

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS COSAINT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Dé Máirt, 20 Aibreán 2021

Tuesday, 20 April 2021

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 12.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 12.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

Teachtaí Dála/Deputies	Seanadóirí/Senators
Cathal Berry,	Gerard P. Craughwell,
John Brady,	Diarmuid Wilson.
Sorca Clarke,	
Gary Gannon,	
James Lawless,	
David Stanton.	

Teachta/Deputy Charles Flanagan sa Chathaoir/in the Chair.

Commission on the Defence Forces: Discussion

Chairman: I welcome members. On behalf of the committee, I extend a warm welcome to Mr. Aidan O’Driscoll, chairperson of the Commission on the Defence Forces, and Mr. Cathal Duffy, who is from the commission secretariat. This is the first time the committee has engaged with the commission.

We look forward to hearing from you, Mr. O’Driscoll, on the work already undertaken, the work programme, the timelines and when it is expected the commission will be in a position to report. The committee was invited to forward views and did so to the Minister earlier in respect of the terms of reference. This was prior to the formal establishment of the commission.

I remind witnesses of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable, or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as in any way damaging to the good name of the person or entity. Any statements that may be potentially defamatory in regard to an identifiable person or entity will result in a direction that the remarks be discontinued. For witnesses attending remotely from outside of the Leinster House campus, there are some limitations to parliamentary privilege. As such, they may not benefit from the same level of immunity from legal proceedings as witnesses who may be physically present. Witnesses from outside the jurisdiction are advised that they need to be mindful of domestic law within that jurisdiction. This does not apply to our proceedings today.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that we 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 the person in any way identifiable. Members are only allowed to participate in the meeting if they are physically located within the confines of the Leinster House complex. Anyone watching online or accessing the meeting remotely, as some are, should note that due to the unprecedented circumstances and the large number of people attending the meeting remotely, technical issues may result in obstruction or delay. We seek forbearance in the event that this arises.

I invite Mr. O’Driscoll to make an opening statement, following which I will open the meeting to observations, comments questions and otherwise on the part of members of the committee.

Mr. Aidan O’Driscoll: I thank the Chairman and members of the committee for giving me the opportunity to appear today. I imagine I speak for all members of the commission when I say that the invitation is welcome indeed. I am joined by Mr. Cathal Duffy, the head of the secretariat to the commission. Many other members of the commission are watching online. We are all keen to hear the views of the members of the joint committee. Meeting with the committee is something the commission identified at the outset as a key element of our consultation process. I am genuinely pleased to have this opportunity to hear the views of the committee this afternoon and to outline to the work the commission has commenced. Please note that I will not be in a position today to indicate any commission findings or conclusions as our work is still at a relatively early stage.

The Government established the commission in December 2020 and has asked that we report by the end of this year. In establishing the commission, the Government appointed 15 members. They bring a great range of experience and expertise in key areas, including in senior

management, human resources management, security policy, public and the diplomatic service as well as national and international military expertise.

As chairperson of the commission, I am fortunate to have such an extensive range of skills and experience among my fellow members. While a 15-member commission is quite large and presents its own challenges in the current environment where meetings must be held virtually, it is also something of a blessing in that it allows us to undertake work in a number of smaller subgroups in a way that still ensures a good diversity of expertise in each such group. The commission has an extensive agenda and, therefore, a busy schedule and programme of work. In broad terms, we see three phases to our work: first, issue identification; second, detailed analysis and consideration of the key issues identified; and, finally, agreeing conclusions and preparing our report. In this regard, this meeting seems well-timed because we are quite close to the end of the first phase of our work - the issue identification phase - and we are now embarking on a deeper dive into the analysis of the range of issues that we can most usefully deal with in our report. The production of our report with conclusions and recommendations will be the final phase of our work and I see that commencing in early autumn. In practice, these three phases of work are not rigid and will to some extent overlap with one another.

Members will, no doubt, have seen our terms of reference and I do not propose to go through these in great detail but I am keen to make some important points or clarifications. First, our terms of reference are quite extensive. In fact, they set out a challenging range of issues that we have been asked to address by the Government. There are aspects of our terms of reference that address immediate requirements, while others focus on the need to develop a longer term vision for the Defence Forces beyond 2030. Developing a longer term vision for the Defence Forces of the future is important given the dynamic changes and the pace of change in the security environment, including the emergence of new threats and new technologies and, of course, globally important issues such as climate change. In broad terms, we have been asked to consider the appropriate capabilities, structures and staffing needed for our Defence Forces in the immediate and long-term future. In doing so, we are to be guided by the national defence policy framework and to be cognisant of developments in the current security environment. I emphasise that the commission is future-focused but obviously starting from a realistic assessment of the current situation.

In developing our findings and recommendations, we are required to have regard to the level of funding provided by the Government for defence. Therefore, in accordance with our terms of reference, the commission is approaching its work against the backdrop of Ireland's existing defence policy, as laid down in the White Paper on Defence 2015 and the White Paper update of 2019. As such, fundamental issues such as Ireland's policy of military neutrality are outside our remit. Matters explicitly within our remit include issues around identifying and making recommendations on the capabilities and structures needed to ensure the Defence Forces remain agile, flexible and adaptive in the face of the changing defence and security environment, as well as ensuring they can continue to fulfil the roles assigned to them by government now and in future. We will look at the structure of each of the three services in the light of current experience and best practice in comparable countries. In this, as in other work, we will draw on material from the projects being undertaken on foot of the White Paper on Defence and the high-level implementation process involving joint civil-military teams from the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces.

Our initial work on structures is focusing on issues that are cross-cutting for the Defence Forces as a whole, including overall command and control systems and the important concept

of “jointness”. The latter relates to the need for structures that facilitate a joint force approach across the traditional domains of land, air and maritime, as well as the newer domains of cyber and space. This is a significant focus in national defence strategies in many countries, especially in recent years. Beyond these structural issues, our work on capabilities will require us to consider how our Defence Forces are trained, resourced and equipped to undertake the tasks assigned to them by Government.

In regard to staffing and HR, I should draw the attention of the committee to the fact that the commission does not have a remit to consider rates of pay and allowances. The latter fall outside of its terms of reference. However, the commission is asked to examine the evolution of the remuneration systems and structures currently in place. I mentioned earlier that we are on the cusp of turning from issue identification to the analysis phase of our work. One of the issues that has emerged from the first phase of our work is the complexity of existing remuneration structures, particularly concerning allowances. This is an issue that a staff subgroup of the commission is looking at. This subgroup has a particularly busy programme of work facing it and I am pleased to say it has begun making good progress in sifting through the substantial number of issues that have emerged. These include issues concerning the working time directive, workforce planning, recruitment and retention, promotion, career planning and career progression, as well as issues of gender and diversity and much more. I do not think the commission will be able to address the range of staffing and HR issues that have been raised, but it will attempt to focus its consideration and recommendations on the issues on which it is felt the commission can be most impactful within its terms of reference.

I would like now to speak briefly to the commission’s work on the Reverse Defence Force. As set out in its terms of reference, the commission will look at a wide range of issues in regard to the Reserve Defence Force. We aim to make specific recommendations intended to better leverage the capabilities of the Reserve. It is too early to say what those recommendations will be. The approach we are currently taking is that all subgroups of the commission, whether looking at capabilities, structures or staff, are tasked with addressing relevant issues in regard to the Reserve. Later in the summer, the intention is to draw all of this work together to ensure a clear and coherent set of recommendations on the Reserve.

From the outset, it had been the commission’s intent to visit military installations across the country to engage candidly with the women and men of all ranks across the Defence Forces. Our ability to conduct these has been severely constrained by Covid restrictions. To date, only two visits have taken place, namely, to Cathal Brugha Barracks in Dublin and Casement Aerodrome in Baldonnel. Nevertheless, we continue to plan for, and look forward to carrying out, a more extensive programme of visits and meeting with as many personnel as possible in the coming months. As we did with Cathal Brugha Barracks and Casement Aerodrome, we will be actively encouraging staff of all ranks to speak their minds to better inform our work. Members of the commission and I were impressed with the quality of the people we met on the two visits and their very obvious dedication to and pride in the Defence Forces and the role they play in serving the people of this country. This has been genuinely inspiring for me and my colleagues. It makes us every more determined to do our work with the same level of commitment.

Another key element of our engagement is the public consultation process we launched in January. I am pleased to say that this has elicited a tremendous response, with over 520 submissions received, including some from members of this committee, which are very welcome. The secretariat to the commission is in the process of sorting through the submissions and members of the commission have begun reviewing the responses. We have decided that these

submissions should be published on our website and this process will get under way in batches, commencing next month.

The past number of months have provided the commission with much food for thought. We have had a very intensive series of meetings with the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces, the Secretary General and senior management teams of the Department of Defence and senior officers from the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service. We also had a very useful engagement with the Defence Forces senior NCO forum. We have also met with and listened to the views of the Defence Forces representative associations, permanent and Reserve, and we will engage further with these groups as our work progresses.

Two weeks ago, we held a webinar which, thanks to the Royal Irish Academy and the Institute for International and European Affairs, IIEA, provided an opportunity for experts from outside of the commission, Irish and from further afield, to give us their views. This proved extremely valuable. It was very interesting to have such a rich and informed debate on security and defence matters, something, I am sure, many here today will agree is often lacking in this country.

In all of our work to date, we have had tremendous support from our colleagues in the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces. This support has been freely and jointly given to the commission by the two sides of the defence organisation. I take this opportunity to record my gratitude to the Secretary General, the Chief of Staff and their colleagues for this assistance. We will continue to engage with the Department and the Defence Forces as we proceed with our work, but our conclusions and recommendations will be arrived at independently by the commission.

The commission has done a lot of listening and reading over the past four months and we will do some more listening this afternoon. As I mentioned, we are moving into the analysis phase of our work. As we do so, it will be very helpful to us to have the views and advice of members of this committee who, I am sure, have also been hearing a lot about the issues with which the commission must grapple in the months ahead. I look forward to hearing and taking on board the perspectives of members and I am happy to take any questions they may have regarding the commission's approach to this important task.

Chairman: I thank Mr. O'Driscoll for the very fine progress report notwithstanding the challenges of Covid-19. It is pleasing to note the amount of work undertaken and the manner in which it was undertaken over the past few months. I will now open the floor to members of the committee, commencing with Deputy Brady, followed by Senator Craughwell and Deputies Clarke and Stanton.

Deputy John Brady: I thank Mr. O'Driscoll for his opening statement and for agreeing to meet with the committee this afternoon. I acknowledge the other members of the commission who may be watching and I wish them well in their work over the coming months. It is critical work. The commission has its work cut out for it.

That more than 520 submissions have been received shows the level of concern in regard to the Defence Forces, as well as the engagement of communities with the Defence Forces. My party colleague, Deputy Clarke, and I have made a submission on behalf of Sinn Féin. While I do not propose to go into all of the issues we raised within that submission, it covers many of the matters touched on by Mr. O'Driscoll, from the Reserve Defence Force to the role of women in our Defence Forces, cybersecurity and the really important issue of pay and condi-

tions, which is one of the core issues facing our Defence Forces. Mr. O’Driscoll mentioned that the commission may not be able to deal with complexity of remunerations in terms of the work it is undertaking. It is a critical issue which has led to the huge retention issue within our Defence Forces. Numbers are down at around 8,500 members, which is testament to the failure of successive governments to tackle the issue.

Mr. O’Driscoll mentioned the three different stages of the process the commission has embarked on. He mentioned the issue of the identification process. I want to ask Mr. O’Driscoll a couple of specific questions on that. One of the biggest issues facing members of our Defence Forces is obviously pay and conditions, but contracts are also a massive issue. That impacts significantly on recruitment and retention. Since 1994, there has been a huge level of insecurity associated with the Defence Forces and the changes that led to the five-year contracts being issued. Does Mr. O’Driscoll agree there is an onus on the commission to address the issue of contracts post 1994?

I will read a quote which I think is poignant:

We all know that there is a retention crisis. The White Paper target is not being met. PDFORRA has [established] that in the next year, that some 600 to 800 people may leave the Defence Forces. Much of that is based on the 1994 contracts.

That statement was made by Deputy Jack Chambers in 2019, now the Minister of State with responsibility for the Defence Forces. He was also pushing for a review of the 1994 contracts. An adjudicator was appointed in 2015 due to differences of opinion between PDFORRA and the Government. An important recommendation came from the adjudicator at that point that there should be a further review of the service limit for line corporals, privates, corporals in technical grades and so on. Will the contracts form an integral part of the commission’s work over the coming months?

Article 6.2 of the European Social Charter states that Defence Forces representative groups have collective bargaining rights. Recent pay talks have found tangible benefits to being associated with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, ICTU, in terms of securing ancillary benefits. Does the commission agree that, if they so desire, representative groups should be allowed to be associated with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions?

My two specific questions are on the right to affiliate with ICTU and the 1994 contracts. I wish Mr. O’Driscoll and the rest of the commission well in their work and we look forward to, we hope, a process of ongoing engagement with Mr. O’Driscoll and the commission in the months ahead.

Chairman: For ease of management, we will take two members’ observations and questions, then I will revert to Mr. O’Driscoll and then back to Deputies Clarke and Stanton. Is it okay if we do it in twos? Okay. I call Senator Craughwell.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I thank Mr. O’Driscoll for coming before the committee. I will not ask any questions on the likely outcome of the commission’s deliberations. I welcome as well the members of the commission, who are watching. I am aware of the onerous task the commission has ahead of it. A total of 520 submissions is quite a response from the Republic and I am delighted there has been that response.

The commission cannot deal with pay so I leave that and the working time directive aside.

I believe those are HR issues the commission may address in its final report. I am interested in the issue of the land component of the Army element. Specifically, the Defence Forces has three services and retention of key Army personnel is a daily negativity affected by geographical disposition of the Army. Since 2012, soldiers and their families do not receive military housing, rent allowances, soft Government loans or free family medical services, as in other international forces. As such, reliance of military families on housing or land to build homes made available by families or extended families is essential. The historical military personnel over the generations were inducted into military units adjacent to or within easy access of where they lived or came from. The 2012 reorganisation disrupted that.

The strategic military need for the State and its disposition of forces in the immediate and middle future will be north of the line from Dublin to Galway, exactly where the Army has the lowest footprint. The Army supports structure and its disposition of forces are critical for the commission. The structure of the Army, in particular, needs to be finalised by the commission before it begins to address capability, staffing or otherwise. It is the cart before the horse. I would like Mr. O'Driscoll to address these concerns.

Regarding recruitment, the proven conveyor belt for some has been the reserve Defence Forces. The reserve was in every town and village in Ireland until the 2012 reorganisation, which led to the collapse of the Reserve Defence Force. Going back to my youth, on Tuesday night in Galway city, every corner had a group of guys in uniform waiting to go up to the barracks for training. That ran across the entire county of Galway because we all met in the barracks. That is gone and, with it, I believe we have lost a crucial part of the recruitment cohort that were available in the country.

Turning to diversity in the Defence Forces, I noted this week an article in the newspaper on new recruits to the Naval Service being from different parts of the world. Why is a member of the Defence Forces not entitled to Irish citizenship the moment they sign up? If I go to the United States, walk into a recruitment office and sign up, I am immediately given my green card and allowed to remain there.

On the following issues, I am not looking for answers today because I do not think it would be right to. On training locations, if I am stationed in Galway, Cork or Donegal and I want to train to be a corporal, I have to leave my family for six months and go east. That has to be looked at by the commission. On unit culture, I joined the first battalion in Galway in the 1970s and I met my sergeant major my first day in the barracks. From that day on, I aspired to be the sergeant major in the barracks. The sergeant major developed the culture of the unit. Now we have senior non-commissioned officers, NCOs, promoted into positions with a couple of months left in their career. I do not believe it is good for unit culture and I would be interested to know if the commission is looking at that.

On the Air Corps, I and several members outside of here have been advocating for some time for the use of the Air Corps in search and rescue services. The Air Corps is involved in the air ambulance service. Will the commission be looking at and making recommendations on the conflict between military tasking and military-civilian tasking?

My colleague, Deputy Brady, raised issues with regard to the European Court of Justice. The ICTU thing hangs over our head. Will the commission look at the benefits of ICTU membership and compare and contrast such membership with a commission on pay? The last round of pay negotiations was outrageous in the way it ignored the uniformed personnel in this country.

I am sorry for throwing all that at Mr. O'Driscoll. I thank him very much and I really appreciate the time he has given to the committee. I am delighted that he is getting the co-operation that he needed both from the uniformed services and from the Department.

Mr. Aidan O'Driscoll: I thank Deputy Brady and Senator Craughwell for their questions. The Senator raised quite a few issues and he raised many more in his submission, which I have read. He was being mild on me for which I thank him.

I will first deal with Deputy Brady's points. As I mentioned earlier, we have broken the work into a number of subgroups and among the issues the staffing subgroup is investigating is the area of contracts. Obviously, the prism through which it is looking at this is in part the question of turnover in the Defence Forces and the desire for retention. The Deputy specifically mentioned technical grades. In both our visits to Cathal Brugha Barracks and to the Air Corps, the specific challenges of technical staff were raised very strongly with us and so we are becoming better informed on that. I cannot tell the Deputy what we will conclude on these things. I think both will feature in the final report, but I cannot tell him the extent to which they will feature. They are on our list of matters we are investigating.

The Deputy also asked about ICTU. This is obviously a tricky subject and I do not want to get too far into it. We will keep ourselves informed of developments over the next few months because this is obviously a live issue at the moment involving PDFORRA. There are also legal issues. We will keep an eye on it. Towards the end of our work, we might make a call on whether it would be appropriate or useful for us to make some comment in this area. I will be realistic. There are a number of representative associations. They do not all have precisely the same view and we need to respect that. We will not shy away from the matter, however, if we think we need to address it.

I will now deal with Senator Craughwell's questions. The land component is very important and I understand his point on the geographical distribution. We have not had a particular look at geographical distribution yet. I will probably be hung by my fellow commission members for saying this, but it would be our broad intention to visit all the locations if we can, at which point we might have a better view on this.

Obviously, the importance of the distribution of facilities to recruitment has been raised with us. On the other hand, however, the difficulty of having a very dispersed force in the context of causes for career progression has also been raised. I hate to proceed by means of anecdote but nevertheless I will do so. One member of the Defence Forces spoke to me about how his career had stalled. He felt he was stuck in his initial location because he had his house close by where he and his family were living. He said there were not too many senior NCO positions at that location. Obviously, concentration provides individuals with greater promotion opportunities; dispersal provides greater recruitment opportunities. It is not an easy issue, but we will think about that as we go through those issues.

The Senator and Deputy Brady both talked about the Reserve. The Senator spoke about his experience in the distant past when he was young; I am sure it is not that long ago. It is a long time since I was in the FCA, although I have to say we were not hanging around corners as apparently they were doing in Galway. We were very disciplined. The Reserve is very important. I will try not to repeat what I said in my opening statement. We are trying to deal with the Reserve in the three big buckets first. The Reserve needs to be looked at in totality with the Permanent Defence Force in those areas. However, we are very conscious of the need for specific attention to be paid to the Reserve. I am well aware of the current state of the Reserve.

I will not go further than that.

Diversity is very important. Let me first talk about gender diversity. Only about 7% of the members of the Defence Forces are women. As I have said a number of times at meetings with Defence Forces colleagues, we are effectively recruiting from half the population and then worrying about problems with recruitment. There is a big issue here. It is not exclusive to the Irish Defence Forces. I have been looking at defence forces in other countries and while some of them are better, quite a few of them struggled with this. I compliment the Chief of Staff on this. I used to have responsibility in the Civil Service at Secretary General level for promoting gender balance in the Civil Service. That expanded to the public service at one stage and I worked closely with the Chief of Staff on it. I know of his personal commitment to gender balance and diversity, but a considerable amount remains to be done. The story in the past week of the Rastafarian recruit to the Naval Service was very heart-warming. I hope we can see more of that.

The issue of giving people citizenship was raised. I am sure that the Chairman, Deputy Stanton and I would be delighted to pass that one back to the Department of Justice. I am sure they would forgive us.

The issue of training locations for six-month courses was again raised with us. Many things cause strains in respect of having a family-friendly approach and two things have been called out to us in particular. The first relates to the requirement for Defence Forces members to participate in a six-month course in the Curragh or wherever, when they may be living with their family in Cork, Finner or elsewhere. The second issue relates to overseas service, which again requires stepping away for the duration of the deployment. These are significant challenges. We will be looking carefully at the training systems involved in promotion because they put multiple strains on the individuals who have to go off on these courses and also on the Defence Forces in providing these courses. I do not have solutions at this point, but we are aware of the issue.

The issue of an Air Corps contract relating to search and rescue will be dealt with by the time we report and, therefore, will have resolved itself one way or another. I know that search and rescue is specifically mentioned among the 11 roles of the Defence Forces set out in the 2015 White Paper on Defence.

The Senator raised a broad issue that I have been thinking about recently. On the one side there is the pull to the core military duties of the Defence Forces and on the other side a pull to using its capabilities in a way that benefits the people of the country generally in what we call aid to the civil authority, including search and rescue. That tension is a big issue and the Senator is quite right to point it out. We are thinking about it and, certainly, I am thinking about it. It seems to be a very present and real issue. I will leave it there. I have tried to answer as far as I can. I again apologise for not being able to indicate any conclusions or anything like that.

Chairman: I thank Mr O'Driscoll for that. I am sure there will be an element of overlap in the further observations and questions in any event.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I thank Mr. O'Driscoll and the other commission members who are tuning in for their time. I do not intend to go over questions other members have asked because we are quite short on time but I will start with a couple of background questions regarding the terms of reference. Mr. O'Driscoll stated that the terms of reference set out a challenging range of issues that have been raised by the Government. Given that he went on to say he does not think the commission will be able to address the huge range of staffing and HR issues, does he

think the timeframe allocated to the commission for this piece of work is adequate? If the commission is not able to address the HR and staffing issues, will it make a recommendation, as part of its report, on a practical alternative to address them in their totality?

On public consultation, there is mention in one of the briefing documents of sifting through the submissions and reviewing the responses. Perhaps I misinterpreted this point and Mr. O'Driscoll may clarify it. If the commission is close to the end of phase 1, the issue identification phase, how confident is Mr. O'Driscoll that all issues have been identified if the commission is still sifting through submissions? Does that mean they have not been read or that they have not been graded? Will Mr. O'Driscoll provide clarity on that?

Mr. O'Driscoll also mentioned the webinar. It was absolutely excellent and I agree with him that these webinars need to take place more often. It was an extremely interesting event and one that should be repeated quite regularly.

To stay on the terms of reference for a moment, there are repeated statements on having regard to the level of funding provided by Government. How does Mr. O'Driscoll see that affecting his job and the piece of work the commission is undertaking? Are we to presume the commission will hold back on making recommendations on strategic advice because of it is constrained by budgeting issues or, perhaps, the political impact if it is seen to be asking for increased spending? This is an area of significant concern because there must be a hierarchy of planning in terms of the flow of recommendations and plans. Operational thinking comes after strategic planning. Strategic planning comes after the long-term national plan. The focus needs to be on that plan and it needs to take on board all recommendations by the commission, regardless of budgetary expenditure. My fear is we could end up putting the cart before the horse. We will not get the best value out of the potential of this commission if decisions are made before that national long-term goal is established.

I move on to international commitments and the overseas domain. Will the commission examine the role of the Chief of Staff in respect of policy advice to the Government? It is done in other Departments, in particular with direct advisory roles. Is that something the commission will examine?

Mr. O'Driscoll mentioned the search and rescue contract being done by the time this commission reports. Is that also a factor in the work the commission is undertaking? Is the fact that the contract will have gone out to tender limiting the view the commission will take on the future role of the Air Corps in search and rescue or top cover? Again, that goes back to the original statement regarding the level of funding provided by the Government.

I am moving down through the terms of reference that are laid out and I will touch on cybersecurity. There is no doubt higher priority needs to be given to cybersecurity and tackling cybercrime in Ireland. This was a major aspect of that webinar. We hold 30% of Europe's data due to international companies located here and there is a huge range of talent in that environment in the private sector. The lack of appropriate information and communications technology, ICT, capabilities could make this a dangerous combination if it is not addressed and if structural policies are not put in place to do so. Some €3.5 billion has been lost to cybercrime, an absolutely phenomenal amount of money. Is the commission looking at cybercrime and cybersecurity in terms of ultimate responsibility moving back to the Department of Defence and away from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications?

On the grade structure, the restructuring that took place in 2012 created significant imbal-

ance and regional uncertainty, and that is far from suitable. Nobody is happy with this as it stands, based on conversations I have had. Given the level of understaffing and the lack of defence regional development, will the commission assess the return to a three-brigade structure and of a return to a brigade based in Westmeath? Will the commission carry out a full review of the efficiencies, including assets and personnel, given as the reason for that restructuring in 2012?

I apologise because I know I am throwing questions at Mr. O'Driscoll left, right and centre but I move on to the Reserve. An issue raised with me regularly is the lack of a permanent headquarters, HQ, for the Reserve that would facilitate training and development and encourage more activity within the Reserve. One option that has been put out there is looking at one of the closed barracks as part of that restructuring. It would be one that would be central, easily accessed from the motorways and from Dublin, the Curragh and the Glen of Imaal, that would have sufficient land for small- and large-scale exercises and access to training facilities for water-based activities. Is that something the commission will examine? Will the commission go on to examine the potential for overseas participation by reservists? If so, what model is it looking at or what existing country has a system that may suit Ireland?

On retired members and veterans, is the commission looking at the potential for building on the relationship between the veterans and the Defence Forces, in terms of partaking in the Reserve, to give of their experience and expertise gained in a lifetime of service? Senator Craughwell mentioned the training location and that location also has an impact on the Reserve and on the attractiveness of people coming into the Reserve, in hand with the Permanent Defence Force.

I move on to the remunerations systems and structures and that strategic perspective of HR. Regarding grievances, be they gender, diversity or pay and conditions, one of the key aspects is representation. It can play a fantastic role in stopping a complaint becoming much more serious if it is put in place at the start. I refer to the case of Yvonne O'Rourke before the Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, in December. Discrimination against women due to pregnancy is not acceptable in society or in any structure. Has the commission taken on board the recommendations from the WRC on anti-discrimination as part of its work? Has it looked at the potential for specific strategies to address diversity and equality?

There needs to be an end to the current situation where public pay sector deals that affect current service members are negotiated and concluded with little or no input from representation bodies. The most recent round of pay talks are exactly of the kind in which PDFORRA wanted to play a constructive role and it would have done so, had it been allowed to affiliate with ICTU, as per the European Social Charter. There is reference to a pay review body in the context of the national public sector wage policy. However, given that is an ask of other public sector groups, how does that mechanism not potentially undermine the current collective bargaining structure, should there be multiple demands for pay review bodies in different groups? The current contracts of Defence Forces members are of significant importance and need to be reviewed in their entirety. They are not fit for purpose and until they are, they will not be able to compete with the private sector in the labour market.

On recruitment, these contracts need to be dragged kicked and screaming into the 21st century. They need to meet the asks of future employees and current service members. On recruitment and retention, the long-term costs of losing personnel after training far outweigh the investment in retaining staff. That has to be critical when we look at recruitment and retention.

Deputy David Stanton: I welcome Mr. O'Driscoll and the other members of the commission. It is nice to see him again. I echo Senator Craughwell's comment that in the past the Reserve Defence Force was visible in every town and village. I was a member of the RDF for some years, as were a number of other members. We took part in St. Patrick's Day parades and various events like that. The Reserve Defence Force is held in high esteem both at home and abroad. In the past, the RDF meant the Defence Forces were visible in every town and village and people knew about them. From being involved in the RDF, I am aware of the change it made to young people who put on the uniform. Their self-esteem increased dramatically when they achieved success. It was the great leveller as well, in that everyone was equal when they put the uniform on. It did not matter where a person came from or who they were - once they put the uniform on there was an equality there. There was also the opportunity to move on. As Senator Craughwell said, it acted as a recruitment body for the Permanent Defence Force. Many members of the RDF got a taste for military life and joined the Permanent Defence Force afterwards.

The Naval Service is based very close to my own area. Members of the service in particular and the Defence Forces in general are highly sought after by employers because of their skill set and discipline and the high regard in which they are held. While I do not want to relate anecdotes, I have heard anecdotal evidence that when members of the Naval Service join certain companies, particularly in the southern region, they may be offered a bounty to persuade former colleagues in the Naval Service or people from the other services to leave and join their new company. That is a positive in a way because the discipline, skill set and mindset of people in the Defence Forces is being spread out into society in a general way. However, it is obviously a negative for the Defence Forces and the Naval Service especially.

I emphasise again the situation with the RDF. On a slightly different but related issue, I note that the Canadian Cadet Organizations, as they are known, allow young people in Canada to get involved in military activities at a young age. They can thus build up *esprit de corps* and morale, a bit like in the FCA in the past. Perhaps the members of the commission will look at the Canadian Cadet Organizations and see if we can learn anything from what they are doing in that area.

The size of the RDF has been mentioned. I note from some recent parliamentary questions that its strength is down to fewer than 1,500. At establishment, its strength was 3,800 and at one stage it was about 15,000, so it is almost gone at this stage. Consequently, we need to do some more work on that.

Will the commission examine employment protection legislation for members of the RDF who may go overseas? For as long as I have been in the Houses, and indeed before, Members have been raising the possibility of RDF members going overseas. The Minister indicated recently that people in the RDF who have specific skill sets, which are needed in the Permanent Defence Force, and have reached a certain level of competence and training could go overseas. However, if an RDF member leaves a job here in civvy land to go overseas, who is to say the job will be available when he or she returns? In other jurisdictions, employment protection legislation is in place for members of reserve forces.

Career progression, diversity and the number of women in the Defence Forces have been mentioned, so I will not go over all that again.

When members leave the Permanent Defence Force they sometimes go through hard times. That may be a slight negative so I ask the commission to consider it at some stage, although the

issue is slightly outside its terms of reference. It is incumbent on us keep an eye on it because I am aware of members who have left and fallen on hard times. I know there are organisations that do work in this area.

I wish Mr O'Driscoll and his fellow members of the commission well with their work and look forward to having them back when the report is finalised, or perhaps before that, for further engagement.

Mr. Aidan O'Driscoll: A large number of issues have been raised, which I will endeavour to go through as best I can.

I am happy with the timeframe set for the commission. I am a believer in getting on with things. Long timeframes often do not work very well. The Chairman and Deputy Stanton will recall that we completely transformed the Department of Justice in nine months. Sometimes if one wants to get a job done, one needs to get on and get it done. To address Deputy Clarke, when I said we would not get all the issues covered I meant that there is such a huge range of issues that the commission could be extended for another ten years and we would still be at it. However, I take her point that at the end of our work, we may make suggestions that a certain bundle of issues should be dealt with in some way. That would be quite sensible.

On issue identification and the consultation process, believe me, we will look through everything in the consultation process and see if we have missed issues in our initial issue identification and if we need to add to that. We will definitely do that as thoroughly as we can. To be perfectly frank, we have received at least twice as many submissions as we were expecting. We are, therefore, a little overwhelmed with love but we will go through them. The secretariat and some of the members are already doing that and I have been reading through them. I thank the Deputy for her submission, which I have read, and for her comments on the webinar.

On funding, our terms of reference state we should have regard to the level of Government funding. I am taking that at face value so we will have regard to it. If one thinks about it, we would hardly make recommendations while completely ignoring the budgetary implications of what we were proposing. We would not be foolish enough to do that. We will have regard to the level of funding in another way, I think. Again, we have not reached this point in our work yet but I guess we will have a look at the level of funding in this country compared with the funding of defence forces in other countries, as a contextual issue where funding is concerned.

On the role of the Chief of Staff, we are certainly looking at high-level command and control structures within the Defence Forces, and that includes the Chief-of-Staff role. We are not looking at the totality of the relationship between the Department and the Defence Forces. I know some people felt strongly that we should do that. My view is that we have enough to do as it is. There is another process in place, namely, an organisational capacity review within the Department. I am familiar with those processes; they are quite demanding. At some stage towards the end of our work, our process and the organisational review must have some sort of conversation.

On the search and rescue contract, it would not have been reasonable to expect the Department of Transport to postpone the contract in some way until we had finished our work. That would not be realistic. Life goes on. A commission has been set up but the Defence Forces and the Department are making decisions every day as we continue our work. That means that we are sometimes standing on moving sand but that is just life. On that basis, I would not have expected the Department of Transport to defer the contract. However, the issue of the role or

potential role of the Air Corps in search and rescue is a live issue for us. I will put it that way.

Cybersecurity is absolutely critical. We have our national cybersecurity strategy. The roles of the various bodies are set out in that strategy and they are also set out in the White Paper on Defence. The cybersecurity strategy was produced in 2015 and updated in 2019. The White Paper on Defence had the same timing so they are both very much in line. They set out the policy decisions on the role of the various bodies. The cybersecurity strategy sets out very clearly the interlinkage between cyber defence, which is broadly within the remit of the Defence Forces, overall cybersecurity which is the responsibility of the National Cyber Security Centre, NCSC, and cybercrime, which is primarily the concern of An Garda Síochána. These areas interlock and one could argue that everything should be put in one box but that is not always the best approach because one needs all of the skill sets that these bodies together bring. We work within the policy framework that has been set out and will continue to do so but the committee can be absolutely assured that the cyber area will feature in a very significant way in our report.

On the question of the Reserve, a number of issues were raised by Deputies Clarke and Stanton. We do not have a mandate to cover veteran affairs as such so we cannot deal with issues pertaining to Defence Forces veterans. While these are important issues, we will not be seeking a mandate on them because we have so much ground to cover as it stands. However, we will be looking at the potential of the Reserve to recycle skills from people who are leaving the PDF. Of course, that is one of the issues that arises in relation to the Reserve. One of the key issues that people have raised with us is the potential of the Reserve to recruit in high-level specialist skills, particularly in the cyber space but also in medicine, engineering and a host of other areas. This is a really important issue, although I do not want to prejudge our conclusions. That said, this does not pull away from other potential roles for the Reserve in terms of providing surge capacity to the PDF. A specialist role and a surge role are both being raised with us.

I accept the point that the needs of the Reserve are different to those of the PDF in terms of location. By its nature, the Reserve is spread all over the country but we have not broached that issue yet. I have already spoken about the ICTU issue so I will not go back over that again. The issue of the pay review body is beyond our terms of reference. Our terms of reference do contain a comment on the process of moving from our work to the subsequent work of the pay review body, if and when it is established. Competition with private sector pay and the loss of staff is a real issue but we are not going to get into the question of pay rates. One of the problems we struggle with throughout the public service is that when we try to modernise in order to be a public service or a defence force of the 21st century, we train people to a high level in ICT, cyber and other areas and, of course, the moment they are trained, they become extremely valuable and can command very high salaries in the private sector. To be frank, that is a struggle for us all but it is a particular struggle for the Defence Forces, undoubtedly. The issue can be addressed in a variety of ways, including by making the Defence Forces an attractive place to be. One of the things I have found, having spoken to members of the Defence Forces, is that they do have a strong culture of wanting to be in and to stay in the Defence Forces, and we can work with that. Ultimately, we must provide conditions that people find attractive. That speaks to pay, with which we cannot deal but it also speaks to other issues of conditions, particularly issues of career progression which are very important in the context of encouraging people to stay.

Employment protection was referred to by Deputy Stanton in the context of the Reserve and that issue has also been raised with us. We have received submissions from ICTU and IBEC to our consultation and there may be grounds there for some discussion with those bodies. That

said, we cannot negotiate or anything like that because we do not have that authority but we can make recommendations in this space. Deputy Stanton also mentioned the gain to industry from turnover in the Defence Forces. This is something I am personally familiar with through my family. It must be borne in mind that people who leave the Defence Forces are not lost to the country. If they have particular skills, those skills are lost to the Defence Forces, which feel that loss but I have no doubt that the result is some very able people moving into Irish industry.

Chairman: Deputy Berry is next, to be followed by Deputy Lawless.

Deputy Cathal Berry: I welcome Mr. O’Driscoll and his team. It is great that they are here. I am a big supporter of the commission and the work it is doing. I am hearing nothing but positive reports on the level of engagement, and the fact that there have been over 500 submissions tells its own story. People are very interested in defence matters and the Defence Forces, and want to be involved in finding solutions. I very much agree that this commission is about capability development and that is exactly how it should be. To me, the most important element or component of capability is people. A weapon is only as good as the man or woman holding it and a ship is only as good as its crew. I am sure everyone is familiar with that argument. This is all about solving the people issues and technology is a bonus that comes afterwards.

I totally accept what Mr. O’Driscoll has said about pay in terms of the commission not being allowed to venture into the area of rates of pay. I have a number of questions for the witnesses, some of which are related to the principle or the concept of pay rather than the rates *per se*. My first question relates to the principle of paying overtime to military personnel. We know that if prison officers, members of An Garda Síochána or nurses, for example, do shift work, they get paid overtime. If staff work harder and longer, they get paid more. That is a generally accepted principle across both the private and public sectors. I would like to hear the witnesses’ thoughts on whether overtime could or should be paid to military personnel. That would certainly solve a lot of the pay issues because I do not think, to be fair, that people have an issue with the core or basic pay but with the additional hours they have to work for almost a pittance.

My second question relates to the principle or structure of pay in the context of the national minimum wage, the legislation for which came into effect in 2000. There has not really been a review of the structure of Defence Forces pay since the Gleeson commission in 1990. I am interested to hear the witnesses’ thoughts on that. I am of the view that the Defence Forces is obligated to pay at least the national minimum wage, like every other employer in the State, both public and private. Is there any way we can incorporate the provisions of that legislation, in a very efficient way, into the pay structures of the Defence Forces?

My next question relates to the outstanding pay awards that have yet to be honoured by the State. Again, I totally appreciate that the witnesses cannot comment on rates of pay or even analyse them. However, surely some pay awards that have already been approved, balloted on and accepted by both the State and the representative associations should be considered. This is an issue that the commission could consider including in its report, that is, a paragraph to the effect that all outstanding awards should be paid. When I say “outstanding awards”, I am talking about the technical pay award for groups 2 to 6, the Army Ranger wing allowances and the specialised instructors’ allowance. A catch-all sentence or statement explicitly stating that those terms should be honoured would have a sea-change effect across the Defence Forces overnight. I urge the commission to consider including same in its report.

A lot of those pay awards come from the conciliation and arbitration system, where an adjudicator makes an adjudication. As the witnesses will be aware, the Defence Forces family

is not entitled to go before the Labour Court. As a general rule, when the Labour Court issues rulings the Government accepts them and pays accordingly. I would like to hear the witnesses' thoughts on whether the status of the Labour Court should be afforded to the adjudicator, from a conciliation and arbitration point of view. If that was included from a structural perspective, it would also have a transformative effect downstream.

The independent peer review body, whether we like it or not, is part of Government policy outlined in the programme for Government. I acknowledge it is a subsequent piece in which Mr. O'Driscoll is not specifically involved but the process towards it is covered in the terms of reference. What would the independent peer review body look like to Mr. O'Driscoll? When will it be established? Does Mr. O'Driscoll see it being established in January of next year or will it be synchronised with the pay talks later in 2022? What are his thoughts on that?

My last two questions have to do with implementation. I have no doubt that Mr. O'Driscoll's report will be excellent. All the views I have heard so far have been very positive. It is like all those excellent reports that have been previously written by so many different organisations. We have a habit, and it is not just an Irish habit but probably is an international pastime, of writing wonderful reports that gather dust on shelves. What are Mr. O'Driscoll's thoughts on implementation? Will there be a requirement to establish a separate implementation body to ensure that the wonderful findings of the commission's report will be implemented in full? All we have to do is look at the White Paper to see that is not always the case.

To finish on a positive, could this committee do anything to assist Mr. O'Driscoll and his team in their work? We could very easily review the implementation of the commission's report on a six-monthly basis, for instance. From a political perspective, is there anything we could do to assist Mr. O'Driscoll's work? It is hugely important and it is a watershed in the history of the Defence Forces.

I thank the Chairman. I thank Mr. O'Driscoll and his team and wish them the very best of luck in the rest of their work.

Deputy James Lawless: I thank the witnesses from the commission here today. I will focus on the second point in the terms of reference that refers to "the appropriate balance and disposition of personnel and structures across a joint force approach in the land, air, maritime, cyber, intelligence and space domains". That brings it into my own area of interest, particularly the cyber domain. I see it as cybersecurity, telecommunications security and maritime security but I would also add climate security. I do not know if it is in the terms of reference at present but climate security and volatility around climate are matters we must consider as part of our defences in every sense going forward. I put forward those four areas of climate security, cybersecurity, telecommunications security and maritime security. They are actually separate and distinct. While telecoms security has an overlap with cybersecurity, I do not believe it is the same thing. Cybersecurity can encompass attacks, denial-of-service attacks, hacking and all sorts of different interference involved with taking down various public or even private services, whereas telecoms security can be intercepting. We had a discussion at this committee a few weeks ago, for example, about submarine cables being intercepted off the west coast. That can be telecoms security, which can be different to cyber security. They are separate and distinct but related. As I said, maritime security is also linked and I would put climate security into the mix as well.

In terms of how Mr. O'Driscoll proposes to approach those topics within the commission, I listened to some of the contributions before me and I believe Deputy Berry or somebody else

touched on how retention can be an issue. It can but it can work two ways. There can be quite strong synergies.

I worked in IT in a previous life and I was privileged to work with a number of former Defence Forces officers. Typically, they came from the old systems and signals corps. Some of them served abroad in the Lebanon and elsewhere but all of them had very strong capabilities. When they came back to Ireland or left the Defence Forces, they went out to work with private industry, some as consultants and some in different roles. They were really strong, capable people who I was delighted to have the privilege to work with in the past. That said to me there was a synergy. I do not think people were necessarily being poached by the private sector. They had served their time and perhaps done 20 years or more and were happy to move on. They had given their contribution and done the State some service. There was nothing wrong with them moving on at that point. It was a good training ground, however.

Along those lines, there may be synergies around that being a natural movement of people, which we could do here. It could actually enable us to grow our economic offering, as well as our defence offering, in terms of working in partnership and looking at career paths that span both sectors over a lifetime. There is also an opportunity for academic university courses or placements and hosting centres of excellence in those areas.

I mentioned at the outset the areas of cybersecurity, telecoms security, maritime security and climate security. I can see a scenario where Ireland becomes a centre of excellence with academic and Defence Forces expertise with that then spilling over into a wider private sector pool of knowledge that really strengthens our economic offering and our own output. I put that out there as something of significant interest. I believe the synergy is there. In the past, the Defence Forces have done that well. I would like to see that really brought to the fore in this. It is only going to be more important, over and above more conventional methods, as we go forward.

Chairman: I thank Deputy Lawless. Before going back to Mr. O'Driscoll, I will briefly throw two points into the mix. In his opening address, Mr. O'Driscoll mentioned that he will look at the structure of each of the three services in the light of current experience and then, taking into consideration what some members have said about the complexity of ongoing issues and cybersecurity in particular, also will look at international comparisons, given the size of Ireland's Defence Forces is relatively small. Would consideration be given or does Mr. O'Driscoll regard it as being within his terms of reference to look beyond each of the three services of land, air and sea and talk about an amalgamation of the services into a defence force rather than the current Defence Forces?

Second, I will follow on from a point by Deputy Berry, who is quite right when he speaks of a defence force being only as good as its people. That is taken as a given. We need to acknowledge that there are some morale issues. I believe Deputy Clarke spoke about a family-friendly environment and the need to ensure that the people who form the services have appropriate infrastructure.

My constituency is not too far away from the Curragh Camp. I know it is in Deputy Berry's constituency but it is the Army base I certainly know best over the past number of decades as a serving public representative, where people move from my constituency and actually live in the Curragh. As for the physical surrounds of the Curragh Camp, it is the largest base for serving members of the Defence Forces. The need for an overall land-use plan and the need to improve the built environment and have a land-use policy for the built environment and beyond will require a capital investment. This has been mooted in the past with only limited success. Obvi-

ously, it is not something that could be undertaken by the Department of Defence, or indeed, as a major project on the part of the Office of Public Works. It needs to be looked at and done, however. It seems to me that the commission might be an opportunity to dig deeper into how this might be undertaken.

Only yesterday, the Department of Rural and Community Development announced multimillion euro funding for rural regeneration in small towns, some of which are smaller than the population base of the Curragh Camp and some of which are larger. Mr. O'Driscoll will be aware of the LEADER programme, again, multimillion euro investments, from his time in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Then, there are urban renewal and town and village renewal schemes. None of these, however, seem to encompass the type of investment that to my view is needed in the Curragh to enhance the environment or infrastructure for the many families who live there or who will, perhaps, move there on various courses, as was mentioned earlier by Senator Craughwell. How best can we ensure the appropriate level of necessary investment or the joining together of various agencies or Departments that might be in a position to assist on that? Does Mr. O'Driscoll have any view on that?

Mr. Aidan O'Driscoll: I thank the Chairman and the Deputies. I will take the questions in the order they were asked. Members will have to forgive me. Deputy Berry has already decided that we are going to do a wonderful report, which is good. I will take that and also thank him for his comments on the level of engagement. I mentioned that many of us believe there is insufficient public debate and engagement in this country on security and defence issues. Through our public consultation, the webinar and so on, we are deliberately trying to provoke debate and discussion, which we hope will have an impact beyond the commission.

The Deputy put a series of questions to me and I do not want to dodge them. I do not like doing that but, frankly, all of them are related to pay. That poses a particular difficulty for me because we do not have a remit on pay rates and so on. On the working time directive and overtime, again, we are keeping an eye on that. I do not rule out that we might have something to say but it will not relate to the issue of pay and overtime rates. The Deputy also invited us to comment on pay awards already made and so on. We will probably decline to do so as it is not really our role. We are not dealing with those kinds of pay issues, which arise in any case.

On the independent pay review body, I cannot answer the Deputy's question. It is a question for the Department of Defence and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as to when the independent pay review body will be established and what will be its relationship to pay talks. We will not be dealing with that area.

On implementation and the idea of an implementation body, this issue has been raised with us. Unsurprisingly, people have quoted at me the implementation process around the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, which is overseen by a committee that I helped establish and chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach. That process lies in that place because a whole range of Departments is involved. One of the things many people do not understand is that the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland was not just dealing with An Garda Síochána. It was dealing with policing in its broadest definition, including social services and so on that deal with people who get themselves involved in criminal activity and all of that. There is a range of Departments involved. I was involved with the Secretary General to the Government in establishing an interdepartmental structure reporting on that to the Department of the Taoiseach for that reason. I am not ruling anything in or out.

With regard to the assistance the committee can give, it is giving it today by raising the is-

sues members have raised. Also, as I said, I welcome the submissions that have been made by members of this committee, the political parties and other public representatives. We are well aware that members hear stuff and we are receiving material on the same issues and it is interesting and helpful to triangulate that somewhat.

When we do our report in December the next step is for the Government to decide what it wants to do with it. The first question is whether the Government accepts, rejects or accepts part of the report. The second question, insofar as the Government accepts it, as I hope it will, is how it proposes to go about implementing it. That is what would normally come out of any such commission report. The Government might ask the committee to review implementation every six months, as members suggest, or the committee may take its own decision in that regard. I am sure it is within its authority to do so. Implementation will not be the commission's responsibility. Our job is to do the report and make our recommendations. We do not, correctly, have any capacity to implement. That rests with our elected representatives. In fact, it rests with Members of the Oireachtas and the Government they choose.

Deputy Lawless raised a number of interesting questions in respect of cybersecurity and maritime, climate and telecommunications security. I agree with him. There is a big range of issues here. We have a number of security experts within the commission and we have had discussions with the national security analysis centre, which is based in the Department of the Taoiseach. We have discussed some of those issues and what is very clear is that the landscape is becoming much more complex than it was even a few years ago. The ground is shifting very fast. Every organisation engaged in this area has to develop the capabilities to deal with these matters, and that is very true of the Defence Forces. This is a major focus for us in our work.

I agree with the Deputy that issues of climate also arise. I referenced that briefly in my opening statement. Climate change impacts on everything but it is also a source of instability. This country will be affected by climate events that we would not otherwise have affected us. More broadly, some of the poorest countries in the world will be deeply affected by climate change and that will have an effect on migration, terrorism and all kinds of issues in those countries. We are an island geographically but we are not an island when it comes to issues of security, which are global issues now.

Deputy Lawless also raised a question, one that I touched on earlier, of looking at the issue of turnover from the other perspective, in other words, the benefits to industry and so on from highly skilled people moving out of the Defence Forces. It is a tug of love. The Defence Forces desperately want these highly skilled people to stay in the Defence Forces and need their skills. They are extremely valuable to Irish industry when they leave. I do not doubt that but we have to find a balance. We cannot have a situation where the Defence Forces are just training people who immediately kick on and leave. The Deputy made the interesting point that people are trained and they then do the job, serve their time in the Defence Forces and move on. There is a natural balance there in people's careers that I can understand.

To turn to the matters raised by the Chairman, the point about having the three services in one service is very interesting. In my opening statement I spoke briefly about jointness. It is a major feature of all modern defence force strategies that I have examined. It means exactly that the traditional focus on land, sea, air is, for the reasons we have just discussed, no longer sufficient. More and more threats and attacks come from hybrid sources which may incorporate cyber, space, land, sea and air and we have to be capable of dealing with the complexity of all of that. Much greater jointness in defence forces is a feature of strategies in other countries and is something we will definitely examine.

I take the Chairman's point also on creating a family friendly environment for the Defence Forces. This is an issue that relates to our desire to have a better gender balance in the Defence Forces but it affects young men also. There are a number of challenges in that regard. Some come from the multiple locations of the Defence Forces and some from the training courses that last for six months that I talked about, while others come from overseas deployments. We cannot throw all of that out the window and say we will not do any of that because we want to be family friendly. We still have to do the core jobs of the Defence Forces but the question is whether we can find a more family friendly way of doing these things. I am aware the Defence Forces are very conscious of this issue and are looking at it. It has been raised with us. As we go around the barracks, we meet staff in all the different ranks but we also meet staff informally in age groups. We meet younger staff and more experienced staff and we get a somewhat different read from the different groups.

The Chairman is correct about land use and so forth. The Defence Forces have 20,000 acres of land, mainly at the Curragh, the Glen of Imaal and Kilworth Camp. There are 14 permanently-occupied locations and four rented properties around the country. It is a very dispersed estate, which was largely inherited from the British. Many of these barracks and other buildings are showing their age. I visited the Curragh on Good Friday and met with some colleagues from the commission. It was possible to see even there that the buildings have aged. I also met a lot of sheep. It is an unusual situation, but I take the point. I do not think that the commission will be doing a detailed land-use plan and I do not think we have the capabilities to carry out a survey of all the buildings or anything like that. I hope, however, that we will have something useful to say in that space. I am going to leave it at that, if I may. I hope I have made a good attempt to answer the huge range of questions posed. That reflects the great range of issues raised with us in the public consultation and in our meetings with staff associations and other groups. I propose to stop here, unless the Chair would like me to say some final words.

Chairman: No, that is fine. I do not see any members of the committee offering. I thank Mr. O'Driscoll and Mr. Duffy for dealing so comprehensively with the questions from the members, notwithstanding the strictures imposed by the terms of reference, especially regarding Deputy Berry. I think we had a most useful engagement, but there is more work to be done. Perhaps Mr. O'Driscoll will agree to come back before the committee with members of the commission, maybe after publication of its report. I agree with Deputy Berry in that I see this committee having a role following the publication of that report in respect of an examination of its recommendations, if accepted by the Government. In any event, we might explore how we might be best able to assist with further implementation once the report has been published. I see this committee, because of its membership, having a role to play in respect of whatever recommendations are made and their implementation.

If members wish to make final brief contributions, they can do so. I stress the brevity aspect. I see Senator Craughwell chomping at the bit. I ask him to be brief and we will then bring matters to a conclusion for today. We will continue to address these issues another day. I call Senator Craughwell.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I thank the Chair. I apologise to Mr. O'Driscoll for coming back in. I refer to the statement in the terms of reference that, "All recommendations by the Commission or the successor body and their implementation must be consistent with national public sector wage policy", and that that means the commission can make recommendations on pay, once they are consistent in that regard. Would Mr. O'Driscoll agree with that statement?

Mr. Aidan O'Driscoll: No, I am afraid not. My understanding of the situation is that we

have been specifically asked to look at pay structures and systems. We are not getting into pay and-or overtime rates. Structures and systems, however, potentially covers quite a lot. At this point, we are focusing especially on the complex structure of allowances. In fact, much of what has been said here is covered in that space as well. Let us have a look at that context first, and we will try to scope out whether we feel we can contribute useful commentary in this area.

I have referred several times to the fact that we will attempt to make recommendations in the area or areas where we feel we can be most impactful. There is no point in us making recommendations which we know are being dealt with elsewhere, and that is true of the pay process generally. That might lead to possible confusion and, equally, our views would probably not have much impact. That is the way in which we will approach the pay issue.

Chairman: I thank Mr. O'Driscoll. I am reluctant to open the discussion again, but I will allow Deputy Clarke to ask a question or make an observation.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I will be very brief. I thank Mr. O'Driscoll for his time. To clarify, it is stated in respect of the structures that best practice in comparable countries will be looked at. Will Mr. O'Driscoll give us an example of a comparable country which is being looked at? Is one country being used to make comparisons across the three services or are different countries being considered for the three services?

Mr. Aidan O'Driscoll: I thank the Deputy. We are of course blessed to have three very skilled people from Norway, Denmark and Finland on the commission, so those are three examples. Broadly speaking, the countries we will be comparing ourselves to are other small European countries. That is generally speaking. We have also got some information concerning New Zealand, for example, but broadly speaking we are looking to small European countries with whom we have close relations, and that is particularly the case with the Nordic countries. Those are the kinds of examples we will be looking at.

Chairman: I thank Mr. O'Driscoll. With that, I will bring matters to a conclusion. I again thank Mr. O'Driscoll and his 14 colleagues for undertaking this important work on behalf of the Government. We wish the commission continued success with its work, notwithstanding the restrictions and the care that must be taken as we move to a less restricted era with the Covid-19 vaccination process under way.

We wish the members of the commission success in their endeavours and we certainly look forward to hearing from them at any time they feel we might be in a position to assist, or, indeed, if there are aspects of the work of the commission that its members may feel would be appropriate for consideration by this committee. We would be very pleased to hear from them and we look forward to hearing from Mr. O'Driscoll, and maybe some of his colleagues, near the end of the year as the commission sets about finalising its conclusions.

The joint committee adjourned at 2.08 p.m. until 11.30 a.m. on Thursday, 22 April 2021.