

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM CHOMHSHAOL, CULTÚR AGUS GAELTACHT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND THE GAELTACHT

Déardaoin, 12 Nollaig 2013

Thursday, 12 December 2013

The Joint Committee met at 2.20 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Kevin Humphreys,	Senator Cáit Keane,
Deputy Catherine Murphy,	Senator Fiach Mac Conghail,
Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil,	Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú.

* In the absence of Deputy Sandra McLellan and Senator Jillian van Turnhout.

DEPUTY MARCELLA CORCORAN KENNEDY IN THE CHAIR.

BUSINESS OF JOINT COMMITTEE

Business of Joint Committee

Clerk to the Committee: In the absence of the Chairperson I nominate Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy as Acting Chairman. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy took the Chair.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): As we have a quorum we will commence the meeting. We are now in public session. I advise members to turn off their mobile telephones while attending committee meetings. Active mobile telephones interfere with the sound system and RTÉ has informed us that it will not broadcast any part of a meeting where interference from mobile telephones has occurred.

Apologies have been received from Deputies Noel Coonan and Michael McCarthy. Before we begin I wish to read into the record of the meeting an item of correspondence we have received. It relates to the appearance of the Genealogical Society of Ireland and the Association of Professional Genealogists in Ireland at our meeting on 10 December 2013. It is addressed to the Clerk to the Committee, dated 11 December 2013 and entitled 'Classification & Correction of Record'. It is from Mr. Michael Merrigan, General Secretary of the Genealogical Society of Ireland and it reads as follows:

A Chléirigh, a Chara,

At the meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee held on Tuesday 10th December 2013 a reference was made to myself, Michael Merrigan, in the opening address by the Association of Professional Genealogists in Ireland (APGI) which was unfortunately and, no doubt, unintentionally, factually incorrect.

Therefore, I wish to clarify the matter in order that the record may be corrected in the interest of historical accuracy.

The reference to me acting as 'General Secretary' of the Council of Irish Genealogical Organisations (CIGO) during the passage of the Statistics Bill through Seanad Éireann in 1993 is factually incorrect.

I was acting for and on behalf of the Dún Laoghaire Genealogical Society, the forerunner of the Genealogical Society of Ireland, and no other genealogical organisations were involved.

Furthermore, in the interest of historical accuracy, please note that the Statistics Bill was signed into law on July 14th 1993 and that the Council of Irish Genealogical Organisations (CIGO) was only established on July 9th 1994 at a meeting held at the Royal Marine Hotel, Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin - almost exactly one year after the enactment of the Statistics Act, 1993.

I would be obliged if you could kindly read the above into the record of the Oireachtas Joint Committee for clarification and historical accuracy.

Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mise le meas,
Michael Merrigan, MA, FGSI

General Secretary

Genealogical Society of Ireland.

I propose that we note this correspondence and inform the Genealogical Society of Ireland that it has been read into the record of this meeting. I propose that we forward a copy of this correspondence to the Association of Professional Genealogists in Ireland for its information as it concerns that organisation, that we notify the Genealogical Society of Ireland of this decision and notify the Association of Professional Genealogists in Ireland that the Genealogical Society of Ireland has been so notified. Is this agreed? Agreed.

As we do not have any itemised correspondence list for this meeting I propose that we include this item of correspondence for recording purposes in the correspondence list for our next meeting. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Capturing the Full Value of our Genealogical Heritage: Discussion (Resumed)

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): We will now consider the topic, with our first group of witnesses. Is that agreed? Agreed.

I welcome the following witnesses to the meeting: Ms Catriona Crowe, National Archives of Ireland; Ms Fiona Ross, director, Ms Colette O’Flaherty, keeper of archival collections, Mr. Gerard Long, assistant keeper of archival collections of the National Library of Ireland; and Mr. Kevin Lonergan, principal officer, Mr. Chris Flynn, principal officer, and Ms Oragh Gleeson, assistant principal officer, Cultural and Art Institutions, at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. I thank them all for their attendance here today. I propose that we hear the witnesses in the order in which I have introduced them. Is that agreed? Agreed.

This session will continue until 3.45 p.m. when we will suspend and we will resume at 4.15 p.m. with our second session. Is that agreed? Agreed.

I wish to advise the witnesses 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 committee. However, if a witness is directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in regard to a particular matter and continues to do so, the witness is entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of his or her 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 that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. The opening statement and any other documents submitted to the committee may be published on the committee’s website after this 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.

Before I call on the first witness I wish to make some comments. As stated at our meeting on 10 December, genealogy and the search for one’s origins have become a very important issue for many people in Ireland and elsewhere. People want to know where they have come from and the origins of their families. They want to know if their foreparent was a soldier, farmer or

blacksmith, what part of Ireland he or she came from and what were the local conditions that encouraged or forced them to leave. While many people engage in genealogical research as a personal hobby there is a very important role for the professional genealogist in providing research, information and Internet facilities. The worldwide web in particular has an important role to play in facilitating people all over the world in accessing records in Ireland without leaving their homes. While this makes it much easier for them to engage in such research it will also hopefully encourage them to visit Ireland at a later stage.

I now call on Ms Catriona Crowe to address the committee.

Ms Catriona Crowe: I thank the Chairperson for inviting the National Archives of Ireland, NAI, here today to make a presentation to the committee.

The National Archives of Ireland has custody of some of the most important genealogical records relating to Irish people, and we have always taken our responsibilities to them very seriously. The National Archives and its predecessor body, the Public Record Office of Ireland, have a long tradition of assisting both professional and amateur genealogists in their searches for relevant records and providing outreach services to national and local organisations interested in genealogy.

We recognise that there is very great interest among Irish people, both at home and abroad, in tracing their ancestors and in finding out what conditions were like for them when they lived here. The Irish diaspora is estimated to amount to 70 million people in all parts of the globe and many of these have an interest in their family and local history. Thus, we endeavour to create resources to help people to find individuals for whom they are searching and to help them to understand the society of the time. Thanks to the Internet, our main tool is the use of online facilities but our traditional interaction with readers who visit or write to the National Archives of Ireland, remains very important to us and our services reflect that commitment.

We began our development in the provision of online genealogical resources with one of the biggest cultural websites ever produced in Ireland, the 1901 and 1911 census website. The records of our only two complete surviving pre-Independence censuses went online between 2007 and 2010. The process was a partnership between ourselves, the Library and Archives of Canada, the National Library of Ireland, the Department of Finance and many small repositories who gave us copies of relevant material free of charge. The census website has been a great success since its launch, with 850 million hits and 15 million visitors. The records have been digitised to preservation standards and transcribed into a searchable database which contains all of the data contained in the household forms, including name, occupation, age, religion, gender, Irish language proficiency, child mortality, and so on. The website contains these databases as well as the digitised images of the original forms. This is the gold standard for genealogical provision so that one can link to an image of the original document in order to verify the index information. These forms are surrounded by contextual and illustrative material relating to life in Ireland at that time. The site can also be browsed by location. This is another important facility for genealogy websites because people want to know about the neighbours of their ancestors; they want to be able to learn about life in the townland or the street at that time. The census website is now the most comprehensive free census website in the world.

The financial climate has changed substantially since the census went online, and the National Archives has had to adapt accordingly to manage online provision at minimum expense. Our route to this objective is through partnership. The National Archives has a memorandum of understanding with the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, LDS, to allow LDS to digitise from

microfilm made by the church some years previously and to index a number of record series which we consider to be our most important genealogical records. There is a separate tripartite agreement between the national archives, LDS and Eneclann, a private service-provider, to digitise and index other record series not in the first rank of priority as genealogical resources but very important, none the less. I have provided a list of these records in my written submission to the committee. These will be available on a subscription basis for five years on *findmypast.ie*, Eneclann's website, after which they will become available free on all three websites. In the intervening period, the records are available free on-line to visitors to the national archives reading room. This practice is now common in many archival institutions such as the UK national archives and the US National Archives and Records Administration. My written submission gives details of the record series which have already gone online, and those which will shortly go online. Quite an amount of information will be online in 2014 and will be free to access.

It is the policy of the National Archives that our genealogical and other records should be placed online free to access. We believe that our citizens and our considerable diaspora deserve unfettered access to their genealogical cultural heritage, especially since so many significant genealogical records were lost in the destruction of 1922. Genealogists and scholars can all be kept happy by free access to digitised archives which have meanings and uses well beyond one's ancestors' names. My written submission elaborates on some of the scholarly uses made of our online records.

The National Archives provides a contracted professional genealogical advice service free to our readers every morning in the national archives from 10.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. The service has been in existence since 2003, and has proved very popular, particularly with first-time visitors who need help with researching their family history. Between 2,000 and 4,000 people avail of the service each year.

The creation of *Irishgenealogy.ie* by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, is a big step forward in consolidating genealogical resources in one place, with a well-written text to advise and support researchers. All of the National Archive's genealogical content is available on this portal site, along with other sources such as Griffith's Valuation and we will add to it as time goes by. We regard it as an important assistance to anyone researching family history to have as much information as possible in one location. That is where the future lies.

The main record series which are still difficult to access are the records of the General Register Office, for births, deaths and marriages, Catholic parish records, and the three big series of land records, the Registry of Deeds, the Irish Land Commission and the Land Registry. My written submission elaborates on the problems affecting access to these extremely important genealogical records.

The National Archives provides an excellent service to those interested in their family history, both in our reading room and through our online resources. Over the coming years, particularly next year, a large number of record series will be added to our genealogy website pages, thus enhancing our offering to the public. We will continue to engage in the broader world of Irish genealogy, in an effort to ensure that the maximum number of records are available, free to access where possible, to our citizens and our diaspora.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I thank Ms Crowe for her opening statement. I invite Ms Fiona Ross to address the committee.

Ms Fiona Ross: The National Library of Ireland is the largest publicly-accessible research library in Ireland and is recognised as a leading centre for Irish studies. Although it is not a specialist genealogical library, it is a major resource for Irish family history researchers. The National Library of Ireland's mission is to collect, preserve, promote and make accessible the documentary and intellectual record of the life of Ireland and to contribute to the provision of access to the larger universe of recorded knowledge. The library's extensive collections include printed manuscript and visual material - much of which is unique - from the archives of landed estates to the papers of major Irish writers, Gaelic manuscripts, collections relating to Irish national history and politics, books printed in Ireland and books of Irish interest published abroad, Irish newspapers, periodicals and official publications, photographs, prints, drawings and ephemera.

In order to fulfil our statutory remit, we must also develop significant capacity for the ingest and preservation of what is referred to as born digital material, while continuing to develop our printed and manuscript collections and to manage our legacy collections. We have begun to collect born digital material on a very small scale through the archiving of some websites and blogs.

The library has provided a national genealogy advisory service for more than 20 years and has facilitated researchers at every level of research and assisted hundreds of thousands of researchers in making those all important links to past generations and to places where their ancestors lived. For example, we welcomed over 7,000 visitors in the month of July 2013. Most recently the library has hosted a lecture series on topics of interest to family history researchers.

The Office of the Chief Herald has been part of the library since 1943 and is the heraldic authority for Ireland. The office grants, confirms and records coats of arms to Irish citizens and persons of Irish descent around the world. Its archives include heraldic manuscripts from the sixteenth century to the present day, documenting Cromwellian settlers in Ireland, as well as the Wild Geese emigrés from Ireland, collections of wills and pedigree abstracts and other significant record types.

All aspects of the library's collection management activity and service delivery have been affected by significant reductions in staffing and budget in recent years. Our current staff component is 85 full-time equivalents and our employment control framework number is 75 staff. Equivalent national libraries such as the National Library of Scotland and the National Library of Wales have 324 staff and 300 staff, respectively. The library has a significant storage requirement with currently less than 1% of the national collections preserved to international standards. As a result, the remaining 99% are at risk through outdated and inadequate storage facilities.

Following a government decision of 31 October 2012, the governance of the National Library of Ireland will change. Legislation providing for this change will be presented to the Cabinet in the near future. We will continue to make the case for additional resources and we will work to ensure that the library derives the greatest possible benefit from the technological developments which have transformed the library world. The transformation programme currently in train at the national library will see the creation of a twenty-first century library capable of supporting the needs of both existing users and future generations. The library's collections are a national resource but their potential can only be fully realised with appropriate planning and investment. Delivering the widest possible access to these collections is central to our mission and we are completely committed to playing our part in the development of any national genealogical resource.

Mr. Kevin Lonergan: The Department welcomes the opportunity to address the Joint Committee on the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht on the subject of developing a plan to capture the full value of our genealogical heritage. This is a subject which has assumed increasing importance in recent years particularly with the rise in what is termed roots tourism. Genealogy is an important way of connecting with those abroad who wish to trace their roots and also permitting those in Ireland to establish their family history. In this regard it can also be of significant economic benefit to the country in the development of cultural tourism and in attracting visitors to Ireland to trace their ancestry, visit their ancestral homes and so on.

However, genealogy is also immensely important from a social history perspective. Ireland is unique among western nations in its loss of significant quantities of archival records due to revolution and civil war. Church records predate the commencement of State registration of births, marriages and deaths by up to 100 years and by up to 200 years in more exceptional cases. The records thus cover a period from the penal times to the aftermath of the Famine. They represent a treasure trove for those wishing to undertake family history research. They also represent an invaluable link in the chain of Irish genealogical records. They are an immensely valuable tool to facilitate social history research, as they are a major source for social, economic, demographic and religious historians. The work of these historians suffers from a lack of easy access to those records, which are the only surviving micro-demographic material for the whole of the country in the pre-Famine period. It is therefore of importance for the State that there would be a comprehensive set of records online that would be available to both potential visitors to the country and family historians as well as social, economic, demographic and religious historians.

The Government is well aware of the importance of our genealogical heritage and it included in its programme for Government a commitment that the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht would develop a national genealogy policy. It is against this background that the Minister brought proposals to Government for a national policy for genealogy. Those proposals were accepted by the Government at its meeting on 18 December 2012. The aim of the Government policy is to bring some coherence to the area, particularly for those with no genealogical research experience. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has been engaged in the implementation of this policy since then.

In September 2011, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Jimmy Deenihan, convened a meeting for groups and individuals who are professionally involved in the provision, dissemination and use of genealogical records. The purpose of that meeting was to establish the current position regarding the provision of genealogical services and to discuss options for further development of these services. Each of the groups present at the meeting made a presentation. That meeting highlighted the wide variety of groups involved in the area of genealogy ranging from amateur genealogists to professional genealogists to locally based groups as well as national and international organisations. A wide variety of issues were highlighted on the day. However, it is fair to say that the issue of whether records should be available to access free of charge or whether bodies should be able to levy a charge generated strong views. The Minister welcomed the attendance and interest of all bodies and indicated that this was the beginning of a process which would lead to the development of a national policy for genealogy.

Following this meeting the Department reviewed the position regarding the provision of genealogy services in Ireland and formulated proposals for a national policy for genealogy, which were then submitted to Government by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. At its meeting on 18 December 2013 the Government approved the plans of the Minister for Arts,

Heritage and the Gaeltacht for the implementation of a national policy for genealogy in line with the programme for Government by way of the following phased approach. Under phase 1 it is proposed to make available online the genealogical records of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and of key agencies within its ambit, namely, the National Library of Ireland and the National Archives of Ireland, by developing the website *irishgenealogy.ie* as a virtual entry point and a portal for those wishing to search for genealogical records. Under phase 2 it is proposed to advance agreement with other State entities, notably the General Register Office, to facilitate access to its primary historic records, which are register entries of births, deaths and marriages, through the Irish Genealogy website to advance the enhancement of the existing National Genealogical Office as a joint enterprise between the National Library of Ireland and the National Archives of Ireland, and, in that context, to enter into discussions with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport for the purposes of examining potential synergies in regard to the longer-term plans for a national diaspora centre. Under phase 3 it is proposed to enter into negotiations with non-State bodies holding genealogy records, with a view to enabling access to them through the Irish Genealogy website. This would include exploring the option of charging for certain records if a commercial partnership were entered into.

Following the agreement by the Government, the Department immediately embarked on plans for the redesign of the *irishgenealogy.ie* website to become the virtual entry point and portal for those wishing to look for genealogical records online. The aim was to launch this in time for The Gathering initiative. The revamped website was launched by the Minister on 26 March 2013. The new web portal enables visitors to the site to search genealogy records from a number of online sources. A link brings the visitor directly to the results of the search. Now for the first time, one search on the Irish Genealogy website will enable the visitor to establish whether relevant records are available in a number of online sources such as the church records currently on the website, namely, the Tithe Applotments and Griffiths valuations onto the Census 1901 and 1911 records. Another major addition is the link to the American emigration records of Castle Garden and Ellis Island. Records such as those are also vital as those are the first records the new emigrants completed in the new world and are a great starting point for those seeking to research their ancestry. This revamped website has been a huge success and has made an important contribution to the recent The Gathering initiative.

The next stage of the national genealogy policy is to advance agreement with other State entities to facilitate access to other important primary historic records. The Department has recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the General Register Office, GRO, which operates under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection and has responsibility for the administration of the Civil Registration Service in Ireland. Under this agreement the GRO will provide all available index data relating to the birth registers from 1864, marriages from 1845, deaths from 1864 and civil partnerships from 2011 to this Department and this information will then be made available for online searching through the Irish Genealogy website. This agreement is regarded as being a major step forward and it will provide an opportunity to access the full set of records online for the first time. Subject to funding being available, the Department will proceed with the remaining aspects of the national genealogy policy.

As Ms Crowe has outlined the developments on the census site, I will not read that section of the presentation. The Department is satisfied that considerable progress has been made over the past number of years in the area of genealogy. Improved services are being offered, through our website *www.irishgenealogy.ie*

but also by the National Library and National Archives. This has made a major contribution

to the genealogy landscape and to the cultural offering of the country. In the longer term the Department is available to enter into discussions with other genealogy records providers, either commercial or voluntary, with a view to improving the product on offer still further.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I thank Mr. Lonergan for his opening statement. I open the discussion to the members and ask that they confine their remarks to questions as much as possible.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I thank our guests for their opening statements. We will gather their statements with the ones that were made on Monday and with those we will hear from the next group of people. Mr. Lonergan from the Department made an important point about the indexes. There has been an improvement whereby people can now go to one portal to search for records with the redesign of the *www.irishgenealogy.ie* website. It is the right way to go, but it is the getting of the records, as opposed to the indexes, that is critical and that will be the game-changer. Where does that fit in with the Department's the work programme? Are discussions taking place between the Department of the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Social Protection on changes, perhaps legislative changes, that would result in that happening? There is not the same control over church records that there is over public records, such as those held by the GRO. Such a change would be a major improvement. With the loss of the 19th century census records, census substitute records are obviously more important. That was the main question I had.

It was interesting to hear the staffing ratios in comparable countries. There is a view that we have a bloated public service but those figures clearly demonstrate that we are probably underselling our cultural heritage by virtue of the fact that we are not investing in it to have sufficient staff to undertake imaginative projects and have sufficient trained personnel who would be familiar with the systems in place. It was useful to hear that detail. I would like to hear what the comparable position is with regard to the National Archives. It would be useful to know the parameters in terms of what could be done. I appreciate that legal responsibilities must be fulfilled in the National Archives with respect to all the State papers. I have spent a good deal of time in the National Archives and the National Library. There is a good space available in them but it is a fairly limited space in terms of the prospect of holding exhibitions and such events. There is some fantastic material available, not least the publication of the 1911 census, which provided a window into what can accompany a big data set such as that.

I do not dispute that the records in the National Archives are being well stored, or, to put it another way, they are not at risk. A reply to a recent parliamentary question I tabled seeking a rough estimate of the number of boxes of uncatalogued records revealed that there are a staggering 70,000, which seems an absolute shame. A number could not be put on the length of time it would take to catalogue those, but what difference would the provision of multiples of ten staff have made in completing that work? Ms Crowe might give us an idea of the time that would involve.

The information we have been given on the storage of records in the National Library is a little shocking also. Only 1% of records are stored at the standard to which they should be stored. Where are they physically stored? Is there a difficulty in the National Archives with regard to exhibition space, or is that part of its remit? Is that something the National Archives would like to do? Are there more initiatives in that respect? I am certain there are with respect to the projects that could be undertaken in terms of census records, which are a fantastic resource. I probably have one or two further questions but I am conscious of hogging the time.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail: A vote has been called in the Seanad.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I will leave it at that and might come back in later.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Does Senator Mac Conghail want to pose his question?

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail: Yes, if the Acting Chairman does not mind. I apologise for being late and not hearing the guests' presentations. I was detained in the Seanad for a vote. I wish to declare a potential conflict of interest. I am the son of a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists in Ireland. As director of the Abbey Theatre, I am also a member of the Council of National Cultural Institutions. Therefore, I am a colleague of Ms Fiona Ross, director of the National Library. The Abbey is funded indirectly and directly through the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Those are a myriad of potential conflicts of interest, but that will not stop me from making my comments or giving certain people a hard time.

I have a few questions for Mr. Lonergan. I wish to express major congratulations to the Department on the development of the *irishgenealogy.ie* website. That is of tremendous benefit. I have heard Ms Catriona Crowe say how important it is. We also heard that at our previous briefings on Tuesday. We must acknowledge the important contribution it will make, and the Minister is driving it. I wanted to put that on the record.

Under phase 2 of the policy, in terms of the macro issue, arising from what previous witnesses have said, there seems to be a creative tension between private organisations wanting and needing, quite rightly, to make money from genealogy and sustain jobs, and the issue of the availability of these records free of charge for citizens. On Tuesday Mr. Donovan said that there should be no such tension in that everything should be free and available, and then people will be able to make money on that in any event. He was very clear that there was no tension.

Without putting words in Mr. Lonergan's mouth, in the context of his phrase "whether bodies should be able to levy a charge generated strong views," I would argue that phase 2 of the policy is not complete because, as Ms Catriona Crowe and previous witnesses mentioned, some particular records, including birth and death records, are not available free of charge. The index might be available but the certificates are not available free of charge. I would like clarification from the Department on whether that remains a stumbling block. It would be fair to say that the more frank the members of this committee are, the better we can come up with our own understanding of this issue.

I would like clarification from Mr. Lonergan with regard to the implementation of phase 1 of the policy whether everything is free in terms of Irish genealogy requests and particularly in the General Register Office, because in her presentation Ms Catriona Crowe stated - I do not want to put words in her mouth - that certificates up to 1914 should be made available free of charge. She later made the assumption that some people have to make money on that also, which is not a problem. The same applies to the Catholic parish records. I would like clarification on that.

I have a particular question for Ms Catriona Crowe because she did not mention the 1926 census. That was a theme at the meeting on Tuesday. This may sound like a leaving certificate question but I would like if she could outline, in order of importance, what she believes are the most important records that should be made available sequentially free of charge to citizens. Where does the 1926 census come into that? If there was an amendment to the Statistics Act

changing the 100-year provision to 70 years, and people felt the 1926 census should be put on-line, what would be the implications of that in terms of resources?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Many questions were asked. Who would like to start the replies?

Mr. Kevin Lonergan: On Deputy Catherine Murphy's question about the General Register Office, we are only making access to the index available at this stage. Access to the full records is a matter for the General Register Office and we cannot speak on its behalf. We will monitor how we get on with the indexes. We will keep in touch with the General Register Office and enter into negotiations with it thereafter, but at this stage we cannot say where we are going in that regard.

With regard to Senator Mac Conghail's question about pay-per-view facilities, the Department retains a preference for free access to online records, but we recognise, given the current economic climate, that it cannot be expected that resources to meet genealogical development will always be available from the State. Accordingly, it may well be necessary to explore the potential for other models to secure revenue, including philanthropic support, commercial partnerships and concession contracts. That is our position with regard to pay-per-view.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail: Could there be a model whereby the pay-per-view facility would apply for a certain period and then the record could be released free of charge? Is that something the Department is investigating?

Mr. Kevin Lonergan: We are not restricted at this stage to any particular model and we are open to discussions with the various interested bodies to come up with a solution. I cannot give the Senator an answer on what the general solution will be at this stage. We have to examine the situation with regard to particular sets of records.

Ms Fiona Ross: I can speak directly regarding the Catholic parish register records we hold on microfilm with the National Library of Ireland. They are available free to access in person on Kildare Street and it is a long-held wish of ours, and part of Government policy, to make those available. I confirm that those records in microfilm format are available free to access in person on Kildare Street and obviously it is a great wish of ours to make them available more freely.

I welcome Deputy Catherine Murphy's comments on our staffing and storage issues. The staffing issue has a major impact on our ability not just to do genealogy, which is a small subset of what the National Library does on a daily basis, but all of the other activities we do. We see a great deal of scope for expanding all of our activities, with even modest additional staffing. She spoke specifically about cataloguing. If there are 70,000 boxes at the National Archives, I would hate to tell her how many there are at the National Library. At the last count we reckoned there were about 10 million items in the National Library. We have a lot of cataloguing to do. The idea of coming up with more creative ways of solving that staffing issue through job schemes, etc., arose during the discussion on Tuesday. We have looked to secure some support for that in the future, which is something we would love to examine. I will ask my colleague Ms O'Flaherty to discuss the storage issues in detail.

Ms Colette O'Flaherty: We engaged in a project with the libraries of Trinity College and UCD to look at a possible collaborative storage facility at the end of 2011. That was a very valuable exercise in quantifying the existing storage needs and the future growth of our collec-

tions. Much of our material is stored on site in Kildare Street. We have some off-site storage and we also avail of commercial storage, but as the director said in her opening statement, very little of this storage meets international preservation standards. We are keen to explore the opportunities that are available to ensure that does not continue to be the case in the future. There was a major loss of material at the end of the decade we are now commemorating 100 years later, so there is a possible opportunity to redress that in this decade of commemorations, in terms of our national patrimony.

Ms Catriona Crowe: I will address Deputy Murphy's questions first. I thank her for her interest in our staffing problems, which are considerable. I echo what Ms Fiona Ross has said. When we look at comparable institutions in countries of similar population size, such as Scotland or Denmark, we have a third and a quarter of their staffing levels, respectively. We have always been badly under-resourced. Things have improved slightly in recent years, which is surprising given the recession. However, we are still way behind other comparable institutions in terms of what we need to catalogue our material. For example, the chief secretary's office registered papers, which is the biggest single archive on 19th century Ireland anywhere in the world, is not catalogued. We have begun the process of cataloguing it due to a bequest that we managed to secure from a philanthropic American gentleman, but the process is slow because it must be done properly. If things are to be done correctly, it takes time. We had two archivists working on that. We lost one of them two years ago, we are losing the other at the end of this year and we have had to wait until now to get an interview process to fill those positions. That is not satisfactory.

We could certainly do with multiples of tens of staff to get working on all this, but where would we put them? Our other big issue is space. We are full. We have three full repositories in Bishop Street, the Four Courts - the headquarters of the former Public Record Office - and at a quite expensive off-site storage facility to take the spillover from both of those buildings, and it does not make economic sense to spread things over three different places. We have some grounds for hope that a decision will be taken to construct a new building on the Bishop Street site, where the warehouse is currently located, and that should solve our problems and allow us to bring everything together in one spot. However, resources will have to be provided for that. We will need staff to manage it. Moving stuff around is murderously difficult and very labour-intensive. We do not give up hope. We know that we are struggling with very limited resources, but we still take great pride in the service we provide and we do our best.

The Deputy asked about other responsibilities that we might have. Our major responsibility is to make accessible the records of the Irish State. That is what we are statutorily bound to do. I focused on genealogy today, because that is the subject of the committee's hearings, but I could talk for hours and hours about all the other things we do in the National Archives which are equally important and sometimes more important than our genealogical services.

We never had any exhibition space in the Bishop Street building. We have created a number of travelling exhibitions, which are panels with digitised images of documents and other things on them. We look with envy at the National Library's beautiful exhibition spaces, which they are so lucky to have. They have done a wonderful job in converting the old Heraldic Museum into a spanking new exhibition space, with two terrific exhibitions this year. We do online exhibitions. The Deputy referred to our contextual material that accompanies the census, of which we are extremely proud, but the money ran out for that. It costs about €5,000 to provide a good dose of information about each county. When money starts to flow again, we are hoping we can finish that off so that every county in Ireland will have a section with photographs and

historical information on what is going on. We did an exhibition this year on Ireland's entry into the European Union, which is currently travelling around the library system in Dublin, and we received a lot of praise for that.

I will move on to Senator Mac Conghail's questions. Our knowledge of the position regarding the 1926 census is that the Central Statistics Office is opposed to its early release. We did a number of exercises because we thought that this was about data protection issues, as there could be people in the 1926 census who are still alive. We worked out a way to redact those names, so that would not have been an issue. I think it is more about the guarantee of confidentiality that was given in 1926. There are worries about that. There are respectable arguments on both sides of this debate, but I would ask the Department to elaborate a little more on it, since we are not the key player in the decision to release the material. We would love to see it happen. We think 90 years is more than sufficient for these records to remain closed, and it would be marvellous to be able to compare our last pre-Independence census with our first post-Independence census and examine the many changes which happened in that decade, to which Ms O'Flaherty has just referred. We do not see this as a possibility at the moment. It is not on our radar.

In terms of private sector versus public sector, things have changed quite significantly, as many of the private sector operators - certainly the two with whom we work, Eneclann and ancestry.com - have become very open to flexible partnerships, as committee members will have heard from Mr. Brian Donovan, with whom we work all the time on many things. The basis of our strategy is that we are in partnership with them and the LDS to try to do time-limited exploitation. That goes along with a bunch of what we call the crown jewels, which are the really special things, such as the Tithe Applotment books, that all go up for free. To give Eneclann its due, it has now expanded the number of record series that it will allow us to put up for free without any intervening period of commercial exploitation. We have done some very interesting work with ancestry.com and we hope to continue that. We are open to partnership with anybody as long as it does not cost us any money. That is basically the issue. If we can enter into fruitful partnerships with any organisation, whether commercial or voluntary, we are very happy to do that. I see that as being the future for practically everyone.

The Senator asked a very important question about the sequence of important records that should be made available. The Catholic parish records are gigantically important due to the tragic loss of records in 1922, including in particular the 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851 censuses, which was a dreadful loss. The Catholic parish registers are then centre stage as our major demographic record with names of people for the 19th century. They are the only thing that comes close to replacing the loss in 1922. I have made no secret of my desire to see these records available free of charge online, properly indexed and linked to an image. That is the gold standard for genealogical websites. We should be able to see an image to verify the transcription or the index that has led us to it. Without that, I do not think we can be happy.

The second thing is the GRO, and the Department has already informed the Senator what the situation is. I stated in my submission that it would be marvellous if the certificates up to 1914 could be made available. It would be fascinating if officials from the GRO could let us know exactly what its revenue stream is for its genealogical records, as opposed to the current business of supplying birth certificates to people for passports and so on. It has a thriving revenue stream. It would be good to know what exactly it is earning from the genealogy side, and if there was a way of replacing that in some way so that the records could be made available for free. If we had those two sets of records, along with what we have and will have, we

would be in a very healthy position in respect of the rights of citizens and the diaspora to free access to our cultural heritage.

The other ones are the land records, which are hugely important. The Irish Land Commission records should not be closed to the public. They should be available and easy to access. The Land Registry instruments, which are extraordinarily interesting records which I describe in my submission, should be in the National Archives, but we have nowhere to put them - there is no space. They alone would be a fabulous resource, from the 1890s on, for the instruments that underlie land transfer. They tell one on what conditions land was transferred, often from parent to child. One gets all kinds of names in them. It is absolutely fabulous stuff but, again, we are up against resourcing issues there.

We are a fair bit along the way. There are differences of opinion about free access versus charging for records. We should try to keep records free to access as far as possible. We ourselves destroyed a vast quantity of our wonderful genealogical records. We cannot blame the British or anybody else for it. We did it to ourselves - congratulations. We also forced a large number of our population to emigrate over the years from the late 18th century on, and in the course of the 20th century people had to leave this country, and it is only fair that they should now be able to have access to really important information about their ancestors and the environment in which they lived. It is a gift we should give them as some recompense for the fact that people were driven out of this country by economic necessity. I have made no secret of my opinions on this. I really think we should be looking at providing free access to these records.

Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú: I dtosach, is mian liom fáilte a chur roimh na finnétithe anseo inniu.

First, I will declare an interest for the record, as I am chairman of the Irish Family History Foundation, which made a submission here the day before yesterday.

These hearings are a good indication of the diverse range of interests in the area of genealogy in this country, and something we should be pleased about. That is our asset - that there is such a diverse interest. That was quite evident here on the last occasion. We could find much common ground in the discussions.

I agree with Senator Mac Conghail on the need to tease out any issues of tension which may exist in regard to the fee-or-no-fee issue. That important matter was raised at Tuesday's hearings. Mr. Michael Merrigan posed an interesting question: does it have to be either or? That might be a starting point for discussion, not necessarily today but in the future. I welcome the clarification from Mr. Kevin Lonergan on that particular issue because it possibly is a move forward from where we were in the past. I would even like to think it was not only the recession that brought about that change. That in itself is important when there is a lack of funding. It is also important to look at how we go forward. If we want funding to develop particular amenities and if the funding is not there in the future, we must find ways of finding it. That is something we should be able to tease out and discuss as well.

I understand the concept of the hearings - perhaps it is Deputy Catherine Murphy who was responsible for them to some extent, and I congratulate her on that - is to get as many views as possible from the stakeholders, which is really a clinical word, or those who are interested, and then decide whether the committee can make a contribution to a national plan involving all the players in that way. That is, perhaps, one of the questions I would pose today. Can they see a process developing in which that may happen? It is unnecessary, for instance, to have duplica-

tion, particularly if there is a cost involved in it. We all must agree that the assets belong to the whole nation and, if they do, it should be possible to sit down and discuss it.

I compliment the Department and the Minister, Deputy Deenihan, on the seminar that was held, which I believe was helpful. It may not have reached a conclusion but, generally, such consultative processes do not reach a conclusion immediately. At least we became more aware of exactly what strengths and, perhaps, weaknesses exist. However, we also began to see considerable common ground. I certainly did. I saw it again on Tuesday here. The Department should get the credit for taking that initiative.

I would like to hear their views as to how that might go forward in the future. Whatever - I use the term advisedly - "vested interests" are involved right across the board, there should be one common interest of doing what is best for our heritage, people and history. That does not mean I believe one must lose autonomy. I do not believe it should always be necessary to create a federal approach rather than a single unilateral approach. That is something the committee might consider.

I would like to hear views on how we might pool resources without necessarily diluting the identity of each of the players. I put the same question yesterday. I have seen other areas - for instance, in sport nationally - where that has been achieved. I give only one example, and there are many more.

There are a couple of milestones, and the one achieved by the Department was important. Today is another milestone. It would be a pity if we lost the opportunity and the potential that come out of this, and the word "compromise" need not even be part of it. Perhaps Ms Crowe's point about partnership is a good one. We must start in recognising each of the groups and the role they play, and then if we have to tease out the free or pay-per-view issue, that can be done as well. There must be a formula and a forum for doing this, and I believe this is the first part of that forum.

I would like to hear views coming back. Do they see an opportunity? The Department has already made the point and I understand it will work with anybody involved. Ms Crowe has spoke about partnership and there seems to be something developing there that could be looked at more closely. I do not even know the process for this committee in bringing that forward. If that were to happen, we would be achieving something important in terms of what we are discussing here today. I would like to hear views from each of the witnesses today. Do they see opportunities not only for consultation but for meaningful engagement on the way forward?

Deputy Sandra McLellan: I thank the witnesses for their interesting presentations.

On the issue of the 1926 census and whether or not a breach of confidentiality arises, I want to know the position of the Department in that regard. Are there safeguards we should be seeking to put in place, or are the current safeguards adequate?

Regarding the small number of parish registers and the delay in progressing that due to budgetary difficulties, what level of investment is required and how long would the project take to complete?

I recall the work done in Trinity College on the Down survey and digitisation. Is there information that would be useful, perhaps combined with current records, or do the records date too far back to be of any use?

Ms Fiona Ross: In response to Senator Ó Murchú, of course there is always a process to be followed and we would welcome any role in that process. There has been an ongoing process for many years in this area. In Tuesday's session there were references to the Teehan report of 1998. It gives those of us on this side of the table a heavy heart to think that we may have to begin a long process again. I have met the family history foundation, the association of Professional Genealogists in Ireland, APGI, and all the other participants at the National Library. Indeed, we have met our colleagues from the archives and the Department on many occasions. We also had the session to which Senator Ó Murchú referred, approximately 18 months or two years ago, chaired by former Mr. Justice Bryan MacMahon. In many respects, the issues, challenges and items for discussions are well known and well socialised, and it is time for action and change. I would like to make that point strongly.

With regard to funding, one of the issues for us at the National Library is that we look at some of the relationships that the archives have developed with some of the commercial partners. Our challenge within the National Library concerns our having sufficient staff resources even to enter those negotiations and contracts.

On the issue of possible costs and funding, I will answer the question directly in terms of parish registers. This is also an investment and should not be seen as an unnecessary cost. The marketing and PR costs associated with The Gathering amounted to many millions of euro and represented money well spent. I congratulate those involved in The Gathering. Where a percentage of that investment is in genealogical records - in my case, the ones we hold on microfilm are the parish registers - the economic value that this seed corn can create is such that 70 million people can sit in their own homes and identify their Irish ancestry and then plan their trips to Dublin, Cork, Kerry, Roscommon and Leitrim. It is a long-held belief of the National Library that we should decentralise genealogy. We would love everybody to bypass Kildare Street. We have two members of staff dealing with 7,000 people, who must queue up on a Victorian staircase in the heat of the summer to try to see our two unqualified but hard-working genealogists. This is an investment. Where one sees an investment in jobs, enterprise and creative industries, one should realise there is an investment to be made in this field that will categorically pay a return to all involved. With regard to the specifics surrounding parish registers, we are in receipt daily of offers by those who would do the work for free. At this point, we have held off on making any decision simply on the basis of our internal resources required to handle a project of that scale. It is something we would love to explore. Free is a good number and obviously there will be resource constraints but we would certainly love to be able to move forward on that agenda specifically.

Mr. Chris Flynn: Let me address a few of the issues that have arisen in my area specifically. I am the desk officer for both the National Archives and the National Library of Ireland. I take the criticism on staff numbers in both organisations and I must put up my hand and say it is a factor of the funding that is available to the Department overall. There is a moratorium in place and we just have to soldier on with the numbers of staff permitted. Despite the reduced number of staff, the staff in both the National Archives and the National Library of Ireland are doing tremendous work and they are still providing a good service to the public.

A question was asked about the 1926 census. The Minister has set up a working group comprising officials from the Department, the Central Statistics Office and the National Archives to examine the issues surrounding the census and the question of how the project can be advanced. A number of issues arise, the first of which is the legal issue to which members have referred. The Statistics Act has a 100-year rule and the CSO is not about to recommend a change in that

regard. Another issue concerns where the project might physically be carried out. The 1926 census returns are not in the same condition as the returns for 1901 and 1911, on which Ms Crowe and I worked. They are just the paper returns. The 1901 and the 1911 results were put on microfilm and were much easier to digitise for that reason. We have a spatial requirement. The project must happen at the premises in Bishop Street because it is secure. We would need staff to carry out the project, but not any old staff. They would have to be relatively technically adept. The working group is currently examining all these issues and will be making a recommendation to the Minister in the coming weeks. Until this process is concluded, I will not be in a position to shed much more light on the issue.

On the question of maximising the return from genealogical records, there is tremendous potential. When we finished working on the 1901 and 1911 censuses and the material was put online, we certainly did not regard that as the end of the project, because the end involved finding a way to maximise interest abroad in the website and to use that website to get people to land here. We have had discussions with Tourism Ireland and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport over recent years. There are ideas on how the project could be carried out on the website. We have a number of website links already and they will generate traffic in other directions. We hope that can be developed to a more productive level.

Digitisation is the other big problem we have in both institutions, apart from staffing. We have no issue with commercial partnership if it works. In Denmark, the authorities went to the market and got Google or another multinational company to agree to digitise many of the holdings in the Royal Danish Library. The condition was that the contractor digitising the material got rights for either five or seven years. Even with that condition attached, anyone seeking to see the material with a Danish IP address got the material free of charge. The archive officials were able to maximise income from the Danish diaspora in the United States and elsewhere. That is possibly one model that could be examined. It would still give the Irish citizen the material online free of charge. We are very keen to be involved in partnerships with the admittedly reduced resources at our disposal.

Deputy Murphy mentioned storage. In the past, many potential schemes were proposed for the National Archives building in Bishop Street. We are now considering one we believe we can sell at ministerial and other levels. We have recently had a cost-benefit analysis completed on it, and we hope that a new logical scheme to maximise the use of the space in the very large building in Bishop Street might proceed. We will know in a few months. There is so much wonderful material in the archives that an exhibition space must be a *sine qua non* and a priority.

Ms Catriona Crowe: Deputy McLellan asked about the wonderful Down survey site, which is regarded as fabulous by anyone who has examined it. I am not actually sure whether what are called the books of survey and distribution on the site have been digitised yet, but if not, it will certainly be done. We have a set of those in our possession at the National Archives and are very happy to share them. They provide the names of landholders in Ireland before 1641 and also in the 1680s. They comprise the record of the massive transformations in land ownership that took place in the 17th century, the key century for changes in land ownership, particularly from the old Gaelic order to the new ascendancy. There are names in those records that one will not find anywhere else. They are incredibly valuable genealogically and in terms of social and economic history. This is an example of how we are quite happy to share our material with any project that creates a website that is free to access. It gets the job done and the material is made available. A link is created between our website and that of the project. We must be as flexible

as possible about this and ensure that anybody with a good idea is entertained. For example, we are now entering the year that will commemorate the outbreak of the First World War. There are plans for the State to hold various events, which I hope will be very innovative and interesting, to mark that anniversary. The big event will be the Imperial War Museum's fabulous website called Lives of the First World War. We have been engaged with the war museums for the past two years. I am on the steering committee for that project. We have given the museum authorities the entire database for the entire 1911 census, so people will be able to use it as one of the elements relating to the 250,000 combatants from Ireland, 30,000 of whom died. We are very happy to engage in partnerships with anybody who will use the material in an innovative way as long as it is free to access, as this project will be.

The first phase of a fantastic project that relates to both the decade of centenaries and genealogy - namely, the project on the military service pension files - will be launched very shortly. The military service pension files deal with people who applied for pensions due to their active service from 1916 to the end of the Civil War in 1923. There are 285,000 files altogether which is a gigantic collection. It is hugely informative and contains all kinds of names that will not be found elsewhere. We are hoping the first phase will be launched in January. That will deal with all the survivors and veterans of 1916. We are well ahead of the posse in terms of getting all that up online, free to access. It will be a totally online release. We will not be able to do that for the others because it is too resource heavy.

The other side of that is getting a new building for the Military Archives, which I believe is finally on the cards, so the many people who will want to see this material when it is released will have somewhere to view it. We helped out the Military Archives with the Bureau of Military History material, which is another fantastic genealogical resource that is now online due to the generosity of our own Department which paid for that to happen.

We took the duplicate statements from them back in 2003 when they were released because the stream of people coming to see them was so huge. People have a big interest in this material so we need to facilitate that. Over this decade the archival project must be way up there, front and centre, as part of what our aspirations will be.

Senator Jillian van Turnhout: I apologise for being delayed, as I was speaking in the Seanad. I come to this more as a citizen member than as a genealogical expert. My experience is that *irishgenealogy.ie*, as well as the National Archives and National Library sites have always been excellent. I have seen the impact of the reduction in staff, however, which affects waiting times for overseas visitors. The staff are trying to do their best but we need to examine the impact such cuts are having. We must also examine the fact that not everything can be stored at Bishop Street. I have seen the frustration of people who have travelled a huge distance, yet need to return tomorrow which is sometimes impossible for them to do. Alternatively, they may get a file tomorrow but find that they need something else and have to return on another day. We are still in a climate of cuts, so are there any plans to limit hours? Are there any further cuts we need to be aware of in preparing our report here?

The CSO's 1926 census was mentioned and I hope we will be asking the CSO representatives in here. There was a commitment in the programme for Government to release the 1926 census. I do not accept the arguments for not doing so, because when people filed out that census there was no stay on releasing it for 100 years. There are many good reasons for releasing the 1926 census, as Ms Crowe has outlined.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): There is a vote in the Seanad.

Senator Jillian van Turnhout: Thank you, Chairperson. From my work on family history, I got very excited about digitising the Catholic parish records. I have used the *rootsireland.ie* site but a link to images was mentioned. We need that extra information but I am not always absolutely sure that it is the person I am looking for, since the information on that site is quite sparse at times.

Are the National Archives and the National Library allowed to generate revenue? We have been talking about free-to-access and bringing in companies but is there another way? I imagine there is a big appetite for people to pay a nominal fee. Why can we not have a model we could enter into with a company, such as Eneclann or Ancestry? Many companies could be tendered to work with the National Archives or the National Library. Are they allowed to generate revenue to support other areas?

What should our report seek concerning the church registers? Having listened to the witnesses, they have gone around in circles, so we do not want to signpost them further around that circle again. I would welcome it if the witnesses could tell us what needs to happen.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail: I meant to ask Ms Ross a supplementary question. She showed a slight exasperation at the end about not wanting to go on another process, but I do not necessarily think that is the case. Can she highlight what she thinks are the actions going forward?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I should have declared a conflict of interest at the beginning, as I did on Tuesday, in that I have some shares in Eneclann. I wanted to put that on the record.

It is obviously a great improvement that there is one central location for the website, but is that advertised? People who do not know that is the official portal may not find it obvious to visit that site. Are there any proposals to separate that out or advertise it?

The project must be seen as an investment in terms of bringing in tourism. We did not select the title from a purely economic viewpoint. The value, however, has a number of different meanings. The reduced VAT rate that will generate tourism is comparable in that we can see it is an investment that will bring a return. At the same time the investment could be made in an entirely different way that would generate exactly the same thing but which may have a longer-term return on it. Perhaps the witnesses could say something about that.

I know the Catholic records are in the National Library but I found them difficult to go through. One must get used to the different patterns of writing and some of them are in Latin. Some of them were also kept in bad conditions, as one can see from the microfilms. What are the challenges in digitising those records? Is it about ownership or translating from that format to another?

As regards philanthropy, is there much capacity or is the prospect being over-hyped? The witnesses might tell us what part philanthropy plays in this regard.

As regards costs, I may have got it wrong about the Valuation Office's records. Will they go to the National Archives? One must pay to consult council books and maps there and one also pays with the GRO. I have never had a problem with paying because I did not want to consult 25 different Paddy O'Briens, but it can be expensive when one goes about it that way. It is incredibly useful to be able to search for material online.

When one considers the cost of travelling, a modest charge is not objectionable. A point

was made about the IP address. A different way of approaching it would be for people to turn up in person to view material in the National Archives or the National Library. I would be interested to hear what the witnesses have to say about that. We are all interested in this topic, not just personally but in how we can see a timely progression. The witnesses have been at it a lot longer than most of us.

Ms Fiona Ross: Senator Mac Conghail sensed my frustration. The good news on the Catholic parish registers at the National Library is that we have made a digital copy of them, which we did for preservation and conservation reasons at a minimum so that there is a backup copy to the microfilm. Microfilm is a 20th-century access format. The format that should be used in the 21st century is digitised online content.

To answer both questions at the same time, the digital images of Catholic parish registers are not indexed. We have the images in a digital format but they need to be indexed and then put into a database. In simple terms, what would make that happen is if a few members of staff - which I do not have - or an allocated number of staff could prioritise this project within the National Library. I am quite creative and have come up with ideas in the past. However, the National Library is a growing deposit library and must deal with other collections. We have stalled in progressing the Catholic registers but they are ready to go. We just need to prime the pump in a modest way to get over the line.

We are completely agonistic on whether it is done through a commercial or philanthropic arrangement. Our absolute desire, having gone as far as the digital image, is to make them available for free. We will work with the Department and other parties to come up with a model that will work. In the past, the National Library went to tender for several of our large collections, namely the newspaper collection and the photographic archive consisting of 5 million photographs. We withdrew from tendering processes two years ago simply because of staff resources. One might win a contract, but as Ms Catriona Crowe and Mr. Chris Flynn know well, one has to fulfil the terms of the contract. One has to give the people involved in a project access to the materials to work with it and so forth. Such project management can be overwhelming for an organisation with the small number of staff we have.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail: Would Ms Ross prioritise this over the 1922 census? Does she agree with Ms Crowe that this register has heritage tourism potential?

Ms Fiona Ross: Absolutely. These registers are ready to be made available. There have been challenges in the past in making these records more accessible but we do not believe they exist anymore except on the resource side.

Ms Catriona Crowe: I share Ms Ross's desire for the Catholic registers to be made available free to access. However, there are many other issues about these registers, not least their safety. The National Library collection is on microfilm made many years ago from the original volumes. We do not know the conditions or state of these original volumes. It must be borne in mind the Roman Catholic Church is a private organisation. This issue will have to be resolved at a very high level in terms of the regular church-State talks that take place. We urgently need to have a survey of Catholic parish registers across the country and their condition. Do they need to be preserved differently? I know in some dioceses they are well preserved but by no means in all. Some of them could be in outhouses and sheds.

Ms Ross and I visited the Episcopal Conference in Maynooth where we found ourselves with five bishops and a cardinal. It was an interesting afternoon where we challenged them as

to their responsibility for this major irreplaceable piece of our cultural heritage, pointing out it is a public good. They were very receptive with one exception. However, nothing has happened since. I know the wheels of God grind slow but a year and a half is a long time to wait for some kind of a response on this.

The Roman Catholic Church also has rights, as it sees it, when it comes to the microfilms in the National Library. It may be that it would not be amenable to the desire to have them digitised and put online, either for money or no money. In fact, the idea we might charge for them might be the red rag to the bull that might drive the whole project off the rails. There has been no agreement from the church, as yet, that this can happen.

There needs to be a commitment made by the church to the State as to what is to happen with the Catholic parish registers. They are far too important to be left in private hands, whether it is the Irish Family History Foundation or the dioceses, unless they can give a guarantee that they will be preserved. It must be remembered that the diocesan records the National Library has only go up to 1900. What about the later 20th century cohort of records? There are many complex problems with this matter which need to be resolved at a high level.

I mentioned the public good. I have no problem whatever with State agencies generating revenue. There is no guarantee that any revenue generated by the National Library or the National Archives can be kept by them. Instead, revenue might be swallowed up by the Central Fund and not be ring-fenced for projects in the National Archives. Some years ago, in partnership with the Royal Irish Academy, the National Archives published a study on the 1911 census which has made tidy profits for us but we have been told we cannot keep them. What is that all about?

I believe our national cultural heritage is a public good and should be treated in that way. I am delighted we do not charge for entry into our libraries and museums. We do not want to get to the point that everything is subject to the philosophy of making money, that everything has to be revenue-generating. If we had charged for the census online, we would not even have had a tenth of the users we have had and people would have thought it was mean-minded. The goodwill we got from our citizens and the diaspora for making it available free has been priceless.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail: Chairman, I believe that should be reaffirmed in our report.

Ms Catriona Crowe: Philanthropy is great but it is not as available as everyone thinks it is. People come to Farmleigh regularly but we do not end up with them queuing up to give us vast pots money to spend on our cultural heritage. It would be lovely if we did but it is not happening. We were fortunate to get the bequest we did to deal with the registered papers of the Chief Secretary's Office. A professor of French in California, who had never come to Ireland but had Irish relatives, left a good sum of money for heritage projects which we bid for and got. However, that money is going to run out and we will have to mainstream this project because it is one of the most important collections we have. The National Archives can apply to the Wellcome Trust for funding to catalogue, preserve and index our medical records. Last year, for example, we took in the records of Grangegorman, a significant body of extraordinary material going back to the 1840s.

Senator van Turnhout referred to the problem where someone travels to the National Archives to look at some material only to discover it is in the Four Courts and they must wait a day for it to be retrieved from there. There is nothing we can do about that until we can gather all our collections together under the one roof. The economic common sense and customer service

aspects of uniting our collections are obvious.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I thank the delegations for their contributions which will assist the committee in its deliberations on this matter.

Sitting suspended at 3.50 p.m. and resumed at 4.15 p.m.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): We will continue our consideration of the topic, developing a plan to capture the full value of our genealogical heritage with our second group of representatives. I welcome Mr. John Slyne, Mr. Eric Booth, Mr. Brad Argent and Ms Rhona Murray of *Ancestry.com*; Ms Annelies van den Belt, chief executive; Mr. David Thomson, chief operating officer; Mr. Brian Donovan, director, Brightsolid Online Publishing, on behalf of DC Thomson Family History; Mr. Steven Smyrl, Mr. Colm Cochrane, Mr. Richard Flatman, Ms Ann Robinson, Ms Rosaleen Underwood and Ms Linda Clayton from the Council of Irish Genealogical Associations. I thank all of them for their attendance. I propose that we hear from them in the order in which I introduced them. Is that agreed? Agreed.

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 or an entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Members are reminded of the long-standing ruling of the Chair 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. I also advise that opening statements and any other document representatives have submitted to the committee may be published on its website after this meeting. I call on Mr. Slyne to address the committee.

Mr. John Slyne: I take the opportunity to thank the joint committee and our colleagues from Eneclann for inviting us to participate in what we believe is an important discussion in helping to create a focus on capturing the full value of our genealogical heritage. I am the finance director for Ancestry International and the rest of the delegation from *Ancestry.com* consists of Mr. Brad Argent, director for international content; Mr. Eric Booth, senior international marketing manager; and Ms Rhona Murray who is also from the international content side.

As most members will be aware, *Ancestry.com* has been the global leader in the family history sector for over 20 years and brought an extensive and unique collection of over 12 billion historical records online and acquired over 2.7 million subscribers globally. We have recently established our international headquarters in Dublin on Sir John Rogerson's Quay. This represents an exciting new investment by the company in its international division and highlights its focus on long-term growth. We have 75 employees in Dublin focused on functions which include accounting, financial planning and analysis, analytics, marketing, product development and member services and hope to grow this number further in the years ahead.

I will turn to the opportunity for economic growth through Irish genealogy. With The Gathering initiative concluding, we believe there is a unique opportunity to leverage its success by enabling the international family history community to reconnect with Ireland and utilise the genealogy sector as a stimulus for economic growth. There is an Irish Diaspora of an estimated 80 million worldwide and we believe there are further opportunities to use the genealogical

sector as the focal point for encouraging greater footfall towards Ireland. As we have outlined in our written submission, to enable Ireland to leverage this fully, we need to focus on improving access to records online, as well as extending their reach both domestically and globally in order to ensure Ireland maximises the full potential of our genealogical heritage. It is well known that a large number of Irish people emigrated to the United States. *Ancestry.com* has a significant North American market that it can easily leverage to promote Irish genealogical heritage. Providing for greater accessibility to these records both domestically and internationally will also drive employment opportunities both in public archives and repositories, as well as within commercial entities, to cater for the increased demand. Collaborative content projects also enable us to overcome funding issues and generate a revenue stream which can help to alleviate potential resourcing demands on the State.

To be clear, *Ancestry.com* can help. We concur with the recommendations presented earlier on Tuesday around the facilities of the General Register Office and revisiting the 100 year rule. We also believe that to enable us as a sector to realise the benefits genealogy can provide and create the economic stimulus, a collaborative approach between all of the relevant parties is key to ensure we are developing a focused plan that can deliver in the short, medium and long term. Experience tells us it would work. We have seen at first-hand through our involvement in local projects such as the full digitisation of the Morpeth testimonial roll how improved access can act as a catalyst for international users to visit Ireland. Recent press on President Ronald Reagan's great-great grandfather's signature on the pre-Famine roll is an obvious example. Another perfect example is the growth of *Ancestry.com* in DNA testing for genealogical purposes. Recent advances are providing an international audience with an ability to gain a more granular insight into their ethnicity, of which Ireland is a key region. Coupled with increased access to vital records, this initial and often surprising first connection with the country of Ireland within one's ethnicity can provide more contextual reasons to create a meaningful connection with Ireland and, therefore, a reason to visit.

While there are challenges to overcome, the genealogy sector provides the perfect platform to build on the success of The Gathering initiative and ensure a sustained stimulus for economic growth through tourism and grassroots genealogy. We have a great opportunity to make a significant contribution to economic recovery in Ireland. However, to enable us to do this, a collaborative approach with all of the relevant bodies will be key to ensuring we overcome the challenges we face on the accessibility of records and how we reach the right audiences. As a business, *Ancestry.com* has the expertise and resources required to make a significant contribution to the development of this plan and it is something we look forward to being involved in.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcela Corcoran Kennedy): I thank Mr. Slyne for his opening statement. I now call on Ms van den Belt to address the committee.

Ms Annelies van den Belt: I am present on behalf of FindMyPast Ireland to convince the committee that more records digitised with the rights partners create a vibrant global genealogy market which delivers direct and indirect benefits. FindMyPast Ireland is a web presence of our Irish joint venture company which brings together the best of tradition and innovation. The joint venture partner is D.C. Thomson, the 108 year old publishing firm from Dundee in Scotland which is well known to members as the creator of the Dandy and Beano comics. Members may not know that it also owns several family history websites with over 26 million registered users worldwide, including FindMyPast, Genes Reunited, British Newspaper Archive and ScotlandsPeople. It recognised the importance of local expertise in developing an Irish web service and record collection and established this joint venture with the best in the

business in Ireland, Eneclann. Eneclann is a campus company at Trinity College Dublin which was founded in 1998 and offers high profile genealogical research services and a variety of heritage and digitisation services. It is well known for its partnership with many Irish cultural institutions. Representatives of the two partners are here with me.

We launched FindMyPast Ireland two years ago and in that short time have created the largest online collection of Irish records, with over 70 million published to date, including wills, newspapers, prison records, land records, etc. We expect to double this number in a shorter duration. There is much I can tell the committee about our joint venture company and the DC Thomson family history business in general, but I will refer it to our submission and focus on some key issues in the limited time I have available.

Our success has been built on partnerships, specifically on developing partnership models which exceed expectations. What does this mean in practice and what defines a successful partnership? Our submission gives a number of concrete examples in the appendices and members will notice that the nature of the relationships we have with partners varies enormously, depending on their priorities. For example, one of our biggest challenges was when we won the contract to release the 1911 census in England and Wales on a commercial basis with a royalty to the National Archives. Rather like the 1926 census here, these records were still stored in their original collection boxes, with no archival finding aids. Within 18 months we had arranged the collection, taken 16 million digital images, transcribed 36 million entries and published them online. A total of 3.4 million people successfully searched the site within the first 24 hours, which is a testament to the stability of our technology and marketing. By contrast, in the United States when we were faced with the enormous challenge of releasing the 1940 census, we worked with a consortium of organisations, including the government archives, National Archives and Records Administration, non-commercial bodies such as FamilySearch and other commercial copies such as *Archives.com*. Together we created a part cloud-sourced solution which indexed the 136 million records and published them online for free within six months of release of the images. In Ireland we have developed a vibrant relationship with the National Archives of Ireland which is committed to free access. We are digitising and indexing the principal genealogical records for release online for free from the moment they are published. We are also publishing another 100 million records initially commercially but which will be made available free after five years. To date, we have digitised 40 million records and published 20 million, with five million being made available for free early in 2014. There are many examples in our submission of other relationship types which mix elements of free and commercial access.

Ireland has been successful at fostering entrepreneurship and encouraging significant international companies to base themselves in Dublin. With some good decisions, we could turn Dublin into a global hub for family history in Europe, fostering ancestral tourism, technological innovation, employment and tax revenues, as demonstrated in Salt Lake City in the United States. Having encouraged companies such as ours and *Ancestry.com* to base themselves here, it raises the question of what Ireland is going to do with us.

How can this presence be leveraged to help meet the demand for access to Irish records?

A thriving Irish-based commercial genealogy industry brings investment and employment to the economy. It needs researchers, managers, project managers, scanning operators, quality controllers, business developers, finance and accountancy services and many others. It delivers tax revenues to the State and a revenue stream to the institutions that own the original records. It brings indirect revenue from ancestral tourism from tens of thousands returning to discover

their heritage in person.

The committee's recommendations to the Government about the future of genealogy must take on board the economic activity that can flow from opening up more records. There is an opportunity for decisions to be made which foster growth and employment. Inertia will restrict this. It is not sufficient to invest taxpayer money in digitisation projects and to make them available in local or national centres. The money and goodwill is subject to Government budgets and changes in policy. One is left with a sub-optimal product with no incentive or budget to improve or keep pace with the technological innovation that customers demand. This requires a public private partnership with commercial publishers who are experts in delivering this service. To engage the worldwide Irish, customers require instant access to fully indexed records. They need to make rapid progress in their research and they demand attractive tools to allow them to find, build, share and connect with their heritage in meaningful ways. Commercial genealogy companies are willing to invest in bringing records online faster, in greater volume and to a higher quality. This is our core competency. They can offer the technological innovation, customer focus, global marketing required to service the needs of the diaspora globally and to ensure maximum value from the nation's archival treasures. We ask the committee to recommend that the State should allow innovation with its public heritage. This will result in more users of these resources, a more engaged audience, and a massive expansion of digitisation.

The prevailing ideology in Ireland has been that free access to records online is required to ensure accessibility and the engagement of the diaspora in order to feed roots tourism. We argue that the free versus pay-for-access argument is a false dichotomy, which has delayed or halted important initiatives that would better realise the accessibility objectives. The reality is that pay sites, such as FindMyPast.ie which offer advanced online services, gain overwhelmingly the most traffic internationally, because of the range of records offered, the engaging customer experience and advanced online services, as well as multi-million euro marketing budgets. State-sponsored institutions cannot compete on their more limited resources and offerings. Projects are funded but there is no ongoing budget or imperative to upgrade the services.

While I have ve touched on "roots tourism", it is important to underline the value in our approach to connecting to the Irish diaspora globally. Our reach extends across the globe with more than 26 million registered users, mostly located in the heartlands of the diaspora in North America, the UK and Australia. We understand the importance of this audience and their part in the Irish diaspora. Our goal is to bring family history to life. We use digitisation and technological innovation to create new ways of finding, attracting and engaging a wide audience and we provide context to allow people find discover their heritage and ancestry through rich content as well as records.

Our content is distributed through multi-platform delivery, including smartphones, tablets and social media, as well as our websites. More than 50% of Internet traffic comes from mobile devices. We perform smart matching of family trees and offer DNA products and other tools to allow casual users to discover their roots without the in-depth research. Being responsive to these innovations is crucial for reaching beyond the core market of traditional family historians to younger, wider audiences who demand simpler ways of engaging. We are also much better positioned than other institutions and organisations to place the Irish records in their global context, specifically our circa 2 billion record collection. This means we can present a richer picture of the progress of the families of the diaspora as they migrated from their homeland. For example, we can make Irish censuses and parish records searchable alongside US and British censuses, passenger lists, transportation records, army service records and other major

collections of records.

Much more can be done with this by using our global reach and Ireland's rich heritage. Through all these activities, we can enrich the history of a nation. Ireland has the opportunity to become an international thought leader in this area. We recommend that to achieve this the committee should be proactive in delivering a strategic directive to encourage widening of access to digital records; set a direction for the future of public records, encouraging a flexible approach; position Dublin as a global hub for genealogy; empower people within heritage organisations to make decision that are right for their needs; support them with investment in business development resource to review opportunities and deliver projects; provide a framework for public-private partnerships to flourish; and remain open to the several ways in which this can work.

Mr. Steven Smyrl: I thank the committee for the opportunity to make a submission on its report. I am accompanied by Ms Ann Robinson, chairman, North of Ireland Family History Society, Mr. Con Cochrane, chairman of the Council of Irish Genealogical Organisations, CIGO, Mr. Richard Flatman, treasurer Irish Family History Society and my colleague, Ms Rosaleen Underwood, who, like myself, is a professional genealogist. CIGO was founded in 1991 initially under the name GRO Users Group but shortly after it adopted its current name. Its original name reflected that it was established in response to the then Government's surprise announcement that the GRO would be decentralised to Roscommon town. In the 20 years since, CIGO has been hard at work on behalf of Irish genealogists. We are a lobby group for the various national and international organisations that share an interest in Irish genealogical research. We lobby for better and greater access to source material and through our work we give a voice to those involved in genealogical research across the island and beyond. Nationally and internationally, we represent more than 50,000 genealogists.

Part of our remit is to keep genealogists and family historians at home and abroad abreast of the latest news and events in Irish genealogy. We carefully monitor the genealogical issues of the day and comment on proposed policy and legislation. From its early years, CIGO quickly began to take its place in lobbying right across the island on behalf of those involved in genealogy for which it has earned an enviable reputation. Its views are regularly sought by institutions, politicians, archivists and the press. Its stature is such that it can easily gain access to decision makers and policy setters using its influence to make views known, urge caution and initiate change.

Issues on which CIGO's lobbying has been successful include achieving amendments to the Civil Registration Act 2004 to provide for death registrations in Ireland to include the deceased's date and place of birth and parents names. This had not been done until then. We achieved the same in regard to death registrations in Northern Ireland under new regulations introduced in December 2012. There were brought in on foot of our intervention on new registration legislation in Northern Ireland. We obtained confirmation from the CSO that next of kin to deceased persons were in principle entitled to data from the 1926 census about their deceased relatives under section 33 of the Statistics Act 1993. We also secured inclusion in the programme for Government of early release of the 1926 census and obtained a decision from the UK Information Commissioner that the public had the right to obtain data relating to deceased persons recorded in the UK's wartime national register compiled in September 1939, which included Northern Ireland.

Of the various important issues currently affecting genealogy in Ireland, we consider the two most important areas to be the upgrading the GRO and its web presence and establishing

public access to the 1926 census returns. Other issues include adequate funding for the National Archives to upgrade-rebuild its current facility and to deal with the conservation, cataloguing and digitisation of its records, assistance for the National Library to upload digitised copies of its Roman Catholic parish registers to the Internet, and legislation to finally allow proper public access to the records of the Land Commission, many of which date from the 17th and 18th centuries. One cannot understand sometimes the obstacles placed in the way of researchers getting access to material that relates to people who are dead 100 or 200 years. The Minister, Deputy Deenihan, spoke of utilising the historic Bank of Ireland site on College Green to house a central genealogy centre. While it is clear this site will not now be made available to the State, the Council of Irish Genealogical Organisations, CIGO, suggests that some other location be found to progress this project.

To move on to the two obvious issues we mentioned, the General Register Office, GRO, and the 1926 census, the GRO's public search room holds copies of microfilms and scanned images of all of Ireland's civil birth, death and marriage records from 1845 to 1921, and those only for the Republic from 1922. For many years the public search room was located in cramped conditions in Lombard Street East, Dublin 2. Subsequently, to wide acclaim, it was moved to the Irish Life Centre on Talbot Street, Dublin 1 where well-appointed facilities were provided along with a promise of upgrading to online access to the records. Economic deterioration since 2007 necessitated a move in October 2013 to less suitable but State-owned premises in Werburgh Street, Dublin 2. This former labour exchange was widely considered as unsuitable but through newspaper publicity the CIGO ensured that the refitting of these premises was to a high standard. However, much work still remains to be done to make the new premises more welcoming to the front and easier to locate. The CIGO suggests that the surrounding wall to the front of the building is renovated and the rough, uneven gravel surface on the car park to the front is levelled, and given a tarmac covering. The barbed wire on the top of the wall should be removed. One might think in this instance should I be bringing the mundane and the parochial details before the committee but I cannot tell the members enough that it is the most unwelcoming place to send any member of the public, whether he or she lives in Ireland or is a visitor, because it looks like Colditz from the front. It really is bad. We understand that the Department and the GRO have done great work in making sure that the inside of the building is welcoming and is of use to people going there but if we compare it to what we came from in Lower Abbey Street it is quite poor.

The CIGO also suggests that the city council be approached to add finger bolts to the street signs to guide locals and visitors alike to the new facility. Many people have come up to me and said that they cannot find the GRO and I have had to say it is that building with the barbed wire and the awful front, and they have been astounded.

Importantly, one of the key requirements to fully develop a plan to capture the full value of our genealogical heritage must be that funds are found to complete the digitisation of the republic's civil records in order an online service can be provided. I know that Eneclann has spoken to the GRO about a wish to work with it on scanning its records but again it does not seem to have got anywhere. The General Register Office for Northern Ireland, GRONI, has digitised all of its records and has obtained legislation to allow it to provide access through the Internet for genealogists and family historians. This service is expected to commence very soon. CIGO was so impressed with GRONI's flagship facility in Belfast in 2012 that it was awarded the GRONI its prestigious annual award for excellence in genealogy.

A good measure of progress has been made in this area with the recent amendment of the

Civil Registration Act 2004 to allow the Minister, Deputy Jimmy Deenihan's Department to host copies online of the computerised indexes to Ireland's civil records. This move was widely applauded. This was an initiative of the Minister's Department and without doubt it will create better and wider access online to Ireland's civil records. There has been talk for sometime that these indexes will be available online by the end of this year, although this is looking ever more unlikely now as the days pass. Either way, the CIGO considers it essential that funding is provided in order that an online service comparable to that which will shortly be launched by the GRONI can be established in the republic. It should be one which allows access to not only the indexes but to scanned images of historic civil records.

Moving on to the 1926 census, since the early days of CIGO it has lobbied the authorities to gain access to the 1926 census returns before expiration of the 100-year embargo contained in the Statistics Act 1993. The previous Act, the Statistics Act 1926, included no provision for any embargo on access to post-Independence census records. Thus, the 100-year closure was only introduced in 1993. No access embargo was in place under the earlier Westminster statutes, therefore, under the Public Records (Ireland) Act 1867 it was possible for the 1901 and 1911 returns to be placed in the public domain as early as 1961. This meant that the 1911 census was open to public scrutiny only 50 years after it was compiled. There was no public outcry about this move; on the contrary, it provided welcome access to information given that earlier census returns had not survived.

After publication of the Statistics Bill 1993, the CIGO lobbied widely for acceptance that the embargo on public access to the original household returns should mirror that of the USA, which stands at 72 years after the data were compiled. I understand that in the past few months the 1921 census for Canada has been released. The Bill included a new 100-year embargo. However, success was achieved in reducing the then 100-year embargo in the Bill to only 70 years but the Central Statistics Office would not support this measure and the 100-year bar was subsequently reinstated.

The CIGO, among others, has lobbied throughout the past 20 years that early access to the 1926 census would be highly desirable given that virtually nothing survives of Ireland's 19th century census returns. Given the tumultuous events in Ireland from 1916 to 1922, access should surely be seen as a special case. The data contained in the 1926 census are almost identical to that noted in 1911, therefore, little, if no, confidentiality would be breached.

Having made contact with various Deputies before the last general election, the CIGO was pleased that its lobbying led to the current Government including the early release of the 1926 census in its programme for Government. The Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Jimmy Deenihan, has promoted the issue widely stating that he believes that in the context of the decade of commemorations a statutory dispensation should be put in place to allow the 1926 census to be released early. Despite this, the Central Statistics Office has refused to agree and has advised the Department of the Taoiseach against amending the Statistics Act 1993. This is where the matter now stands. The project needs the approval of the Department of the Taoiseach and this will not be given unless the CSO can be convinced of the merits of the idea.

Acting on behalf of the CIGO in 2009, professional genealogist Paul Gorry made representations to the Central Statistics Office requesting disclosure of data from the 1926 census relating to his deceased father. He claimed that section 33 of the Statistics Act 1993 allows the CSO to disclose the data to next of kin. The CSO did not disagree but rather put other logistical barriers in the way of satisfying the request. I draw the attention of the Deputies and Senators

to a letter in this respect and I presume they have a copy of it.

The 1926 census records are now held by the National Archives of Ireland, NAI, and the CIGO understands that NAI staff has compiled a rough finding aid to these census returns through which searches can be made to locate individual forms. Of great importance to the Central Statistics Office is the issue of data privacy for people born less than 100 years ago. The CIGO is also concerned about this. It would rather the 1926 census returns were opened in full, but allowing that the CSO has a duty of care as regards the data it holds, the CIGO has suggested a compromise of redaction. This would provide for temporary redaction of information where a person might be aged less than 100 and thus possibly still be living. The CIGO sees this as a sensible compromise, though one to which it would rather not have to agree.

In the meantime, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has formed a working committee with the task of establishing what needs to be done to conserve, catalogue and prepare the physical records in advance of their release, which currently can be no later than January 2027. We hope that the joint committee will give the working committee its support in this measure and encourage the Minister to push further for early release of the 1926 census.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I thank Mr. Smyrl for his opening statement. I call Deputy Catherine Murphy.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: There is not much competition among members for posing questions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The Senators had to leave to attend a vote that was called in the Seanad but they will be returning. Therefore, the Deputy has the floor.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I have a few questions. My first one is a little off the beaten track. I am curious about the DNA project and how that can link in. Mr. Smyrl might elaborate on that because, clearly, that project is linked to this. If we are to future proof any report it would be useful to have some understanding of such linkage. On the partnership arrangements about which the delegates from the first two groups spoke, clearly, a charge currently applies for the carrying out of a search and I presume that will continue to apply in both organisations. I understand the records can then be searched without charge through other sources. Is that correct? If one can charge for a dataset of five years but then the information becomes free to view outside that period, how does that impact on the business model? I do not understand how such a business would be sustainable into the future.

What the CIGA has said is a welcome reminder of what we have heard at our meetings. The key issues are being hammered home. The CIGA has been kind in its remarks on the new home, which is the scrapings of the barrel. I am appalled by this building, which is in awful condition. The move from Lombard Street to the Irish Life Mall was an improvement but now this building is even worse than Lombard Street. It is an insult to people, especially as it is the display window for our institutions that deal with people who are researching family history.

The CIGA has highlighted the resourcing of the National Archives of Ireland. We have had a fruitful engagement with the witnesses from the NAI and the National Library today. The gaps that need to be filled have been identified, and three in particular are very obvious. We need to invite witnesses from the Central Statistics Office and the Company Registration Office to come before us. We need to engage with the bishops to ensure there is no resistance to

making their records publicly available. It has been made abundantly clear that church records are incredibly important. At an earlier session I made the point that conducting research on reel after reel of microfilm is off-putting and one would want to be very determined to do it.

It was interesting that the 1911 census information was made available 50 years later.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I thank Deputy Murphy for her contribution and invite the witnesses to respond to it.

Mr. John Slyne: I will respond to the question on DNA. Our DNA product is basically where family history marries technology and DNA. It is an ethnicity test and one can figure out the value of one ethnicity. We launched this product in the United States in 2012 and it is providing some very interesting findings. My boss in the United States, who has been with *Ancestry.com* for ten years and has spent a lot of time on family history always believed he was Welsh. However, when he undertook his ethnicity test he found out that he has Irish ethnicity. It prompted him to go back further in tracing his family history to find out where his Irishness comes into it. It is a very simple test that prompts them to do a search to find out where they come from.

We also have 50 million family trees online on *Ancestry.com* so that is a major database. Once the DNA database grows and once we have DNA matches we are also able to introduce cousin matches through the DNA. The test will match DNA cousins so I have had some e-mails from fourth cousins in the US that I did not know I had. It is a new product and let me repeat that it is where technology marries family history. Its reach is such that even people who have no access to family history records will be able to find their ethnicity. We are very excited about that.

The Deputy also asked about partnership arrangements and charges for research. The number of searches within family history is significant. In our submission we state that more than 40 million searches are done on our website daily. We have 50 million family trees on line and some 600 million records are available for free online. Many people will find free databases when they search. When people join *Ancestry.com* for the first time they also have a two week free trial period in which they can search for the particular records they are looking for. I will ask my colleague Mr. Brad Argent to go into more detail on the content.

Mr. Brad Argent: I will deal with how we use family history records and how the free aspect of it plays into it from a commercial perspective. One of the great things about free material is that it gives people an experience of what it is like to see a record. It is that scopic experience of seeing history come alive. It is wonderful to have that outside the paid wall because it can help them get over the paid wall and understand the journey they are going on. Over time what happens with particular types of material, not all of it, is that it becomes commodified. Once it is out there behind a number of paid walls after a period of time one can bring that out and make it free because one is always filling the pipeline at the back-end with more material. In broad terms that is how one can make that kind of commercial arrangement. There needs to be a very strong balance between what is behind the paid wall and what is free. I feel very strongly that one needs to be able to provide access to the material for those who are not only economically disadvantaged but technically disadvantaged, so that people can walk into a local library, without the need to have any money and sit down and have the same kind of experience that you or I might choose to pay for and do in the comfort of our own homes. There needs to be a balance and an addressing of that dichotomy in the family history community.

Ms Annelies van den Belt: I will not comment further on DNA. Mr. John Slyne and Mr. Brad Argent explained the business model very well. Another dimension which I addressed in my short introduction is through new platforms and new ways of accessing data, in particular through mobile telephones. There are different ways of charging for a dataset that has been around for quite a long time and has been commodified, as Mr. Argent said, by sandwiching that product into a set of content one can produce a new product, wrapping it in nice ribbon and get people to pay for it on their Iphone.

The exciting part of this business is the combination of DNA user generated contents by people filling in their own records and sharing information - not necessarily their birth records - such as photographs and stories and the professional data we have as well as newspaper content. We are actively digitising information at present. One creates a story and part of the stories people create themselves. Obviously we are not charging for them. They are so deeply involved in the story that they want to buy a particular element that enriches their story.

Mr. David Thomson: Before I start to answer the questions, I would like to add to what my colleague Ms. Annelies van den Belt said about how pleased we are to be here. DC Thomson is very pleased to be in a very strong partnership with Eneclann and our commitment to what we think can be done with Irish family history and Irish family records is clear by the strength of the team we have brought to this meeting. There is a lot that can be done and a great opportunity. I hope all the good work that has been going on over the past few days will engender more of that.

In addition to what has been said regarding the question about how the business works, it is also about the depth and breadth that can be provided. Customers are prepared to pay for the additional content or the additional services, for example, the use of family trees, or the connectivity. Ultimately, this is about connecting records. Of course records need to be provided for free but I believe some people will pay for the convenience, the quality of the service, the quality of the product and the additional elements that can be provided. There will always be those who are prepared to pay for that service, in addition to those who cannot afford to or prefer to take the data for free.

Mr. Steven Smyrl: The Deputy mentioned the GRO. It might be worth looking at the GRO in Northern Ireland. I mentioned it in my address. In recent times, the GRO in Northern Ireland, by comparison to the General Register Office here in Dublin, decided that it was going to scan its records and create digitised records of them. I do not know whether it looked at doing this in partnership or whether it decided against that. However, we had been promised at an early stage - the early 1990s - a computerised index and as matters moved along, as technology rolled out, we were promised by the GRO in Dublin that the records would be digitised, they would be made available, there would be computers to be used for the public. None of this has happened, so much so that the old room at the Irish Life Centre in Lower Abbey Street was fitted out with purpose-built desks to house computer terminals and we still had to use these tattered old indexes. The staff there went out of their way to ensure that the indexes were rebound in more recent times because 20 years ago they had been rebound and the binding was falling apart and splitting. When it split open we discovered that it was made out of recycled Kellogg's flake boxes, which were squashed together, and they were falling to bits. In more recent times, more hard-wearing covers have been put on them.

However, the issue is that the General Register Office of Northern Ireland decided it was going to digitise its records. I and another colleague, who is not here today, Mr. Rob Davison, also part of the CIGO, appeared before a committee in regard to the Civil Registration Bill for

Northern Ireland three to four years ago. Let us say that some of their political parties are more diametrically opposed to each other, yet were able to make decisions and make matters work. They worked with the GRO to help it create the legislation that it needed and this allowed it to digitise its records, to link them to index centres and to make them available in a public search room for the public to search through. There is now more legislation in place so that it can put scanned images of the historic records online. That was to be launched this year but it may be next year. In a short time, the General Register Office of Northern Ireland, GRONI, was able to do this. We, in the CIGO, representing all kinds of users, from quite a small number of professional genealogists to a much larger number of amateurs - I do not like the work "amateur" but I am talking about people who do this for their own interest - find it most frustrating that, once again, we feel left behind by the issues. Surely something must be done. Even in the times we are in, there has to be funding for this. There is the additional matter of the amount of revenue that could be raised from this by allowing access from a distance to these records.

Senator Jillian van Turnhout: My apologies; I had to leave, as there was a vote in the Seanad.

I read the submissions with great interest. I am an amateur. I have no difficulty in calling myself an amateur when it comes to genealogy. I am also a subscriber to *findmypast.ie* and *Ancestry.com*. I can testify to what they are talking about, for example, roots tourism. If I look at the access of records, for example, in the United States of America, that led me last year to going to a small town called Watertown, Wisconsin, which, when I was in New York and Chicago, people asked why I was doing this. It was purely an interest in ancestry that drove me to this small town because three generations of females from my family ended up in Watertown, Wisconsin. I am a testament to the fact that there is a generation of roots tourism.

On their presentations and first that of the CIGA, I wholeheartedly support everything its representatives stated in it. I agree with them about the GRO, especially from the outside where it is now. I have been there twice and on both occasions, I have at least had two or three persons on the street asking where it is located. I know how to find it. On the outside the building does not look like its image on the Internet but in fairness, I do not have complaints about the inside of it.

I agree with them on the 1926 Census. As a committee, we will look at this issue further, particularly in regard to the position being taken by the CSO on it.

On *Ancestry.com*, *findmypast.ie* and the submissions they made, these all are good. I agree with them about collaborative approaches and working together but I am trying to think of when this committee is writing its report and getting down to some of the hard facts of what we need to recommend. We can say we need a collaborative approach and we need greater partnerships and strategic alliances. Will that make a difference to anybody? Will that change anything for anybody? Perhaps there was a way that they could be forthcoming for us on some of their frustrations, obstacles or wish-lists that they see, perhaps, from other countries, that drive people to their sites. Both of their sites at times will offer free access to certain records, for instance, around St. Patrick's Day. Around certain events, they have Irish records to drive people to the sites. I wonder are there recommendations that they would like to see in the report to get an idea of where are the real issues for us as a committee to examine and ask what are the real obstacles to working together. We heard presentations earlier from the National Library of Ireland and the National Archives of Ireland. They have priorities, such as digitising the church records, which, for me, as an amateur, I would welcome. If they have already spoken about it while I was out of the room, I can read the transcripts. I thank them.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Who would like to respond?

Ms Annelies van den Belt: I would be happy to start. I think both sides would probably agree that the more records we have digitised with the best technology, the more interesting it will be for our customers, and, obviously, combining it with DNA. I am not the specialist on the Irish market. Mr. Brian Donovan is and I will hand over to him shortly.

We have had lots of experience in other countries, in particular, in the United States and the United Kingdom, where we have worked with government institutions to digitise sets of records that we believe we have been able - with our knowledge and experience - to digitise much faster and in a more efficient way than they would have been able to do on their own. Digitised records are a foundation for this industry. They are a foundation for the consumer, like Senator van Turnhout. Without these records digitised, one will be able to find probably what one is looking for but it will take much longer and much more dedication.

We also talked about broadening the market. We are only looking at the tip of the iceberg of people who are engaged with this information on a regular basis. It is our duty to ensure that an increasing number of people will have access to this data. We also believe there is an increasing appetite for this data. In the current age many people are looking for where they come from.

Can Mr. Donovan speak about Irish data?

Mr. Brian Donovan: I would be happy to do so.

Senator van Turnhout asked specifically about the obstacles. There are a number of them, mostly around the access to the records and the ability to digitise those records. We have talked about some of the legal obstacles in regard to the 1926 census but it goes well beyond that. We have legal obstacles because of the Data Protection Acts to a vast quantity of record materials. Reducing the data protection regulations, let alone the Act, to 70 years, which one could do in most cases, would release tens of millions of records up to 1943 and would have a phenomenal impact on research.

There are some extraordinary legal obstacles which have been mentioned by a CIGO submission about the Land Commission. The records there are an enormous collection. We also have a real lack of knowledge within archives about what they can do with them. With the Eneclann submission, we cited the Registry of Deeds lack of understanding of what it could do with them. We cited the Valuation Office, among others.

However, the biggest problem that we have is that we can bring proposals to a public organisation and it can do nothing with them because it does not even have the staff to look at a proposal and assess whether it is worth doing. One of things we called for in the submission is to make available business management expertise to the cultural sector to help them work through this. They need funding for a range of reasons but they need help with this one because it would unlock a huge amount and would end up in free records as well.

Ms Annelies van den Belt: I should also have mentioned Scotland. Perhaps Mr. Thompson would like to say something about it.

Mr. David Thompson: It works quite well in Scotland. We have had a partnership with the Scottish Government for over ten years for the Scotland's People website, which has 1.3 million registered users. There is a revenue share model where the Scottish Government gets some revenue and we get some revenue. We are incurring the cost of setting up and running

the site. On Princes Street in Edinburgh, there is a Scotland's People centre, which has 30 full-time employees. It is cost neutral because it is funded out of what is done on the website. That is a way of opening up genealogy to people who can come in and look at records. There is a small charge involved, but there are also opportunities to view things for free as well. Looking at what works elsewhere, we are not here to advocate a particular partnership model, but there are partnership models out there that work. These are the way forward in terms of getting digitisation access and then global accessibility - something that is very important for the diaspora - and getting that online as quickly and as effectively as possible.

Mr. Steven Smyrl: Senator van Turnhout mentioned the 1926 census. This is a particular bugbear. We fought long and hard during the debate on the Statistics Bill 2013 that the census should be allowed to be open less than 100 years later. If I am filling in a form these days there is a lot of information requested, so perhaps I might wonder if I want this to be opened in my lifetime. However, the information recorded in 1926 is virtually no different from that in 1911. It is all available in one form or another in civil records, so therefore all it does is to helpfully put it into a family group situation. Unfortunately, the Central Statistics Office was absolutely not in favour of the idea of the Bill having a 70 year cut-off, and it was raised back to 100 years at later Stages of the Bill. The Bill was enacted and that was set in stone, but that did not stop us trying to push all the time. The more years that have gone by since 1926, the easier it has been to suggest to people that maybe this information could be placed in the public domain because it is so much further back in the public psyche.

It will require legislative change to enable the census to be opened. Our colleagues in the Genealogical Society of Ireland put forward a Bill to try to open the census but it was not successful. What antagonised the CIGO is the fact that much effort was made to get the opening of the 1926 census put into the programme for Government, and then the Central Statistics Office dragged its heels. However, we established, through careful questioning under the Freedom of Information Act, that while the Statistics Act categorically denies any access to information *per se*, it nonetheless seems to allow, under a very oddly worded section, that the next of kin of an individual who has died have the right to apply for his information. I believe the committee has a copy of the letter which shows that was accepted by the CSO, but it went on to put a number of very odd obstacles in the way of why that information cannot be given. These include the fact that the information is stored away in boxes on pallets, and that there are no finding aids. That may be true to a degree but if there are instances where this information is available and should be made available under the Freedom of Information Act, then the individual applying for it should have some cause to try to find it.

Some work was done some years ago to organise the 1926 census returns so that the particular townlands or district electoral divisions could be located if necessary. That being the case, the CSO should have allowed the National Archives and Mr. Gorry to look for the information he was seeking. However, the CSO stated that the issue was with the National Archives, while the National Archives stated that the issue was with the CSO. We went back and forth until the Minister for Arts, Heritage the Gaeltacht announced that he was in favour of this. The Ombudsman, to whom several people had made complaints that they could not get access under the next of kin rule, rightly decided that this would be set to one side because the likelihood was that the census was going to be released. That has not been released and the CIGO has made representations to the Ombudsman again to reactivate these complaints and to make a finding one way or the other that the individuals have a right to this information.

Mr. John Slyne: We frequently have visitors to our offices in Sir John Rogerson's Quay.

Our taxi driver today had dropped off somebody who had ancestors from Cavan who were looking for people. As we entered, the security guard was also asking us questions about Irish records, so there is a huge opportunity here. I lived in the US and almost everyone I met claimed to be Irish.

Many of our people here in Dublin are talking to customers daily. Many of them are asking for more and more Irish records and are wondering why we cannot get them all. It is definitely a major opportunity for us. We are only in Ireland two years but in our experience, everybody is looking for resources to get the material online. We have multiple examples of how that has been done in other jurisdictions, and I will ask Mr. Argent to give examples of those.

Mr. Brad Argent: We digitise and index more historical records than anyone else in the world. This is what we do for a living. This is what our friends at *findmypast.ie* do for a living. Let us do that and let the libraries, archives and other institutions focus on their core competencies. Give them the power to enter into these types of agreements. Empower them to do something about the future. One of the challenges that archives and libraries face around the world is simply the act of conservation and preservation of these wonderful archives. By digitising them, they will be allowed to undertake the core aspects of their work, and I think they need to be given as much scope as possible to do that.

They also need to be able to make decisions for themselves and their own institutions about free content versus paid content. To put this into perspective, the National Archives in the UK gets 25% of its funding from commercial relationships. That equates to about 80 staff. If the organisation decided that it wanted to make all that information free, there would be 80 fewer people employed and therefore there would be a huge amount of people that would not be serviced. While we are focusing on digitisation of records, we all know the reality is that the vast bulk of material will never make it online. It will sit offline and that is the role of our archives and libraries, which preserve and share that with people. We need to make sure that they are funded to do so. The commercialisation of it, putting it behind a paywall, is one way of doing that. The challenge for us all is how to achieve both of those objectives; making it free and making it commercial. I do not believe they are mutually exclusive.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: The one thing that is never in dispute is that there is a North-South unanimity and logic about the records. It was possible for people in Northern Ireland to get records from the census in the South about the North before they were available. There are many of these anomalies and I am sure the reverse is the case in some of the peripheral areas to the Six Counties. In that context, has the Ireland Fund been considered as a source of funding? The issue is something that unites in terms of records and cultural heritage.

There is a notion that once the records are found, then that is it. However, the reverse is the case. When I find a location, I have to be there and have to buy every history book and everything else I can bring back, including bits of stones from the ground or whatever. I am no different to anybody else. We must put this notion, that it is not a one-off, in our report because it becomes an ongoing exercise once one has made that connection, which is the ultimate connection. I am not just talking about the paper connection, but also the physical connection to a place.

My next point is about partnering local groups, particularly for church yards and graveyards, as stone records can be quite important. Can any initiatives be undertaken from that point of view? Bits and pieces are being done and it is also a very useful record in some locations.

Records were not digitised for 1922 or before the blitz, when so many military and other records were lost in places like London. There is nothing to substitute those records but having a copy is incredibly important simply from the point of view of preservation. To avoid risk, it would seem the most logical thing to get as much as possible copied into a source that provides the best insurance against the disappearance of a record or the copy of a record.

Senator Jillian van Turnhout: We can get fixated on the debate on free versus paid-for records. Unless one happens to be living or, like me, working next to the National Library of Ireland, there is a cost to going to these places physically. That is often not taken into account in the argument of free versus paid content. I would like to see access to certain records of cultural heritage but there is a balance that can be struck and that is what we would be trying to do. Deputy Murphy spoke about going to places. My experience is that it is when people absolutely know where their ancestors are from, only then do they want to go physically to the place, rather than on a wild goose chase. That is when the tourism element comes in. We should note that in our report.

Ms Rosaleen Underwood: I would like to make a final comment about the GRO. I am on a team of genealogists who work in the genealogy advisory service in the National Archives. I am dealing with the public all the time, including tourists. They are not impressed with the GRO. Having given a friend - like I do with everyone - detailed directions of exactly where it was last week, he still could not find it because of the lack of signs. Having been there myself, I would be hesitantly looking down alleyways and so on between rows of trucks and buses parked on the street. Eventually I would see a blue sign stating "HSE" at the bottom of the street. We know what the HSE is, but the first thing someone would think of is a clinic. Eventually I might see the GRO at the end of it. The sign "HSE" means nothing to tourists. Signposts are needed outside pointing in the right direction from all directions and pointing down that alley.

I have also heard complaints about the toilet at the GRO. There is only one toilet in a public building. I am sure there is a separate toilet for staff but I do not know how they got away with putting only one toilet in a public building. Admittedly, it is a very large room. In fact, it is so large that they could have fitted several toilets in it. At the very least, they could have had three very adequate cubicles - one for men, one for women and a reasonably large disabled toilet. That is the minimum requirement but I do not know how they got away with what they have.

I have also got feedback from colleagues about the lack of plugs for laptops and so on. This is just general feedback but I think somebody ought to be aware of it. I have no problem with the staff there. Personally, I find the place to be very gloomy and not particularly welcome at the entrance. It is bright, but gloomy; that is the grey. It is Christmas time, but there is not as much as a Christmas card or bit of tinsel. It would not break the bank, even in these times, to have a couple of Christmas decorations to cheer the place up a bit. There are still a good few tourists around.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: If a Christmas tree was plugged in, we would lose Power-Point.

Mr. Brad Argent: I wanted to make a quick reference to Deputy Murphy's point about headstones. I am a big fan of cemeteries. I spend way too much time in them. I am just getting accustomed to the fact that I will be spending eternity there. We have recently acquired a business called *findagrave.com*, and we are enabling people to find their own headstone and then transcribe those monumental inscriptions, preserve them, take photographs of them and share them around the world. That kind of community sourced project is very cost effective

and it makes it so much easier for us to provide access to that kind of material around the world. That is another of these doorways into ancestral tourism. A person sees that headstone and then wants to go to the graveyard and pay his or her respects.

Ms Annelies van den Belt: It has been a great opportunity for us to be here with our friends, or “frenemies” as we call them from across the room, to dive deeply into the issues in Ireland and the opportunities involved. We are grateful for being able to be present today. Hopefully, we have been able to send out a key message, which is that more records equals more people equals more jobs.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I thank you all for assisting us in our deliberations this afternoon.

The joint committee adjourned at 5.30 p.m. *sine die*.