios agam go díreach cad atá socraithe faoi cheist na Rinne nó faoi cheist Rath Chairn go fóill. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil duine ag teacht ón Rinn ar an bhord cheana féin, mar atá Fiachra Ó Céilleachair. Níl a fhios agam cad é atá ag dul a tharla ansin. Tuigeadh domsa go mb'fhéidir go mbeidh an duine ag fanacht níos mó ná bliain amháin. Níl mé cinnte faoi sin ach sin an tuigheáil a bhí agam air.

Is cinnte go bhfuil gearradh siar déanta maidir le cúrsaí fostaíochta ach tuigim nach gcuirfear leis an ghearradh siar sin a thuilleadh. Ba chóir go bhfanfaidh rudaí mar atá siad. Luaigh an Seanadóir píosa taighde a rinne Indecon ar fhostaíocht. Tá cailleadh postanna le cupla bliain anuas ach tá sé moillithe síos cuid mhór. Bheimís ag súil le bheith ábalta na postanna atá againn a choinneáil ag dul mar atá faoi láthair.

Maidir le buanú na Gaeilge, thiocfainn ar ais ag an fhreagra chéanna a bhí agam ar ball. Ceist do mhuintir na Gaeltachta agus do phobal na Gaeltachta a bhéas anseo. Ní féidir teanga a bhrú ar dhream ar bith nach bhfuil ag iarraidh í a labhairt nó í a choinneáil. Má chuireann na pobail Gaeltachta pleananna teanga le chéile beidh orthu coinneáil leis na pleananna teanga sin. Tá sé leagtha síos in Acht na Gaeltachta muna gcloínn pobail leis na spriocanna atá acu beidh impleachtaí tromchúiseacha aige sin dá stádas mar Ghaeltacht.

Chuir an Seanadóir ceis faoi na hathraithe a dhéanfaidh muid i gcomparáid leis an bhord dheireannach. Ní raibh mise ar an bhord dheireannach. Ar ndóigh, tá na tuarascáil agus a leithéid léite agam. B'fhéidir go bhfuil an saineolas rud beag difriúil agus, mar sin de, go mbeidh an cur chuige rud beag difriúil. Ar ndóigh, tá Act na Gaeltachta ann, nach raibh ann ach ag deireadh shaol an bhoird dheireannaigh. Mar sin de, tá spriocanna rud beag difriúla, agus spriocanna cinnte, leagtha síos, áit nach mbíodh roimhe seo, b'fhéidir.

Maidir le yes-man agus yes-women, is oth liom a rá nach duine mar sin mise. Ní duine mé nach bhfuil sásta labhairt amach. Má tá rud ag cur orm beidh a fhios ag daoine fá dtaobh de.

**Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan:** I return to something Ms Ní Ghallchóir said. She may have taken me up wrongly. I am proud of the way I learn, but I learn in a particular way, as many do. Evidence of this is the fact that after 13 years, 99% of the pupils in my class did not know how to have a conversation in Irish. It was not that we collectively decided to be stubborn and that we would not try. We tried just as hard as pupils in the other class which was classified, apparently, as the smarter one. I would not believe this because many in the not so smart class did better than those in the smarter class when they got out into the real world where practice was more important than books.

**Vice Chairman:** Will the Deputy, please, ask a question? Mr. McGuinness has been waiting for a considerable length of time and we want to move on.

**Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan:** I am also missing stuff by being here. This has to be taken up as a serious issue. The impediment is that the vast majority of those who teach learn easily from books without immersion. This needs to be taken into account if Ms Ní Ghallchóir wants the Irish language to survive. Otherwise we will put a massive amount of resources for 13 years into teaching pupils, including my kids. At the age of ten years, my oldest daughter, in spite of the fact that I try to be positive about learning Irish, hates the language because of the way it is taught to her and she is not in a house in which people are negative about learning Irish. If Ms Ní Ghallchóir is serious about ensuring the future of the language, I ask her to take this into account. We do not all learn from books. Many - I suggest the majority - learn everything in life from practice, not from a book. If the Irish language is to survive, Údarás na Gaeltachta must succeed in what it is doing and keep alive the place where people like me can go and learn the language. Otherwise it is finished.

**Vice Chairman:** I think the Deputy has made his point.

**Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan:** I care about the Irish language.

**Ms Anna Ní Ghallchóir:** There was no offence intended.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** I know that.

**Ms Anna Ní Ghallchóir:** The Deputy may realise the Irish curriculum has changed considerably since 2012. The emphasis is now on communication rather than literature which was the case in former times.

I agree with the Deputy in his point about the Gaeltacht. I am not saying that without it there would be no point in learning Irish, but it functions as a resource for those who want to return to Irish spoken in a natural context. That is also happening outside the Gaeltacht, but if there was no Gaeltacht, we would have to rethink everything. I agree totally that immersion is a very important aspect of this issue.

**Vice Chairman:** I am a person who has only rarely been to the Gaeltacht and represents a part of the country that certainly does not have a Gaeltacht area, although it is an area in which many people speak excellent Irish. Le sin, cuirfimid deireadh leis an gcéim seo den bhreithniú ar an gceist seo. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Uasal Uí Ghallchóir as cabhrú linn inniu agus tá súil agam go n-éireoidh go geal leí ina post. Guím rath Dé uirthi.

*Sitting suspended at 5.31 p.m. and resumed at 5.32 p.m.*

### **Western Development Commission: Discussion with Chairman Designate**

**Vice Chairman:** I welcome Mr. Paddy McGuinness and thank him for his attendance to discuss his new role as chairperson designate of the Western Development Commission. I draw to his attention the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the joint committee. However, if they are directed by it 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. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against a person, persons or an entity either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. I also wish to advise Mr. McGuinness that his opening statement and any other document submitted by him to the committee will be published on its website after the meeting. I remind members of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. Before commencing the presentation, on behalf of members, I thank Mr. McGuinness for his perseverance and patience.

**Mr. Paddy McGuinness:** I thank the Vice Chairman and members of the joint committee for their invitation and affording me the opportunity to outline my vision for the Western Development Commission, the challenges and priorities that I see for the organisation and the strategies I hope will realise these goals. In this regard, it might be helpful to say a few words about the background to the setting up of the commission, its status and structure, the composition of the current board and existing and ongoing goals and to list briefly some of the commission's achievements since its establishment.

The Western Development Commission was set up following intense public pressure and



concern about serious economic and social decline in western counties during the 1980s and early 1990s. It is a statutory body established under the Western Development Commission Act 1998 and mandated to promote the economic and social development of the seven counties of the western region, namely, Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare. It currently has ten members whose names are listed in the pack provided. It is serviced by an executive staff of 12 operating out of offices in Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon and functions under the auspices of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

The strategic goals of the organisation are to contribute to balanced regional development by ensuring the western region maximises its full potential for economic and social development; to promote the benefits of living, working and doing business in the western region; to support the sustainable economic and social development of the rural economy; and to provide risk capital for SMEs and social enterprises. Some of the more notable examples of work done to date by the commission are listed in the appendices under appropriate headings. Also included in the presentation pack are copies of recent reports and presentations.

To give an overview of the current position, the region has made significant economic and social progress since the establishment of the commission. That is not to say the commission is responsible for this progress; however, much of it was built on the growth of sectors now severely hit by the economic downturn, for example, the construction industry, the retail sector, other locally traded services and the public sector. The employment and population gains of the past decade and the potential to build on what has been achieved will be undermined unless there is a continued strategic focus on the region. In recent times substantial infrastructural improvements have been made, for example, the M6 to Galway, the strengthening of the electricity grid, greater access to broadband in rural areas, although much work remains to be done, and the first phase of the western rail corridor. However, a great deal more needs to be done if enterprises in the western region are to operate on a level playing field with enterprises in other regions and if the region is to be attractive to investors and highly skilled workers. This is the key to the region realising its full potential to achieve growth and job creation. In this, the commission has strived to identify the western region not only as a key resource for Ireland but also a critical asset as a bountiful region on the periphery of Europe, with untapped resources unique to the location and landscape in areas such as renewable energy, tourism and the creative economy.

The west still requires targeted support to maximise its employment potential and contribution to the national economy. If the potential of lagging regions is not harnessed for the benefit of the national economy, there will be a waste of talent and opportunities and it will reduce overall national economic performance. Regional development is not a zero sum game; growth in one region does not have to be at the expense of another. Improvements in physical infrastructure generate productivity gains for local businesses and increase the attractiveness of an area for investment and tourism. Access to quality road, rail and international air services, broadband and energy resources plays a crucial part in positioning the west within a modern global economy. In a higher value, more knowledge based economy the efficient movement of people, knowledge and information is essential. Improvements in infrastructure alone, however, will not be enough to unlock the west's potential for the national good. The OECD has found that human capital is even more important than infrastructure as a determinant of regional performance.

I am deeply honoured to have been nominated by the Minister for the Environment, Com-

munity and Local Government, Deputy Phil Hogan, as chairman designate of the Western Development Commission. More importantly, as I took the invitation literally and was under the impression that the committee could veto my appointment, I am here to try to convince members that I am suitable for the job. I see it as a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to lead the organisation towards making the region a better place in which to live, work and relax. The opportunity is to work with a competent board and a committed staff in a united and determined effort for the attainment of those goals. I am particularly conscious of the current strains on the public finances and of the need to avoid waste through the duplication of work of other organisations. I will be keen to foster co-operation and will strive to work in collaboration with the public, private and voluntary sectors to focus on the needs of the west. The €1.2 million regional tourism marketing programme co-ordinated by the WDC and funded through a consortium of Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and five regional local authorities has, during its first year, enabled local communities to contribute to the direct marketing of the region internationally.

I will now provide some personal information, although only the positive bits. Members may have read negative comment about me in the newspapers. I am a friend of the Taoiseach, which in certain sectors appears to be a crime. I was born in 1945 and lived until I was 16 years old in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan. There I received my primary and secondary education at the local Patrician Brothers schools. In 1961, I was successful in a Civil Service examination to become a post office clerk and was sent to Ballina for training. I subsequently served in Ballina, Greystones and Castlebar. During my time with the post office, I served at local and national level on the national executive of the Post Office Officials Association. The following sentence is for the benefit of Deputy Flanagan. The general secretary of the union at the time was former Deputy and Senator Mr. Jack McQuillan from Roscommon, who was one of the finest men with whom I worked during my 68 years.

In 1975, I resigned from the post office and opened a retail shop in Castlebar selling paint, wallpaper and DIY products. During the following five years, I opened further shops in Ballina, Westport and Claremorris. In 1990, I formed a buying and marketing group for similar type shops. Today, this chain, named Albany Home Decor, has outlets in 32 towns across Ireland and employes 157 people. In 2003, I passed the day-to-day running of the business to my son, Seán. Outside of work I have always been involved in voluntary community work and have served on boards and committees of many organisations, including Castlebar Chamber of Commerce, of which I was president in 1980. I was director of the Castlebar International Song Contest from 1975 to 1977 and again in 1981, 1983 and 1988. I founded the Castlebar Community Development Association which played a large part in reversing a decision to close Travenol Laboratories, now Baxter Laboratories. I also served on the boards of Castlebar-Mitchels GAA Club, Western Care Association, Council for the West and the National University of Ireland, Galway.

At political level I served as an independent councillor on Castlebar Town Council from 1985 to 1999 and had the privilege of being its Cathaoirleach in 1985 and 1999. I served for one term on Mayo County Council from 2004 to 2009 as a member of the Fine Gael Party. I am perhaps best known for having spearheaded an 18 year campaign for the provision of third level education in Mayo, which culminated in the establishment of GMIT, Castlebar, which now caters for almost 1,000 students from almost every county in the country. As part of that campaign, I stood as an independent candidate for election to Dáil Éireann during the by-election of 1994. For this I can be credited, or blamed, for the election of the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, as the transfer of the bulk of my 6,275 went to the Westport candidate.

In terms of relaxation, I do a great deal of hill walking and am interested in all types of

sports, although nowadays as a spectator only. My hill walking is restricted owing to plantar fasciitis in my heels. Socially, I enjoy a glass or two of good single malt whiskey. Perhaps it will cure my heel problem.

I thank the joint committee members for their attention. Should the joint committee agree to support the proposal of the Minister, Deputy Hogan, to appoint me to the position, I promise to apply myself to the task to the best of my ability. I will do my best to answer questions which members may wish to ask, although they will understand I am not *au fait* with every detail of the commission's work. In fact, my approach to this presentation is entirely different to that of my earlier presentation in that I believed this to be an assessment of me as a person and my commitment to the job. If my answers to questions about the commission are inadequate the Western Development Commission will be happy to appear before the joint committee at a future date for a full and more formal teasing out its workings.

**Vice Chairman:** I thank Mr. McGuinness for his presentation and for his offer in relation to the Western Development Commission, which I am sure the joint committee will consider at a later date. I wish Mr. McGuinness every success in his role. I am sure he will bring his considerable political and business experience to bear in that post for the benefit of the people of the west of Ireland.

**Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh:** I welcome Mr. McGuinness and thank him for his presentation. I wish him all the best in his role, which is an important role. As a Galway and Connemara man, I know that the west of Ireland has lagged behind in development terms for many years. I note there are a number of important projects to be brought to a conclusion, including the West on Track project, continuation of the M17 and the broadband project. Connectivity in air, rail and road is hugely important if we are to develop tourism and business in the areas covered by the Western Development Commission.

Energy is an important issue. Perhaps Mr. McGuinness would outline the direction he would like to take in relation to wind, electricity, oil and gas and renewable energy potential so as to ensure the State gets the best dividend from the resources available to us and as many jobs as possible are created in the area. Having worked in the audiovisual sector in my previous existence, I note the WDC has produced a number of good reports on the development of the audiovisual and creative sector. I would welcome comment from Mr. McGuinness on how this could be harnessed.

In Mr. McGuinness's opinion, how could the commission's investment fund be best used to provide employment where most needed along the western seaboard? As I understand it, WDC does not provide grant aid but invests by way of share capital, preference share capital, loans, etc. Is this the best way to go in the current economic climate or does Mr. McGuinness envisage changing that model? The commission expects a financial return on moneys invested and does not provide hand-outs to prop up businesses. In Mr. McGuinness's view, what type of return on loans provided by the commission is fair in the current climate?

I wish Mr. McGuinness well in his new role and wish the commission every success in the future in development along the western sea board, which development is badly needed.

**Mr. Paddy McGuinness:** I will give a general reply to all of the Senator's questions.

I refer, first, specifically to the fund. In the current period I advocate that we consider having a neutral charge. It is a very good idea to have a revolving rather than an investment fund be-

cause it keeps companies progressing and making money and the funds they pay back become available for new enterprises.

The commission has done substantial work on energy matters and published a good deal of research on the topic, about which I was reading last night. I am a newcomer to this, but I will bring my commitment to work hard, motivate the board to be constructive and the staff to work hard and co-operate. That is a general answer, but it is what I will bring to the organisation.

When I came to Ballina, there were three senior football teams in the area and the matches between them amounted to open warfare. Many of the players were on the Mayo team and when they played together, they passed the ball to one another. One of my roles with Mayo County Council involved chairing a county development board and I found it impossible to even get organisations to work together. The smaller the community the easier it was to bring it together in terms of drive and effort. I want to try to make it happen that Roscommon people can work with people from counties Mayo, Galway, Sligo and Donegal to create a united movement that will make our region the best, not the poorest. I do not say I will accomplish this, but I will try to instil this sentiment in both the board and the staff and hope we will make progress.

**Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh:** I wish Mr. McGuinness the best of luck.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** There is a saying, “Fail to plan, plan to fail”, of which I am sure Mr. McGuinness is aware. One of the best documents I have ever read about the west, including County Donegal and the areas covered by Mr. McGuinness, is entitled, The State of the West: Recent Trends and Future Prospects, subtitled Blueprint for the West. In July 2001 it outlined the spend that would be needed above and beyond what was being planned under the national development plan to enable the region to compete with the rest of the country. The plan made various recommendations, including some those suggested by Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh. Does Mr. McGuinness intend to produce a new plan, pulling together all of the issues faced in the area and taking a holistic view of everything, as a blueprint to drive us into the future? I am sure he is aware of the mantra - it is starting to become boring at this stage - “The Garda station is closing down; the small school is closing down and the GAA clubs are closing down.” I could go on, but I am sure Mr. McGuinness has heard it one million times before. From what he said, it sounds as if he cares. I am terrified, however, that in 20 years there will be no town of Ballaghaderreen or Castlerea. Some will say I am being very negative in saying this, but I am not. I want people to wake up to the fact that this could happen. Will Mr. Guinness formulate a plan for the region, similar to the one produced in July 2001?

**Mr. Paddy McGuinness:** If we do not have a plan, we will have one. That might be too honest for a committee such as this, but that is the way I deal with matters. At 68 years of age, this is my last chance to make a difference and I am grateful that I have been given that chance. I will get the document to which the Deputy referred.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** It is an excellent one.

**Mr. Paddy McGuinness:** I have a lot to learn, but I believe I can bring the talents God has given me to bear to get people to work together. It is hard to beat hard work.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** Mr. McGuinness is making a good start because he is honest.

**Vice Chairman:** I have two very serious questions for Mr. McGuinness, although one is really a comment. Ballina is very well represented today and I have just been informed that

the clerk to the committee, Mr. Eugene Ó Cruadhlaich, spent 12 years there. Perhaps that is why there were so many rows between the football teams. There is, however, a more serious and important point to be made. I am relieved that the Galway man has left, but we still have a Roscommon man present. Does Mr. McGuinness have plans that would help Mayo to win the All-Ireland football final?

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** Mr. McGuinness is smart, but he is not that smart.

**Mr. Paddy McGuinness:** No, I do not. According to the story, a number of people must die first.

**Vice Chairman:** We will not go into it.

**Mr. Paddy McGuinness:** No, we will not. Would I be out of order in paying tribute to Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan for waiting? He is the only Deputy who stayed.

**Vice Chairman:** One of two.

**Mr. Paddy McGuinness:** Of course. That is appreciated because his interest in the west is evident.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** I thank Mr. McGuinness.

**Vice Chairman:** I thank Mr. McGuinness for his presence, briefing us and the excellent document he provided. I wish him every success in his new role.

The joint committee adjourned at 6 p.m. until 4.15 p.m. on Tuesday, 4 December 2012.