



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

TU AIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

Wednesday, 10 February 2010.

[illegible]

SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 10 Feabhra 2010.
Wednesday, 10 February 2010.

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.
Prayer.

Business of Seanad.

An Cathaoirleach: I have received notice from Senator Joe O'Reilly that, on the motion for the Adjournment of the House today, he proposes to raise the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Science to proceed with issuing a roll number for a new second level school for Kingscourt, County Cavan, given that the necessary building and facilities are already in place and there is a prior commitment to the building of the school.

I have also received notice from Senator Cecelia Keaveney of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Science to clarify whether self-awareness programmes on checking for cancer could be piloted in CSPE classes.

I regard the matters raised by the Senators as suitable for discussion on the Adjournment and they will be taken at the conclusion of business.

Order of Business.

Senator Donie Cassidy: The Order of Business is No. 1, Dog Breeding Establishments Bill 2009 — Committee Stage, to be taken at the conclusion of the Order of Business; No. 2, statements on CAO applications and college places, to be taken at the conclusion of No. 1 but not before 3 p.m. and to conclude not later than 5 p.m., if not previously concluded, on which spokespersons may speak for ten minutes and all other Senators for seven minutes and Senators may share time, by agreement of the House, with the Minister to be called upon ten minutes before the end of the statements for concluding comments and to take questions from leaders or spokespersons; and No. 37, Private Members' motion No. 21 on the rise in youth unemployment, to be taken at 5 p.m. and conclude not later than 7 p.m. The business of the House will be interrupted between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m.

Senator Frances Fitzgerald: Last night on "Prime Time" RTE broadcast a chilling documentary on the lives of Irish people in totally unsuitable psychiatric facilities which would have been unsuitable at any time but which are so inadequate in this day and age, yet more than 1,000 men and women live in them. As we saw last night, they are institutionalised in such horrible facilities. The Seanad could play a role in prioritising the issue of mental health and we can begin to do so on 1 March when the Minister of State at the Department of Health and

[Senator Frances Fitzgerald.]

Children, Deputy John Moloney, will make an announcement on the new funding to be made available for mental health facilities. We must make this issue a higher political priority and I want the Seanad to play a role in it. Yesterday, I received a commitment from the Minister of State that the practice of placing children in adult psychiatric facilities would end by the end of 2011. While this is welcome, it is unfortunate that a couple of hundred children with mental health difficulties will be put into adult facilities for treatment this year. I urge the Leader to ensure the Minister of State's announcement on the future of mental health in this country is made in the Seanad so that we can begin to prioritise this area. A number of Senators across the political divide, including Senators Corrigan and Mary White, have raised the issue and we must receive a response. We have an opportunity to make a difference in an area which has not been given the priority it deserves.

I wish to raise the 750 job losses in Bank of Scotland Ireland due to the closure of its Halifax branches here. This follows 1,500 job losses in our main banks in recent months, resulting in a total number of job losses of in excess of 2,000 in the banking sector. We need a job creation plan because it is clear we have not turned the corner and the banking sector is facing into serious flux and uncertainty. Will the third banking force be implemented and what are the Department of Finance's plans in this regard? I repeat the call I made yesterday for a debate which would allow every Member to express a view on these issues. I ask that the Minister for Finance attend the House to discuss the issues and, accordingly, I propose an amendment to the Order of Business in order that we hold a debate on the banking sector today.

Senator Joe O'Toole: I note with interest that Greece has been closed down today by the first of a series of public sector strikes. People should keep that in mind when they study the Irish situation. The difference between the trade union movements in Ireland and Greece is that the former conceded immediately, or at least by last December, that the Government would have to save money the hard way and was prepared to find ways of achieving that goal. Eventually the Government disagreed, as it was entitled to do. However, nature abhors a vacuum. Nothing is happening except that ordinary people are seething with anger. Nobody is driving the process. This should not be allowed to continue because bushfires are breaking out in various public and private sector workplaces. We need to calm the situation by dealing with it now. The Government parties should be discussing how they can address the issues within their parliamentary party meetings. It is not a question of making concessions; it is about identifying ways of making progress.

I deliberately did not speak about George Lee on yesterday's Order of Business because I felt we had heard too much about it already. However, the related point raised by my colleague, Senator Harris, deserves close attention. People should look at what we do and how we do it. Let this be a lesson to those who called for Bill Cullen or Michael O'Leary to run the country. A particular skills set is required for political life and although we should not be completely cynical by saying we cannot have people coming in here, we need to consider how we can deal with this issue. The recent report of the Joint Committee on the Constitution offers one solution with its proposal that people would be appointed to Government through the Seanad. These would be carefully selected people who possess particular skills rather than celebrity candidates. However, we must recognise that skills such as persuasion, perseverance, obstinacy and leadership are required. One cannot run the country solely by having the skill to tell someone: "You're fired", or to demand that one check in on-line for a chair in the accident and emergency department. There are different ways of dealing with these issues.

The question of patriotism arises in respect of people coming forward for public service. Criticism is constantly aired in this House against the boss of the HSE but, to me, that man is

a patriot in the real sense of the word. He put himself forward to run the HSE, yet he gets nothing but stick and criticism from all sides, including me on occasion. We should recognise that the service given by such people helps to make Irish life work.

Senator Alex White: The events of recent days give rise to very important issues which go beyond the personalities concerned. I agree with Senators O'Toole and Harris on the importance of having a debate on the nature and quality of representation and what we can expect from politicians and people in public life. I have just come from a meeting of the Joint Committee on the Constitution which is wrestling with issues pertaining to the electoral system and the nature and quality of representation that Deputies and public representatives are able to offer.

Leaving aside who he or she may be, the introduction of a directly elected mayor of Dublin has the potential to bring about positive and important change to our system in terms of representation and the quality of democracy in the city. I note in this morning's newspapers that the local government (office of the Dublin mayor and regional authority of Dublin) Bill was apparently discussed in Cabinet yesterday. Can the Leader ascertain whether it is possible to publish the scheme of the Bill now? If we have to await its publication next week or in the coming weeks, it will not be possible to have the quality of debate we need on such a profound change. I strongly support the proposal in principle and I want it to work.

I appeal to the Leader to ensure the Government does not bring before us a Bill in respect of which we have one week to debate Second Stage, followed by Committee and Report Stages a week later. That is not sufficient time for proper debate on the very real changes that could come about. We may need to amend a host of legislation if the proposal is to work. It is not possible to introduce a stand-alone Bill on a directly elected mayor of Dublin without amending local government legislation and, perhaps, the planning and development Acts. If I argue that we need more time when the Bill is published sometime in the next three or four weeks, I do not want to be accused of raising obstacles simply because I want to debate it properly. I ask for sufficient time to tease out the issues and if we have to amend other legislation to improve the quality of our democracy, let us do so.

Senator Paschal Mooney: The House will be aware that tourism, along with the agrifood sector, is the largest employer in the State. Will the Leader arrange a debate to coincide with a significant marketing campaign about to be launched by Tourism Ireland aimed at the Irish diaspora, not only in our nearest neighbour, which is our largest tourist market, but also around the world? It is significant that the work of Tourism Ireland has resulted not only in Fifth Avenue but also other major centres worldwide being painted green in March. This is probably one of the most significant marketing campaigns ever launched by a tourism body.

The House will be aware that Tourism Ireland is charged with attracting visitors to the island of Ireland, North and South. The tourism industry is significant in these difficult economic times, especially in my area of the Border counties which has the smallest number of visitors nationally. I understand the marketing campaign will cost in the region of €20 million. I congratulate the Government on the fact that, despite our straightened times, it has not reduced the international tourism marketing budget. I hope Tourism Ireland's campaign will result in an increase in the number of visitors to this country. An increase of 5% is projected this year compared with a decrease of 2% last year. This will clearly result not only in more visitors but in the protection of jobs, especially in the hotel industry, which is suffering grievously from the downturn. Because of the importance of the issue and as it is close to St. Patrick's Day I put it to the Leader that this month would be the time to focus the minds of people and this House on the importance of the tourism industry.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I second the amendment to the Order of Business proposed by my colleague, Senator Fitzgerald. As she said, it is a sad day for the country, especially the workforce, given the increase in the number of people being thrown onto the dole. It is sad to see a further 750 bank staff facing that immediate prospect when we need consolidation in banking. That was promised by the Government but it has not been delivered.

Sadly, the Government has done nothing through the public interest directors or otherwise through the system to be more assertive in regard to the management of the banks and the proper controls that need to be in place. We know the State will be required to take an additional equity stake in the banks as part of the ongoing recapitalisation process. It was interesting to see that illustrious gentleman — the new bright light — the Governor of the Central Bank echo what we have been saying in this House, namely, that the banks have totally lost their edge in regard to small business lending. We have all been very concerned about that in this House. He has pointed out, as we on both sides of the House have done for a long time——

An Cathaoirleach: Does the Senator have a question for the Leader?

Senator Paul Coghlan: Of course I have.

An Cathaoirleach: I would like to hear it.

Senator Paul Coghlan: This is where the banks need to improve for the sake of the economy and their own business performance. They will not have the scope to lend for property in the future. They have to get back to serving their loyal small business customers that they are starving of necessary working capital to keep their businesses going and their staff employed. Those are the people who need our support and help, who are there to protect jobs and who want to create new jobs. The Government is missing that point.

On the amendment to the Order of Business, because of our interest in this matter and given that our future depends on it, I suggest it would be useful for this House if the Leader would consider inviting in the Governor of the Central Bank. I am sure all would agree that it would be useful to have an exchange with him in this House. He is very enlightened in terms of how we should proceed. It would allow us to get to grips with where we are and where we need to go.

Senator Nicky McFadden: Hear, hear.

Senator Terry Leyden: Will the Leader of the House invite the Minister for Transport, Deputy Noel Dempsey, to the House to discuss the transport situation, in particular the 30 km speed limit debacle in Dublin, which affects us all? On my way to the House yesterday I had to travel at 30 km with many cars behind me and a clear road in front of me. People have been getting penalty points for infringing the law in that regard. It is a proper mess. I understand the by-law cannot be changed until April of this year because it was only introduced in October 2009. I urge Fine Gael and Labour Party Members to urge their councillors to bring about a change immediately because it is causing chaos on the streets of Dublin.

Will the Leader also discuss the matter of taxis with the Minister, Deputy Noel Dempsey?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Leyden is in reverse.

(Interruptions).

An Cathaoirleach: No interruptions please.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Leyden should go into neutral. Was he caught himself?

An Cathaoirleach: No interruptions please. Questions to the Leader without interruption.

Senator Terry Leyden: Ms Kathleen Doyle is the taxi regulator. There are approximately 14,000 taxis on the streets of Dublin. A total of 45 taxis were parked at Heuston Station yesterday morning at 11 a.m. I had to use a taxi recently to go to Herberton, Rialto. The driver was not from Ireland. He charged me €18.50 for a trip that was worth——

An Cathaoirleach: Where he was from is not relevant.

Senator Terry Leyden: He had no idea where we were going. He had to get out twice to find out where he was. I had to ring someone to find out where I was going. He charged me €18.50 for a trip that was worth €10.50. I asked him where he was from.

Senator Mary M. White: Where was he from?

Senator Terry Leyden: He told me he was from the Punjab.

An Cathaoirleach: Point made.

(Interruptions).

Senator Terry Leyden: It is a strange situation. There are 14,000 taxis in Dublin.

An Cathaoirleach: The matter is not relevant to the Order of Business. We have no control over taxis.

Senator Terry Leyden: There are approximately 21,000 taxis in London.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Leyden could be driving a taxi himself after the next election.

Senator Terry Leyden: There is a need to review the situation. The Minister should come to the House to explain the disasters of the 30 km speed limit in Dublin city centre and the taxi situation. He should explain the standards required to be met in order for a person to get a licence.

An Cathaoirleach: That is a matter for Dublin City Council.

Senator Terry Leyden: I am afraid it is not doing a great job. The Minister has overall responsibility.

Senator Frances Fitzgerald: Senator Leyden should go to Deputy Harney. The Progressive Democrats played a strong role in the taxi industry.

An Cathaoirleach: The council introduced the system and it is up to it to change it. I call Senator Harris.

Senator Terry Leyden: I thank the Cathaoirleach for his views. It is great to hear him expressing them in this regard.

An Cathaoirleach: I will not call Senator Leyden any more if he keeps that up. Senator Harris should be allowed to speak without interruption.

Senator Eoghan Harris: I wish to return indirectly again to the question of political life. I was perturbed last night to hear two political commentators say that the Lee issue illustrated the gap between the insiders in politics and the rest of the country on the outside. That is a very pernicious doctrine. I seek a proper debate in the House on political life.

Following on what Senator Fitzgerald said, I remember doing a programme on mental health 30 years ago and the switchboard in RTE was blocked for three days because it was the first time the issue of mental health was raised in respect of Johnny McEvoy. Nothing changed for the better until politicians got to work. Ken Loach has admitted that the film “Cathy Come Home” did not get a house built in Britain. Publicity does not get things done until the political process goes to work. Someone has to mediate between the majority who would grab it all and the minorities whom Senator Fitzgerald spoke about, namely, the mentally ill, the Halifax workers, people with mortgage problems and the marginalised. That could be one of the great functions of the Seanad. Let us keep the pity for real pitiful cases.

Senator Nicky McFadden: Hear, hear.

Senator Eoghan Harris: The Halifax workers cannot walk out of their offices today back into State employment in the ESB, as a certain celebrity candidate could walk out of the free market situation — after all politicians are subject to the free market — and back into a safe, secure and pensionable job in RTE. No Halifax worker can do that, unless they can walk back into the ESB.

I speak as someone who is an appointed Senator. I worked in RTE and I was appointed to the Seanad so I did not have to submit myself to election, nor would I.

Senator Nicky McFadden: Hear, hear.

Senator Eoghan Harris: I could not take the gruelling nature of a Dáil election nor far more seriously a Seanad election. Given the short, cushy hours they work, George Lee and people like him have no understanding of the business of politics. I am better placed than anyone to see how hard politicians work.

Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: Senator Harris is such an eloquent speaker and I agree with all he said.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Keaveney should speak on the Order of Business.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: This is the first day of the new European Commission. I welcome the appointment of Máire Geoghegan-Quinn to the position of Commissioner. I was only in the Dáil two days after my election when I got a four page foolscap handwritten letter from her. I wish I had sent it on to George Lee when he got elected because it acknowledged that “the Dáil can be a lonely place unless one thinks about the following”. It was a practical letter about what one needed to do, how one needed to engage and interact with one’s colleagues or one could become isolated and lonely in the House. That was the calibre of the person who contacted me, whom we have now sent to Europe. I wish the new Commission well.

I agree that we must keep mental health central to the agenda. I have been trying to pursue the issue of music therapy and have sought professional recognition for it. On “Prime Time” last night one of the issues that arose was the importance of alternative ways of coping with mental health. Music therapy is recognised throughout the English speaking world as central to dealing with people with mental health and other issues. The Minister of State with responsi-

bility for disability issues and mental health, Deputy John Moloney, is working diligently in that sphere. It would be useful for us to be a conduit to spread the information on what is going on, but also to focus on what gaps remain to be filled. We should have a regular debate twice or three times a year in the presence of the Minister with responsibility for mental health so we could not only be enlightened but also help to progress the issue. We know drink and drugs are issues and that people who watch television are told what they should be doing and how they should be living. In reality, much of that message is not particularly positive but we also have the other side of television where one can be given information such as the “Prime Time” programme last night.

Senator Eugene Regan: I refer to the Bank of Scotland (Ireland) redundancies and the decision of Lloyds Bank to close the retail network in Ireland. Lehman Brothers collapsed in 2008 and the bank guarantee scheme was introduced in October 2008. Legislation was introduced which gives the Minister for Finance extraordinary powers to restructure Irish banks. No decision has been taken under the legislation and no indication from the Minister or the Government has been forthcoming in regard to the consolidation or restructuring of the banking sector. Yesterday’s announcement highlights the vacuum in this area because quite some time has elapsed. During the debate in 2008 the Minister talked about a third banking force in which Bank of Scotland (Ireland) was to play a part. There is a gap in policy formulation and initiative on the part of the Government in this area. What are the Government’s plans regarding the banking sector?

11 o'clock

Senator Paul Coughlan: It will not tell us.

Senator Eugene Regan: As with NAMA, the Government parties are waiting for the European Commission to make the decision for them but there is an onus on them to outline their plans for the banking sector to the House.

Yesterday’s announcement also highlights the need for the two main banks — Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland — to divest themselves of their non-core assets in other jurisdictions such as Poland, the United States and the United Kingdom in order that they can refocus on lending and making credit available in the Irish market.

Senator Paul Coughlan: Hear, hear.

Senator Eugene Regan: The decision of Lloyds Bank highlights the renationalisation of the banking sector in Europe and we must recognise that. The two main Irish banks must play an important role in the Irish market and economy.

Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú: Yesterday, Senator Mullen raised the issue of the intention of Raidió na Gaeltachta to cease broadcasting the weekly mass. At the end of the month, a delegation from the Oireachtas committee whose remit covers the Irish language will visit the Connemara Gaeltacht in connection with the draft 20-year strategy on the Irish language. Will the Leader ask the committee to meet Raidió na Gaeltachta representatives to discuss this matter with them? We all speak about the helpless and vulnerable in the House but there are none more vulnerable than those who are in hospital or who are ill and housebound. Each week, in most cases, they look forward to participating in and listening to mass on Raidió na Gaeltachta. I recall the debate about removing the “Angelus” from radio and television broadcasts. The main intervention at the time was made by a Church of Ireland representative who brought balance to the debate when he said in these hectic times it was admirable that a broadcasting service would signal a time for reflection. The same applies in this case.

[Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú.]

Tá súil agam mar sin, go ndéanfaidh Raidió na Gaeltachta athmhacnamh ar an gcinneadh seo atá i gceist aige. Is traidisiún é leis an raidió céanna an t-aifreann a bheith á chraoladh go seachtainiúil agus go rialta. Táim lán cinnte nach gcabhróidh sé le stádas an stáisiúin má leanann sé ar aghaidh leis an gcinneadh seo. Tá súil agam go mbeidh an coiste sin ón Oireachtas sásta labhairt le Raidió na Gaeltachta agus, b'fhéidir, an tuairim a chur trasna chuige nach ceart dó é seo a dhéanamh anois.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I support Senator Fitzgerald's comments on mental health. It would be wrong of us not to have a debate. When will there be Government action on A Vision for Change and a commitment to funding? Mental health is not just a phrase we can throw about. Many people are under severe pressure. Mental health patients are being moved out into communities and being housed in Dickensian facilities but many other people are under severe pressure predominantly because of bank lending policies and procedures. Senators Feeney and Fitzgerald referred yesterday and today to the number of young and middle aged people on the edge. Many parents have offspring at home and they cannot cope. The Leader should meet the people who are under severe mental health stress and pressure. This was caused primarily by banking institutions and failed Government policy not only regarding the financial services industry but also in the lack of implementation of A Vision for Change, to which lip service has been paid. I applaud the Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, Deputy Moloney, for his interview with Marian Finucane. However, we need more than rhetoric. We need implementation and firm financial commitment.

I support Senator O'Toole's call for a debate on social partnership. I am a firm advocate of the process and it has never been needed more in the history of the State. Government, Opposition parties, unions, employers and every other pillar should sit down collectively to protect, maintain and create jobs. If this is not done, we will be like Greece. The euro has declined in value and the financial industry across Europe is in turmoil. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment needs to come to the House to discuss social partnership, otherwise the bush fires will become an inferno and we will have to put up the "For Sale" sign.

Senator Ann Ormonde: I endorse the comments made on many issues raised. Yesterday I touched on the quality of democracy in this country on the Order of Business. Senators Harris and Alex White referred again to this issue earlier. As Senator Harris said, there is no doubt that there are insiders and outsiders and that is the perception, which is a shame. We need a debate on our democracy and on the nature and quality of representatives as a result of the fallout of the George Lee episode. It should also incorporate the stress and strain people are under and whether we are disconnected from them. That is the question but the cant is that politicians look after themselves. The quality of representation has deteriorated because of the media. We are not being given a chance.

This House presents an ideal opportunity to debate all these issues, including those raised by Senator Fitzgerald such as mental health, the disadvantaged and the marginalised. I hate to think that we neglected these people and, therefore, I call for a debate as soon as possible. It is all about how we represent the people. That is why I came into the House and that is what I want to do. I am not one of those who comes in and thinks I can work on my qualifications and that is it. I want to be a public servant and to do what I can for Ireland, which includes helping everybody I can. That is what this Chamber should be about and that is what I want a debate on.

Yesterday, I raised the issue of cosmetic clinics, which have mushroomed all over the Ireland, but the Leader did not respond. I am concerned about how they are operated because they

are not covered by legislation or regulation. Will the Leader find time to invite the Minister for Health and Children to the House to outline her proposals to regulate these clinics because I fear for the future? People come to Ireland and perform operations before moving out again with no accountability. I would like the Leader to invite the Minister in to discuss this issue.

Senator Rónán Mullen: I thank Senator Ó Murchú for supporting my call yesterday for the continued broadcast of the weekly mass on Raidió na Gaeltachta. His comments on the “Angelus” are particularly apposite. Senator Harris just commented to me that had George Lee taken the opportunity to have a moment’s reflection during the broadcast of the “Angelus”, he might not have taken the rash step that he did. I would go so far as to say that the only bongs causing a problem in this country are the ones being sold in head shops.

An Cathaoirleach: Does the Senator have a question for the Leader?

Senator Rónán Mullen: I wish to make a serious point to the Leader with regard to the debate he promised some weeks ago about the media. I made the point yesterday, with regard to the broadcasting of mass on Raidió na Gaeltachta, that the argument about funding simply does not hold up. The weekly mass is not a Broadway production — it is not something that is very expensive to broadcast — and the same applies to services of other religious denominations, which should be provided for.

To pick up on what Senators O’Toole, Harris and others have said, there is a serious need for us to consider our political culture and here, the debate on the media is highly relevant. The media is helping to shape a completely unrealistic view of the political process among the public. We have been presented with a myth over the last few days that there is a group of insiders keeping out a talented person.

Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Rónán Mullen: The truth about politics is that it is a mixture of plámás and policy and, unless one is willing to hustle for the ideas one believes in, and has the humility to take the time to persuade others——

Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Rónán Mullen: ——that one is worthy of high office——

Senator Eoghan Harris: Or democracy.

Senator Rónán Mullen: ——one has no right to expect preferment. I am asking the Leader to name a date for our discussion on the media.

I wish to mention a point made by Breda O’Brien in *The Irish Times* last weekend which is also apposite. She asked, “Would people who support a derogation from teaching religion for atheistic teachers, also support the right of religious believers not to carry out a civil partnership ceremony for a gay or lesbian couple?” We will have a sensitive debate in the coming weeks and months about the civil partnership legislation.

An Cathaoirleach: I ask the Senator to conclude.

Senator Rónán Mullen: I will conclude on this, a Chathaoirligh, but I would appreciate your indulgence on this point.

Many people in this House will support in their minds and hearts the idea of a conscience clause that is respectful of what the law seeks to achieve but also of the genuine differences of

[Senator Rónán Mullen.]

opinion about this sensitive issue. However, most politicians will not express this because of the party whip system. The media, because it has a bias, generally speaking, against so-called traditional views, will not ask the hard questions, and thus will once again not serve the public. I am asking the Leader for a date for a debate about the media, at which we can ventilate these issues respectfully.

Senator Geraldine Feeney: I rise to support Senator Buttimer — I see him smiling, because I do not often support him — in his call for the resumption of social partnership. None of us needs to look too deeply to see the social unrest out there at the moment as a result of the economic downturn. There is an onus on every one of us to encourage anyone we know on either side — whether the Government or political side, or the union side — back into talks. It is the only way forward and the only way in which things can be done.

Although I mentioned this yesterday, I will ask the Leader again about the debate on mental health. I will be as forceful as Senator Mullen and ask him to name a date. Everybody who saw the “Prime Time” programme last night was sickened to the core. One went to bed depressed one’s self after seeing the old, antiquated and unusable hospitals in which those who find themselves with mental health problems are housed. I take my hat off to the Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, Deputy Moloney, who is a very committed and hard-working man; that was acknowledged last night by the chairman of the College of Psychiatry of Ireland. He said last night on the programme that over the next three years we will see a phasing out of all the old units. I ask the Leader to give us a date for that urgent and much needed debate on mental health.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I join other Senators in calling for a debate on banking. The closure of one of the country’s main banks, as announced yesterday, will cause significant hardship for many people in the north east — not just workers in the bank but also customers who are currently availing of the service. We have also seen recent increases in mortgage interest rates, particularly those of Permanent TSB, and the failure of many banks to put money back into the economy and get credit moving again. A debate on this issue would be timely and I urge the Leader to arrange one.

I welcome the commitment of the G7 countries to cancel the debt owed to them by Haiti. However, the debt cancelled by the G7 is only a fraction of what Haiti owes to organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF. One of the impacts of this is that it will be much more difficult to reconstruct the country after the recent earthquake. Electricity prices will be higher and food supplies will be put in danger. I would like to see further debt cancellation. I urge the Minister and the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Deputies Martin and Power, to make representations at the highest level of the IMF and the World Bank in order to achieve this.

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: I support the calls by many Senators for a debate on mental health. It is important that we do not politicise the issue of mental health. We must all fight together on this issue. There has been much talk about institutions, but it is clear that the foundations of mental health are laid at a very young age — when children are born, in fact. It is a community-based issue and one we must stay on top of.

I support the comments of Senator Alex White about directly elected mayors. I would like to see this come before the House as soon as possible. As we have a potential date in June for the direct election of a mayor, it is important to move the process forward.

Senator Paul Coghlan: When will the Bill be introduced?

Senator Frances Fitzgerald: It is supposed to be September now.

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: We need a debate as soon as possible.

On the issue of directly elected mayors, there is a wider debate with regard to local government reform. It is important that we do not look upon the establishment of a directly elected Dublin mayor as an end in itself; we must also consider mayors for cities such as Galway, Cork, Waterford and Limerick, as well as greater regionalisation and local government reform.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Does the Senator want the job again?

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: Senator White may be looking for a job, but I am not seeking the job of Lord Mayor of Galway again.

Finally, I support Senator Paschal Mooney in his comments about the tourism industry. Going green is a great concept, but it is important on St. Patrick's Day that we focus on the tourism potential of this country rather than encouraging people to leave and go to other countries. It is important that we look after our own people and encourage people to visit this country.

Senator Paschal Donohoe: I support my colleagues in their request for a debate on banking and the future of our economy, but I wish to relate it to what is happening in Greece at the moment. On a number of occasions over the last few weeks, I have pointed to the developments in Greece and the profound implications they have for our country. What we can see happening in another country is what should be apparent to us regarding where Ireland stands at the moment. In other words, the economic security of another country is under threat, but that is also the case in our country. If we consider what dominated politics over the last number of years, particularly before the Celtic tiger descended on us, we will realise it was the national question. The national question then was the future of the North, but the national question for us now is how a small, open economy that built its success upon integration with the world economy will survive when the tide of globalisation goes out. We saw the symbol of this yesterday when Halifax announced it was leaving Ireland.

The tide of globalisation upon which our country is floating is receding. International companies and banks are considering their national markets. The course of action that Senator Regan correctly outlined for Bank of Ireland and AIB is exactly what Lloyd's is doing. Our challenge is charting the route to safety for our country and navigating our way there. I humbly suggest that we establish the value and validity of political life by answering that question and delivering action, rather than by debating it continually. That is the way in which we will establish the relevance of political life. We will rise above the personality-based rubbish of the last couple of days, establish the role of politics, and answer the new national question that our country must answer in order for its security to be protected.

Senator Ivor Callely: I agree with my good friend, Senator Donohoe. I support the view that a discussion on banks, especially foreign banks operating in Ireland, and the financial institutions is necessary. Given the current market, it is likely that Halifax will not be the only foreign bank to pull out from Ireland. My concern rests with its workers. More importantly, it rests with the customers of Halifax and the other foreign banks likely to follow it in terms of how they will be treated by the banks or agencies of the banks. The larger issue is the banks' *modus operandi* in dealing with customers and their customers' accounts and debts. I am deeply concerned by the manner in which customers would be treated in a flush of financial institutions.

[Senator Ivor Callely.]

A letter I have from Halifax to one of its customers asks the customer to contact the bank if he or she does not receive certain information.

An Cathaoirleach: No documents, please.

Senator Ivor Callely: I do not know how a Halifax customer could contact the bank if he or she never received the information in the first place.

An Cathaoirleach: I do not want documents displayed in the House. The Senator can put it on the record in another way.

Senator Ivor Callely: Some customers' accounts and debts may appear before the courts. It might be necessary for both Houses to examine the current legislation with a fresh pair of eyes to determine whether we must change it to meet the market. We should do so. Does the Leader know whether any regulation applies to debts with foreign-owned banks that are passed to debt management companies?

Senator Nicky McFadden: Three weeks ago, I raised the issue in the House of mental health based on the review of the mental health inspectorate. I referred to two wards in St. Loman's Hospital in Mullingar that have been deemed by the inspectorate as being unfit for human habitation. It described the wards as desolate and depressing, with paint peeling from the walls.

The House has discussed the matter of mental health over and back, up and down and the glossy A Vision for Change report was produced, but we are doing nothing for those who most need us to be their voice. Yesterday, visiting committees were discussed, but the comments were a load of balderdash. We do not need visiting committees. Rather, we need the money ring-fenced by the HSE from sales to provide people with proper human living conditions. They are vulnerable and need us to be their voice. I commend the all-party committee on mental health under Senator Fitzgerald and Deputy Chris Andrews. I also commend the service users who appeared before it. They were critical of the Government and of the fact that it was not re-investing money in mental health services.

Senator Donie Cassidy: That is not true.

Senator Nicky McFadden: Then why has the inspectorate, the watchdog, stated that the buildings are not fit for human habitation? That is the bottom line. Let us do something about it. Let the Minister of State, Deputy Moloney, have a frank discussion with the House on where the money has gone.

Senator Maria Corrigan: I rise to support Senators Fitzgerald, Feeney, McFadden and others who have raised the issue of mental health and have again asked the Leader for a debate. I welcome his commitment to hold a debate before 1 March. This is important, as 1 March will clearly be the start of a landmark year.

Senator Harris hit the nail on the head when he remarked that there must be political will to bring about change. This is why politics is important and why good people must become and stay involved. There is political will to bring about real change within mental health services. This will be a landmark year for mental health services, but meaningful change must be achieved. The Minister of State, Deputy Moloney, has made it clear that he is on that road. The Seanad is also on that road. We have an amazing opportunity not only to ensure that all people with mental health challenges will have quality services, but to support and enhance

the mental health and psychological well-being of everyone. We can make this our clear and achievable objective.

Senator Feargal Quinn: I entered the House with no intention of speaking, since I wanted to listen. This morning's Order of Business has been fascinating in terms of the words expressed on all sides. How valuable would it be for the rest of the nation to know what has been stated on this debate by Senators O'Toole, Harris and Mullen, who are my colleagues on this side, and Senators from all sides of the House? In particular, I listened to Senator Donohoe's comments regarding events in Greece and the danger of the same occurring in Ireland. We experienced considerable difficulties during the 1980s. Whatever we did, we managed to work together to make the nation something of which we were proud in the 1990s and during the past decade. We can do it again.

Senator Ó Brolcháin asked that we not politicise everything. While debates on mental health and banking are healthy, let us be sure to work together as well. In the difficult 1980s, the Leader of the Opposition told the Government that, if the latter took the tough decisions, the Opposition would support it. This is the type of attitude we need, particularly in respect of our social fabric. Various parts of the nation are not working together. We can learn to work together, but someone needs to say that the tough decisions will be taken and followed through.

We are no longer in control of many of the elements over which we used to have control, but the past 20 years saw us learning how to get from the bottom to the top. We can do it again, but it means working together, listening to others and supporting the tough actions required.

Senator Eoghan Harris: Hear, hear.

Senator Camillus Glynn: I am somewhat surprised by Senator McFadden. The Cathaoirleach is a former member of the midland health board. I will start with one of Senator McFadden's points, namely, that of visiting committees. A few years ago just before the introduction of the refund of nursing charges legislation, I told the House that people would come out of the woodwork who had never put one foot past the other to visit their relatives. This is still the case. At the time, I received a telephone call from a high-ranking health board official. The official told me that a woman went into a hospital in the mid-west to see her favourite aunt, her only relative. The woman wanted to ensure that she got her entitlement in 2005, but her aunt had died in 1989. As I would say in another forum, I rest my case.

As another member of the health board, Senator Cassidy will confirm that, in the main, psychiatric hospital residents' only contacts with the outside world were members of a visiting committee. Those elected and professional members reported to their boards, as the Cathaoirleach would be aware as a former board member and chairman, on the conditions in every psychiatric hospital, not just St. Loman's or St. Fintan's. The district, general and regional hospitals were all brought before the boards.

Senator Nicky McFadden: The Government closed them down.

Senator Camillus Glynn: I am sorry, but I listened to Senator McFadden.

An Cathaoirleach: No interruptions, please.

Senator Camillus Glynn: Has Senator McFadden ever visited that psychiatric hospital? Would she know where it is?

An Cathaoirleach: Time, Senator.

Senator Camillus Glynn: Okay.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: That comment should be withdrawn.

Senator Nicky McFadden: That is a disparaging comment.

An Cathaoirleach: No speaking across the floor.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: On a point of order, that was a disparaging comment.

(Interruptions).

Senator Camillus Glynn: Sit down.

An Cathaoirleach: Through the Chair.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: That comment should be withdrawn.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: On a point of order, that was a most disparaging comment and it should be withdrawn.

Senator Camillus Glynn: If the cap fits, wear it.

Senator Maurice Cummins: He is at it again.

An Cathaoirleach: I do not want any comments across the floor.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: On a point of order——

An Cathaoirleach: I do not want comments from one Member to another across the floor of the Chamber.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: On a point of order, it is Senator Glynn who has politicised this issue, not us.

An Cathaoirleach: If the Senator wishes to speak, he must speak through the Chair to the Leader.

Senator Camillus Glynn: Up to now we had planned for the future of the psychiatric services in the document A Vision for Change. We had a vision but no change, but now we have money. I say fair play to the Government and to the Minister of State, Deputy Moloney; things will change.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Will change.

Senator Camillus Glynn: There is no doubt about that.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator has gone over time, the time for the Order of Business is almost concluded and other Members are offering.

Senator Camillus Glynn: Having been a former member of a health board, I would close every one of our psychiatric hospitals, but they must be replaced.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: We have had a healthy debate on mental health this morning and I am delighted to speak on this subject. I want to refer to the person who has just spoken. In 1999 I worked in health promotion in the Midland Health Board.

Senator Camillus Glynn: I know that.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: You were a member of the board at that time. A major conference on mental health was held in Tullamore on mental health at that time.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator should address her questions to the Leader and not to any other member.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I am coming to a very important question.

An Cathaoirleach: I am taking questions to the Leader.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: The recommendation that emerged from that conference was that there should be a move from institution to community care provision of mental health care under the direction of Dr. Pat Doorley.

Senator Nicky McFadden spoke today about the inspectorate condemning those decrepit institutions and how we have put down the citizens of our State. I am very concerned about Senator Glynn's comments because we are 11 years late——

Senator Camillus Glynn: We have two thirds——

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: ——in the delivery of this care. All of us in this country are at risk of experiencing mental health problems.

Senator Camillus Glynn: What did the Senator's party do?

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: We have had the fallout from the banking sector.

An Cathaoirleach: Has the Senator points for the Leader?

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I am coming to the point.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator should put her points to the Leader. I do not want her to make a speech.

Senator Nicky McFadden: Senator Glynn has provoked comment.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Healy Eames cannot have a debate on this issue on the Order of Business, she is seeking a debate on this issue and it is a matter for the Leader to agree to it.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I call on our good Leader to heed the cross-party call for a serious move to be taken in regard to mental health care. I have not spoken publicly on this issue previously. The pressures experienced today not only in our institutions but in society following the fallout from the banking sector, credit concerns and threats of home repossessions put all us at the risk of suffering mental ill health. We need to call the date in this respect and the Minister might give due honour to this House and announce that date here as Senator Fitzgerald proposed.

An Cathaoirleach: Three Members are offering and I ask them to be brief.

Senator John Hanafin: I request the Leader to arrange for a debate on banking, particularly in light of the fact that HBOS, Halifax Bank of Scotland, is to let 750 people go. Unfortunately, banks that set up in this State do business here in the good times and when the tide turns they walk away or do not act properly in their dealings with this State. I am thinking in particular of Ulster Bank which is not lending or not giving funds to the Irish banking sector. Now that HBOS is leaving or diminishing its interest in the Irish market, it should make a strong effort

[Senator John Hanafin.]

to cut its losses, which it would have in any event. It should consider its employees and ensure that the third banking force, which evidently will form, will have the benefit of its staff and customers and that it does not lose its customers in the three month window of opportunity we now have. We should avail of that time and opportunity and that requires not only Government effort but an effort on the part of Halifax Bank of Scotland.

The financial situation in Greece was mentioned and a parallel was drawn between it and the situation here, but the reality is that there are contrasts between Ireland and Greece. The EU has told Greece that it must improve its financial measures and it has commended Ireland on the financial measures we have taken.

Senator Michael McCarthy: I join others in seeking a debate on banking. The bankers in this country are getting away with blue murder. We have heard of 750 jobs losses this week; some 750 people will be cast on the dole queues. This has happened after we have recapitalised and bailed out the banks, but there has been no bailout for those who are struggling to meet their mortgage repayments. It is about time that Government brought in the bankers, laid down the law to them and made sure there is some element of *quid pro quo* given that €54 billion of taxpayers' money was forked out to bail out the bankers. The way they behaved was nothing short of criminality.

I wish to raise the matter of a debate on the media, particularly media coverage of the political system. I raised this on yesterday's Order of Business. Elements of the media are clearly anti-politics and an anti-politics agenda in the current climate is extremely dangerous and unhealthy.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I echo the calls of others for a debate on the state of our psychiatric institutions and the Government's mental health policy. Like others, I was utterly shocked at the "Prime Time" programme last night. I was not surprised by what it revealed because we know a good deal about this from previous reports of the inspector of mental health, but I was shocked that these conditions continue to prevail. Conditions in prisons are similar and also unjustifiable, but the people in psychiatric institutions are unwell and require treatment. It is appalling that they are still housed in these absolutely Dickensian conditions.

I also call for a debate on the treatment of victims and vulnerable witnesses in criminal trials. There has been some controversy around the treatment of a key prosecution witness in the Eamonn Lillis trial, namely Jean Treacy. I welcome the comments of the Garda Commissioner, Fachtna Murphy, yesterday in defending the protection given to Ms Treacy. She was a key prosecution witness. It is a matter for the gardaí that where they believe that a witness is vulnerable they should be able to offer protection.

Senator Michael McCarthy: Hear, hear.

Senator Ivana Bacik: There is no right on the part of the tabloid press to take photographs of witnesses or anyone coming to the courts. It is rather hypocritical because the same tabloid newspapers that are shouting loudly for the right to plaster photographs of Jean Treacy all over their front pages condemn those who do not come forward to give evidence in so-called gangland cases. There is an issue about witness intimidation. Witnesses can be vulnerable for all sorts of reasons. One of the great advantages of the new courts complex in Parkgate Street is that it enables the gardaí to offer witnesses protection.

It should be remembered that Ms Treacy gave evidence in public in the court room in accordance with the constitutional imperative. We need a debate on this issue to ensure this is all highlighted.

Senator Donie Cassidy: Senators Fitzgerald, O'Toole, Coghlan, Harris, Keaveney, Buttimer, Ormonde, Feeney, Ó Brolcháin, Donohoe, McFadden, Corrigan, Quinn, Glynn, Healy Eames and Bacik gave their views on last night's "Prime Time" programme and called for a further debate on mental health. As Members know we had at least three debates on this issue with the Minister of State, Deputy Moloney. Senator Corrigan has been a champion of this issue, as has Senator Feeney and Senator Glynn who spent a lifetime working in psychiatric services and who has a great deal of expertise in this area. I acknowledge the view of a person who comes from a background in this sector. I know from my experience that there has been a huge improvement in services compared with the services in place when we became members of a health board in 1985. Many patients are living in beautiful homes in the community and that represents a major improvement in this area.

I wish to inform the House that I have a note in my diary that the Minister of State, Deputy Moloney, will be in attendance in the House on 3 May to discuss mental health issues. It will be an all afternoon session and longer if Members require it. I will discuss this with the leaders at our meeting next Tuesday.

In regard to the new European Commission, on behalf of the House I send our best wishes to our new European Commissioner, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. Europe will be well served by this experienced person who is representing Ireland and the Commission.

Senator Mary M. White: Hear. hear.

Senator Donie Cassidy: Senators Fitzgerald, Coghlan, Regan, Hannigan, Donohoe, Callely, Quinn, Ó Brolcháin, Hanafin and McCarthy all expressed their disappointment about the 750 job losses at Bank of Scotland. The facts about the Bank of Scotland are that it is not covered under the guarantee scheme and it is retaining its commercial and business division, which is enormous and comprises 850 jobs. It is a huge lender in the commercial and business sector. We would not want to overlook the enormous contribution Bank of Scotland has played and is playing in meeting its day-to-day requirements to the small and medium-sized businesses which went to it and were able to secure loans at a reasonable interest rate. The tragedy from the mortgage holder's perspective — taking into account the more than 40 outlets it acquired, in the main from the ESB — is that the bank is a major player in the market. The consumer benefits when there are many major players looking for a share in the market. I acknowledge the continued presence of Bank of Scotland (Ireland) in the commercial and business sector and hope it will continue to prosper, grow and be a major player which will assist small, medium and family businesses which it has been connected with for a number of years.

Various views were expressed by Senators on equating us with Greece. As we all know, the Government has been a shining example for our fellow member states, Greece, Spain and Portugal, on what needs to be done to tackle difficult problems.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: It has not.

Senator Donie Cassidy: Instead of criticising each other, we should take pride in the Government's decisions and what it has done in conjunction with the people and trade unions. They have been responsible in responding with corrective measures.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: The Leader should be careful. He should not be in denial.

An Cathaoirleach: There should be no interruptions.

Senator Donie Cassidy: In 1987 we fought back by making hard and difficult decisions and we are here to do so again today. We are doing it.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Leader's party never did it. It did not have the bottle to do so.

Senator Donie Cassidy: I understand the Senator was in short pants at the time. His party was on this side of the House too.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: It never got it right and will not start now either.

Senator Donie Cassidy: Senators O'Toole, Buttimer and Feeney spoke about looking forward to a return to social partnership in industrial relations. I agree that the concept of social partnership has a significant role to play in the continuation of the progress of the nation. The quicker we get around the table to discuss next year's budget and subsequent ones the better. There will be three difficult budgets and as such social partnership has an important role to play in the process. What had to be done was done and we will have to move on. That is my humble advice to everyone concerned.

Senators O'Toole, Alex White, Harris and Ormonde gave the House the benefit of their experience on the skill set required for political life in bringing people together and membership of both Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, as well as local authorities. Democratically elected men and women give of their time morning, noon and night in serving the people, whether it be in the Dáil, Seanad or local authorities. They are the representatives of the people, whom the media overlook all of the time. The people's representatives are demeaned by the media when they demean politicians. The example we have had in the past 48 hours is a good one for public service in bringing people like ourselves to represent others. It is an honour and privilege to do so, nothing more and nothing less. There will be no difficulty in having a debate on this issue and I will allow time for it. On a related matter, Senator Alex White asked about the possibility of discussing the heads of a Bill to be published which will provide for a directly elected mayor of Dublin. I will look into that matter later today and inform the House of my findings next Tuesday.

Senators Mooney and Ó Brolcháin called for a debate on tourism. Senator Mooney correctly highlighted the importance of the industry. There are over 300,000 employed in the services sector which is facing significant challenges. The hotels, restaurant and guest house sector is under the same intense pressure as every other sector. I am pleased to hear that €20 million is to be spent in March throughout the world in promoting Ireland which could lead to an increase of 5% in tourist numbers this year, as noted by Senator Mooney, compared to a decrease of 2% last year. I will have no difficulty in allowing a debate to take place prior to the St. Patrick's Day break. I commend Senators for calling for such a timely debate.

Senator Coghlan commented on the Governor of the Central Bank; he might like to discuss the topic with his leader. We can also discuss the issue at the Committee on Procedure and Privileges.

Senator Leyden mentioned the speed limits in force in Dublin and, in particular, the 30 km/h limit which is not working. I suggested last week that a speed limit of 40 km/h could be considered. I understand the issue is to be the subject of public consultation. I commend all the councillors and local authority members of all political parties who have played their part. I heard the comments of the chairperson yesterday morning and anything that can be done to save lives must be commended. A speed limit of 30 km/h is too low, while 50 km/h is too high. Therefore, would I see a speed limit of 40 km/h as being very acceptable to everybody concerned.

Senator Leyden also mentioned the taxi regulator. I will pass on his strong views in that regard to the Minister. There are 14,000 taxi licences in Dublin, which seems high compared to the 21,000 in the city of London.

Senators Ó Murchú, Mullen and McCarthy called for a debate on the media. Senator Ó Murchú again outlined to the House the proposal of Raidió na Gaeltachta to cease broadcasting Sunday morning services. As I stated yesterday, it is important to have time for reflection; setting aside one hour each week is not too much to expect. Therefore, I hope the radio station will consider the matter again. As Senator Ó Murchú noted, perhaps when members of the committee visit the station in the very near future and discuss the issue with management, the decision might be changed.

Senator Ormonde called for a debate on cosmetic clinics. I will have no difficulty in allowing such a debate to take place. The Senator highlighted the urgent nature of the issue and I will see if we can debate it in the coming weeks.

Senator Bacik spoke about key prosecution witnesses in criminal trials. I fully agree with her views on the matter and the decisions of the Garda Síochána.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I thank the Leader.

Senator Donie Cassidy: Perhaps the matter might be dealt with in a privacy Bill to enable it to be considered further.

I congratulate the Taoiseach; the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Micheál Martin; the British Prime Minister, Mr. Gordon Brown; the First Minister, Mr. Peter Robinson; the Deputy First Minister, Mr. Martin McGuinness, and all others involved, including the clergy and members of other organisations, in bringing the talks to a successful conclusion in Northern Ireland last weekend. It is a shining example of what we can achieve on the island of Ireland in pursuing peace. I compliment and congratulate everybody concerned.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Fitzgerald has proposed an amendment to the Order of Business: “That statements on the banking sector be taken today.” Is the amendment being pressed?

Senator Frances Fitzgerald: Yes.

Amendment put.

The Seanad divided: Tá, 24; Níl, 30.

Tá

Bacik, Ivana.
Bradford, Paul.
Burke, Paddy.
Buttimer, Jerry.
Coffey, Paudie.
Coghlan, Paul.
Cummins, Maurice.
Doherty, Pearse.
Donohoe, Paschal.
Fitzgerald, Frances.
Hannigan, Dominic.
Healy Eames, Fidelma.

McCarthy, Michael.
McFadden, Nicky.
Mullen, Rónán.
O'Reilly, Joe.
O'Toole, Joe.
Phelan, John Paul.
Prendergast, Phil.
Quinn, Feargal.
Regan, Eugene.
Ross, Shane.
Twomey, Liam.
White, Alex.

Níl

Boyle, Dan.
Brady, Martin.
Butler, Larry.
Callely, Ivor.
Carroll, James.
Carty, John.

Cassidy, Donie.
Corrigan, Maria.
Daly, Mark.
Feeney, Geraldine.
Glynn, Camillus.
Hanafin, John.

Níl—*continued*

Harris, Eoghan.
Keaveney, Cecilia.
Leyden, Terry.
MacSharry, Marc.
McDonald, Lisa.
Mooney, Paschal.
Ó Brolcháin, Niall.
Ó Domhnaill, Brian.
Ó Murchú, Labhrás.

O'Brien, Francis.
O'Donovan, Denis.
O'Malley, Fiona.
O'Sullivan, Ned.
Ormonde, Ann.
Phelan, Kieran.
Walsh, Jim.
White, Mary M.
Wilson, Diarmuid.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Maurice Cummins and Nicky McFadden; Níl, Senators Camillus Glynn and Diarmuid Wilson.

Amendment declared lost.

Order of Business agreed to.

Business of Seanad.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Before calling Senator Glynn I welcome Councillor Paddy Smith from Cavan to the Visitors Gallery.

Senator Camillus Glynn: I propose the suspension of the House until 12.20 p.m.

Senator Paudie Coffey: The business was set for the day on the Order of Business.

Senator Maurice Cummins: It was only a short time ago.

Senator Camillus Glynn: When a Minister is unavailable, this is common practice. It is only a matter of minutes.

Senator Paudie Coffey: With due respect to the Government speaker, I do not accept it is common practice. When a Minister knows the schedule of this House, he should give it that respect.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: If we do not have agreement I must put the question. Is the suspension agreed?

Senator Paudie Coffey: No.

Question, "That the sitting be suspended until 12.20 p.m.," put and declared carried.

Sitting suspended at 12.05 p.m. and resumed at 12.20 p.m.

Dog Breeding Establishments Bill 2009: Committee Stage.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Finneran.

Section 1 agreed to.

SECTION 2.

Senator Paudie Coffey: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 4, line 20, after "pound" to insert "or hunt club".

The logic behind this amendment was debated at length by a number of colleagues from all sides of the House on Second Stage. Commitments were given to the Hunting Association of Ireland regarding an exemption from the regulations and reasons were given at the time. Consultations took place in November 2007 between the Hunting Association of Ireland and officials from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. After that meeting a commitment was given by the then Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe. On 9 January 2008 he wrote to the Hunting Association of Ireland stating, “I am very pleased that you will receive the exemption from these regulations that you sought.” This was a clear indication that the association and its kennels would be exempt. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy John Gormley, subsequently wrote to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy Dermot Ahern on 15 February 2008, to which letter I referred in my contribution on Second Stage. It read:

Given that the primary objective of the proposed regulations is to regulate commercial dog breeding and in view of the strict standards which apply to the members of the Hunting Association of Ireland, it is my intention that groups affiliated to the HAI be granted an exemption from the requirements of the regulations.

Numerous other commitments were given to Government Deputies and others that the kennels of the Hunting Association of Ireland and those of its members would be exempt from the requirements of this legislation. However, the Minister has shifted the goalposts and now wants to exempt them from payment of the fee only. It is acknowledged that the kennels run by members of the association are kept to a very high standard and that there are few, if any, complaints regarding how dogs are kept in them. This would include complaints from local authority inspectors or otherwise. The kennels in question are not breeding establishments, rather they are for holding working dogs used in the legal and rural practice of hunting which, as many Senators have argued, has been a well respected tradition in rural Ireland through the ages. It is Fine Gael’s view that, where commitments were made in writing to the Hunting Association of Ireland by the Minister, as well as by previous Ministers, it is only fair that these commitments should be honoured. It is unfair that the goalposts seem to have been shifted.

Section 2 of the Bill states:

“dog breeding establishment” means a premises at which bitches are kept, not less than 6 of which are—

(a) more than 4 months old, and

(b) capable of being used for breeding purposes,

but shall not include a local authority dog pound;

We understand it also means “or a hunt club”. The definition of “hunt club” as stated in the section is as follows:

“hunt club” means a hunt or game club—

(a) registered with a national hunting association that is a member of—

(i) the Hunting Association of Ireland, or

(ii) the Irish branch of the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the European Union (FACE),

[Senator Paudie Coffey.]

It has been acknowledged not only by departmental officials but also by people involved in animal welfare that these are well respected organisations which run their businesses well and that these dogs are kept to a very high standard. I hope Senators will take into account the genuine commitments given previously. We talk about cynicism in politics; what could be more cynical than giving a commitment in writing and then changing it substantially when the Bill is presented to the House. My amendment proposes to include hunt clubs in the exemption as they are separate entities, not breeding establishments. It is well established that they are run to high standards.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I welcome the Minister of State. I agree with Senator Coffey that we need to know the reason for the change. The letter referred to by the Senator from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy John Gormley, to his Cabinet colleague, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy Dermot Ahern, states:

Given that the primary objective of the regulations is to regulate commercial dog breeding and, in view of the strict standards which apply to members of the Hunting Association of Ireland, it is my intention that groups affiliated to the HAI be granted an exemption from the requirements of the regulations.

It is clear something has changed since the Minister wrote that letter. In a spirit of transparency and openness, we need to know the reason the Minister has done a complete about-turn on this issue. I ask the Minister of State to address these comments.

Senator Paul Bradford: I fully support the contents of Senator Coffey's contribution. Like the previous speaker, I also wish to know from the Minister of State the reason his senior colleague has done a complete about-turn. I regret that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy John Gormley, is not present in the House and trust he has other parliamentary duties to attend to. He should be present to defend the stance he has taken. There is great concern, anxiety and fear in rural Ireland and among hunt clubs and associated country sports organisations. By virtue of this section, in particular, the Minister is introducing what I described on Second Stage as a Trojan horse to attack rural sports, hunt clubs in particular. We need assurances from him that this is not his intention.

I refer to the correspondence made available to us by various organisations in recent months. It appears that during a phase of crucial discussions on the renewed programme for Government there was significant political pressure exerted on the Minister by anti-hunt organisations to introduce strict, new laws, in other words, to introduce anti-hunt laws. At that point it appears he did his U-turn on this section of the Bill. As pointed out by previous speakers and during the debate on Second Stage, a number of commitments were given in writing by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government that hunt clubs would be fully exempt from the regulations. Something has changed dramatically and we need to know what it is. That is why I am disappointed the Minister is not here. We need him to tell us what are his exact intentions. Why has he made this significant policy change?

I assure the Minister of State I do not want this issue to hinge on the urban-rural divide. Many in urban Ireland, including every provincial town, are interested in country sports. The Minister of State should take on board our concerns about the inclusion of hunt clubs in this legislation. He needs to give us a strong commitment about the future of hunt clubs, hunting, country and rural sports. I do not think I am exaggerating when I suggest these regulations could be the first step on a rocky and tricky road for hunt clubs. They will place a financial,

administrative and legislative burden on them. We are talking about clubs which regulate themselves in a laudable, professional and transparent fashion. It is a given that rural organisations, including hunt and coursing clubs, cannot survive if they do not meet the highest standards of animal husbandry, hygiene and animal feeding propriety. They would not exist if they did not look after these matters with near perfection. The Minister's regulations will not cause any animal to be looked after in a better fashion — they are already being looked after as thoroughly and properly as one would demand. The Bill will not make life any better for the animals in a hunt club, but it will impose a major administrative burden on hunt clubs. It will unnecessarily focus the spotlight of the State on organisations which are doing a great deal to maintain and develop the fabric of the interesting jigsaw that is rural life, of which rural organisations are a part.

I understand the Minister of State has to do his job as the spokesman for the senior Minister. I suspect his views on this substantial amendment to the legislation are not very different from my own. As such I look forward to hearing his comments. If the Minister of State wants to send a signal to rural Ireland that he values and treasures its traditions and ethos, he should accept this amendment. If we see such traditions not just as historical but as important for the Ireland of today, we should help them to survive into the future. We should ensure hunting and coursing clubs and other rural organisations such as point-to-point associations remain part of the fabric of rural Ireland. If the Minister of State examines the Second Stage contributions made in this House, he will find that many of his Government colleagues would be happy to make this change. We do not want this legislation to be a Trojan horse, as that would be the beginning of the end for some country sports organisations. We, therefore, need strong commitments from him. We really need him to accept the amendment.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I do not propose to accept the Senator's amendment to the section. The proposed amendment would have the effect of exempting hunt clubs from the regulations and possible inspections. Following consideration of the practical difficulties such an exemption would create for the implementation of the regulations, it is not considered that the exemption would be feasible or justifiable. I reiterate that the hunting association and its affiliated bodies such as the Irish Master of Foxhounds Association have stated dogs bred for hunt packs are kept to the highest standards. Therefore, it is my contention that the Bill will not place an undue burden on hunt clubs. However, I have decided that hunt clubs affiliated to the Hunting Association of Ireland do not have to pay fees for registration. This is provided for in the Bill.

Senator Paudie Coffey: The Minister of State's response to the amendment is amazing. As I said, two Ministers gave a commitment in writing to the Hunting Association of Ireland that the kennels kept by its members would be exempt from the regulations. It beggars belief the Minister of State has said, on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy John Gormley, that the Fine Gael amendment is neither "feasible" nor "justifiable". We wonder why people are cynical about politics. What has happened since November 2007 when representatives of the Hunting Association of Ireland first met officials from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government? They were given commitments by the then Minister of State, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, and subsequently from the Minister, Deputy Gormley. What changed the Minister's view? What influenced him and his officials to roll back on a clear and written commitment to a national organisation which represents thousands of members in every county and district of the country involved in a traditional and legal practice? The questions I have asked deserve to be answered. We need to know the reason for the change in the Minister's stance. Such an explanation might convince Senators on this side of the House that there are genuine reasons for his change of view. We have

[Senator Paudie Coffey.]

certainly not heard them. All I have heard is that it is neither “feasible” nor justifiable”. I do not agree with either of these arguments.

It is a great pity the Minister of State has come to the House to roll back completely on the commitments Ministers were willing to give to their Government colleagues in writing. I suspect the views of many Fianna Fáil Deputies, Senators and county councillors, not to mention those of people in their own districts and constituencies, are not in accordance with what the Minister of State has said. It is a great pity we are bringing in new laws in this way. It is not right that Bills which are drafted and brought before the Oireachtas can deviate so seriously from commitments previously given to respectable organisations. It is a great pity. The Fine Gael Party will pursue this amendment. The commitments given should be upheld by accepting this important amendment to the Bill.

The role of hunt clubs is clearly defined in the law. Many independent agencies clearly acknowledge that hunting associations keep their kennels and regulate them to a very high standard. Obviously, they would not be in the business if they did not do so — that is a given. We will pursue the amendment in the hope we will receive some support from Fianna Fáil Senators.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I agree with Senator Coffey. I do not think the Minister of State has been well served by his officials. The reasons he has given for not accepting the amendment are not well thought out. He has told us the amendment is neither “feasible” nor “justifiable”. We really wanted to see a better explanation. The Labour Party has discussed this issue at some length. While we will not support the Fine Gael amendment, we intend to pursue other amendments on how best to regulate inspections and on the ability of individuals to enter premises and carry out inspections of dogs. We have to ensure those who carry out inspections are completely independent and not concerned about pushing a particular agenda. We will not support the amendment because we do not want to let Fianna Fáil Members off the hook. We want them to come into the Chamber and vote in support of the Government’s position in order that it will be clear to everybody that this is a Green Party-led initiative that the vast majority of Fianna Fáil Members do not support but are willing to push through to save their own skins.

Senator Paul Bradford: The Minister of State’s reply spoke volumes. Truthfully, he said absolutely nothing. It is obvious that he read from a script given to him from elsewhere. He did not really answer the two questions posed by the amendment. Why has there been a change of Government policy? There was a Government commitment given in writing to grant a full exemption to hunt clubs. That was not promised down the telephone line, rather it was given in writing. While I appreciate that Governments are entitled to change policy and Ministers are entitled to take a particular slant on legislation, I ask the Minister of State to explain the reason the Minister reversed a commitment given by his predecessors. This Bill, which was first mooted a long time ago, was drafted and prepared under two or three Ministers. In correspondence with hunt clubs these Ministers gave a commitment that such clubs would be fully exempt from the provisions. For this reason, it is not unreasonable of Senators to expect the Minister of State to explain the reason the Minister has changed departmental policy.

I also ask the Minister of State to outline departmental thinking on hunting clubs and sports. The Minister has taken a particular view, influenced by his party political background, on the Ward Union hunt. Every hunt, coursing club and point to point association is concerned that the introduction of the legislation, specifically this section, will be used as a Trojan horse to attack rural sporting organisations. I ask the Minister of State to give a commitment that this is not the case and the Department will maintain a hands off approach to country sporting

organisations which have survived for decades and will, I am sure, survive all of us. If he is unwilling to give such a commitment, I ask him to give Members at least the scant consolation that the section will be examined before Report Stage.

The Minister of State did not explain the reason for the policy U-turn on this issue. Was it done at the behest of the Minister, Department, Green Party or campaign groups which, as I read last week, tried to influence the Minister during negotiations on a revised programme for Government? Did these groups write the legislation? Will the Minister of State provide further information?

Senator Joe O'Reilly: The case has been well made by my colleagues but one or two issues merit emphasis given the gravity of the problem. I appeal to the Minister of State to ensure written commitments are honoured. Failing that, he must explain the rationale for the policy change.

I live beside a hunt known as the Drumlin Hounds in Cootehill. I am familiar with members of the hunt and know the dogs are well fed, cared for in an exemplary fashion and kept in the best possible conditions. Those involved in the hunt have an affection for their animals, are outdoors people and love sport. This is the *raison d'être* of the club. Animals must be kept in peak condition and optimum living conditions if they are to be suitable for hunting. The suggestion that a hunt would not keep animals in the best of conditions is a non-runner on two levels.

During the Second Stage debate, the Minister stated the purpose of the Bill was to deal with commercial dog breeding farms. None of us supports the abuse carried out in puppy farms. The extension of the provision to hunts is a sad departure from this objective. It is unnecessary, breaches a promise and threatens an aspect of rural life. Why can rural Ireland not have its integrity? Why will a set of values, norms and mores held by certain urban elements be imposed on rural culture and life? Rural people have the right to live as they wish and pursue their traditional pastimes and culture.

Next Friday week, I will attend a hunt ball in the Abbey Hotel in Roscommon in the Minister of State's constituency. I do so every year as the ball is an opportunity to meet a wonderful group of people from the Roscommon hunt who have a passion for what they do and love and care for their animals.

Senator Rónán Mullen: If the Senator were a female, I would offer to accompany him.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: A sledge-hammer is being used to crack a nut and it is wrong.

Senator Rónán Mullen: Someone once said that people who are nice to animals will generally be nice to humans, although there have been examples in history of people who lavished affection on animals and withheld it from humanity. Having listened with interest to the various contributions, I note that some of the language used was suggestive of various blood sports. We heard about people trying to get off the hook, for instance, while Senator Hannigan referred to saving skins. We also heard the word "U-turn" used more times than one would see U-turns at the average coursing meeting.

I am not convinced by the arguments made by either side and I say this as someone who is committed to animal welfare. I shall enjoy reminding Senators who express commitment to animal welfare when we have tricky and thorny debates on abortion and other socially sensitive subjects that they should be at least as concerned about human dignity as they are about animal welfare. I try to maintain a consistent position on this issue, one which recognises that human dignity should be at the apex of our consideration but that animal welfare should not be forgotten.

[Senator Rónán Mullen.]

What I find unconvincing is the argument by Opposition Senators that since animals are well looked after by hunt clubs, such clubs should not be submitted to the same standard as dog breeding establishments of the type the legislation proposes to monitor and regulate. If a good standard of animal husbandry and welfare is being maintained, the provisions of the Bill will not be onerous.

I do not subscribe to the slippery slope argument. It is possible to reserve one's position on hunting while supporting the idea that the requirements of the Bill should extend to hunt clubs. That said, I ask the Minister of State to explain the basis of his statement that it would not be feasible to exclude these clubs. I do not follow the logic of his position as such an exclusion would not necessarily create an additional administrative burden. While this may not be what the Minister of State meant, it is incumbent on us to support our arguments by setting out grounds for the positions we hold. I say this as someone who will support the Government's position on this matter, notwithstanding the interesting fact that the Minister appears to have given commitments to the contrary. As the principle of the proposal is good, I will support it.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Commitments, whether written or oral, will not be honoured by the Government. We had such commitments from a number of sources. For example, such a commitment was given in a letter from the former Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche, while the current Minister, Deputy Gormley, and the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, gave similar commitments. His letter of 9 January stated he was very pleased that the exemption sought to the regulations would be granted. These are not commitments; they are lies, or untruths, if the word "lies" is deemed to be unparliamentary.

Senator Rónán Mullen: They are statements that are no longer operative.

Senator Maurice Cummins: They are not true.

What has caused this change to be made? We are discussing the Dog Breeding Establishments Bill but this is a classic case of the tail wagging the dog. That is what is happening with the Green Party.

I asked whether the names and addresses of registered persons would be published by local authorities. I understand they will be published and open to scrutiny by the public. The question I was asked was why should people fear this. They fear it because of past experience of the activities of animal liberation activists who have terrorised people involved in hunting. The Alliance for Animal Rights, animal liberation front for fur action, protested against a furrier shop in Dublin. I will not quote the names of the people involved in the shop but in a document the protesters told them to remember that they knew where they lived, that they would make sure they would not sleep easy in their beds at night because they were watching them and that they would put a stop to their evil trade. That is just one comment and why members of the hunting fraternity who breed dogs are afraid of having their names published. They look after their dogs very well, but they are fearful, rightfully so, given comments such as this and the fact that people have been jailed in the United Kingdom for activities in support of animal liberation and animal rights. One will get rogues everywhere, but the vast majority involved in hunting look after their dogs very well. They sought an exemption because they were worried. They are in fear of what the people mentioned can do and have done in the past. It is possibly the reason Ministers gave an undertaking that they would be exempt from registration. I cannot understand why Fianna Fáil is accepting this tail-wagging exercise by the Green Party. This is a typical example of commitments being given and forgotten in the hunt.

Senator Nicky McFadden: I raised this issue last week but as I was sick, I could not attend the House to discuss it. I feel very strongly about the difference between making money from dog breeding in puppy farms — to use that awful phrase — and breeding dogs for hunting. From my experience in the midlands, those who breed dogs for hunting care for them and breed them only to replace dogs when they pass away or are no longer fit. We have a pet shop in Athlone and I am convinced the dogs bred and cared for by the hunting fraternity are cared for better than any category of dog. The Minister should honour the commitment he made and that made by Deputy Dick Roche to the hunting fraternity. They are not in the business of making money; rather they are in the business of replenishing their stocks for hunting.

Senator David Norris: This is a glorious opportunity to sow political dissension and my colleagues on this side of the House have exploited it very cleverly. I am sure they are also motivated by principle and while it would be a very pleasant sight for some on this side to see a degree of disagreement between the Green Party — in particular, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy John Gormley — and Fianna Fáil, that is not what the issue should be about.

With regard to the pet shop issue raised by Senator McFadden, I am delighted to hear there is a pet shop in Athlone and that the animals are well looked after. However, I would translate it into an invitation to the Minister to regulate pet shops also, not in this legislation but it should be——

Senator Nicky McFadden: We do not have dogs in our pet shop.

Senator David Norris: I thought the Senator said the dogs there were as well looked after——

Senator Nicky McFadden: No, I said the hunting fraternity——

Senator Camillus Glynn: It is a pet shop without dogs.

Senator Nicky McFadden: I am familiar with the hunting fraternity.

Senator David Norris: What did the pet shop have to do with anything?

Senator Nicky McFadden: We own it.

Senator David Norris: I see. I am sure animals are well looked after in the shop. Some pet shops do keep dogs. The question of exotic pets and their uncontrolled importation should also be examined.

Senator Nicky McFadden: Hear, hear.

Senator David Norris: I have a position on hunting, as I am against blood sports in general. I was interested to hear my colleague, Senator Mullen, drag in the issue of abortion, which seemed a little extraneous.

Senator Rónán Mullen: A passing reference.

Senator David Norris: It would be like me asking about the welfare of homosexual dogs in these various places. I share elements of his position. I certainly believe there is a hierarchy and that it is appropriate that as a species we look after ourselves. However, we should recognise our close genetic kinship with animals and our responsibilities for them. There is no contradiction whatsoever in my position which is completely consistent of accepting the idea of choice in respect of abortion, another matter for debate.

Senator Rónán Mullen: We can deal with the Senator's failure of logic another time.

Senator David Norris: I am sure the Senator will attempt to address what he sees as my failure of logic but this is the Upper House of the Oireachtas, not the debating chamber in which, I read in *The Irish Times*, he did extraordinarily well as an undergraduate.

Senator Rónán Mullen: I thank the Senator.

Senator David Norris: There is an argument that hunting is as humane as and as much in concert with the realities of life in the wild for it to occur as a culling mechanism. If it is a choice between the hunt, with its long traditions in the country and so long as it is at least humanely controlled, and the process of gassing, shooting or trapping foxes in a cull when they become regarded as vermin, it is better to go the natural way. My *I o'clock* uncle was very keen on hunting. He was an Irishman who lived in England for quite a while. He lived in Rutland, the location of all the great hunts, namely, the Quorn, the Pytchley, the Belvoir and the Cottesmore. A friend of his, a very wealthy man, was master of the Cottesmore hunt. Many poor people on the streets of our cities would be delighted to be treated in the luxurious style in which those hounds were treated. They will look after their animals very well but why would they not? It is perfectly natural. However, it seems to be an argument against themselves. If they are so wonderful, they should be quite happy to submit to this test.

The DSPCA produced an extremely fine set of regulations which I hope will be administered under this legislation. It has requirements on hygiene, spatial requirements per dog and deals with the construction of kennels. However sophisticated and well heeled members of the hunt are, they are not beyond learning something from other aspects of animal welfare. Perhaps a little humility would do them no harm.

I am aware the Minister provided certain assurances in writing. I learned today that the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, did the same a few weeks ago. It is perfectly legitimate for a Minister or a Member to change his or her mind on the basis of the weight of evidence. It would be useful in terms of advancing the debate if the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government explained his reasons for reviewing the situation and deciding against honouring his commitment.

With regard to fox hunters being upset by the pamphlets to which Senator Cummins referred, this has been a tradition in Irish life for many years. Seán Ó Faoláin wrote a wonderful story about a group of right-wing, reactionary moralists who objected to a performance in Cork of the Russian ballet. They formed themselves into the sodality of St. Mark and carried placards proclaiming: "Men of St. Mark, we have you marked." All the local dignitaries were terrified to attend the ballet as a result.

Senator Rónán Mullen: An early version of "Down with that kind of thing".

Senator David Norris: I imagine those involved in fox hunting are made of sterner stuff. All of us have received obnoxious material through the post. My distinguished colleague, Senator Cummins, read out a very unpleasant message and I certainly do not approve of such behaviour. The Animal Liberation Front is basically an English movement which has carried out some horrible and inexcusable terrorist escapades which do no good to the cause of animal rights.

Senator Rónán Mullen: Hear, hear.

Senator David Norris: However, it is a marginal element in Irish society and I am not aware that it has done much, other than picketing Barnardo Furriers at the bottom of Grafton Street.

I imagine the sort of pamphlet described by Senator Cummins would cause more concern among shop assistants than among the hardy members of the hunt fraternity, many of whom are well known to me. I assure Senators they would give not only a verbal but probably also a physical response. I would consider such pamphlets as a *prima facie* case for a criminal prosecution for threatening behaviour. The police could therefore become involved. However, I do not think it appropriate to legislate on the basis of the activities of an isolated, tiny and unrepresentative group which is already subject to other areas of the law. I will be supporting the Government on this amendment because the provision as it stands is appropriate.

There is a certain snobbery in saying everybody else should be regulated but we should not because we are independently regulating ourselves. I follow the principle that independent regulation should always apply. I have argued for independent regulation in regard to newspapers, the medical and legal professions and every other area potentially subject to supervisory authority. I accept that most kennels attached to hunts are well maintained, accord a high priority to animal welfare and even come to love their animals but that is not a reason for exempting them.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Chur tú suas do paw, Senator Mullens.

Senator Rónán Mullen: I find myself in almost complete agreement with Senator Norris, who would be advised to examine his conscience.

Senator David Norris: I think so.

Senator Rónán Mullen: He is substantially correct and his argument on the need for independent regulation was well made. I support his comments in the context of the media because it is a position to which I too strongly adhere.

However, despite what I have said previously, I found Senator Cummins's argument very persuasive. I wonder if a *via media* could be found. While I have not studied the relevant section in detail, surely it is possible to craft a solution whereby hunt clubs are not exempt for all the reasons expressed by Senator Norris and others while holding open the option of deciding against publication where a reasonable case can be made. The *qui timor* concept could apply where people fear a certain consequence. It is not a strong argument that we should not worry about a marginal group. Anything that could be a potential source of concern ought to be taken seriously given that the precedent exists for awful behaviour by so-called animal rights activists in other jurisdictions. Surely it is possible for the Government to consider, and hopefully bring before the House on Report Stage, an amendment which allows the Minister to withhold publication of the names of certain bodies while at the same time maintaining the register and requiring the inclusion of hunt clubs. This might allay concerns about the possible misuse of information for intimidation or other purposes.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I ask the Minister of State to consider the issue of making public the registration documents of canine breeders in general. The Bill's provisions as they currently stand will allow the public to check the number of dogs associated with a particular breeder. This is causing concern among breeders that information on their often valuable animals will be publicly available to potential thieves. Perhaps we need to reconsider how we hold this information and whether it should be publicly available. Presumably the Minister, Deputy Gormley, would like people to know where they can buy puppies but it is important that we maintain a degree of confidentiality.

Senator David Norris: I find it increasingly worrying that I concur with Senator Mullen.

Senator Rónán Mullen: He can move back here if he wishes.

Senator David Norris: If it arises that somebody feels threatened, it would be useful to know what recourse or protection is open to him or her. Perhaps in unusual circumstances, names could be withheld from the public. However, in terms of dog breeding establishments, I have no difficulty with making full information available because the public should know how many dogs are being kept. Professional dog thieves would in any event be aware of the value of the dogs being bred in an establishment because the breeder would have to advertise them in order to continue in business. They would be able to calculate, after casing the joint, how many dogs are being bred. The purchaser is entitled to similar information.

In case anybody thinks I am red in tooth and claw in terms of hunting, I leave a question mark over fox hunting but disdain most other forms. I consider hare coursing to be a particularly damnable and degrading pursuit and I condemn it outright.

Senator Maurice Cummins: I appreciate my colleagues' comments regarding registration and publication of the names and addresses of breeders involved in Irish hunting. That is all we are asking. We will certainly table an amendment to that effect on Report Stage if the Minister does not provide for an exemption for those involved in the Hunting Association of Ireland so their names and addresses would not be published for the reasons I have outlined. We all know that the reason the commitment was given and then taken away was because of the Minister, Deputy Gormley, bringing in certain people around him prior to the referendum on the Lisbon treaty and telling them that he needed them to vote "Yes" and that in return, this Bill and other Bills would be introduced. That is the reason the commitments were made and why they have now been reneged upon. Let us be foursquare and tell the truth about it. As Senator Norris suggested, let us have it out. Let the Minister come to the House to explain why he changed his mind. We need a bit of honesty rather than pussyfooting around saying it was this, that and the other. That is the reason the commitment was reneged upon. It is not sufficient for people to renege on commitments for that purpose.

Senator Camillus Glynn: On the matter mentioned by Senators Norris and Mullen, I have raised the issue of puppy farms in this House. The identification of dogs will be important. At least one newspaper in Westmeath carried stories about small dogs such as Yorkshire terriers, West Highland terriers and Scotties being stolen and sold at car boot sales. It is important we would eliminate that practice where possible.

I am pleased that most people who breed dogs keep them in humane conditions, but not all do. The people who abuse dog breeding by virtue of the conditions in which they keep their dogs should be worried by the Bill. If the legislation addresses that issue in some shape or form, I welcome it.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Does Senator Cummins wish to comment briefly before the Minister of State replies? We have spent nearly an hour on the amendment. I will allow the Senator to contribute before the Minister of State replies.

Senator Maurice Cummins: I wish to comment briefly in response to Senator Glynn. Six years ago I was the first in this House to raise the issue of puppy farms and the inhumane practices that went on. I was supported by Senator Norris at the time. I will support any legislation that will regulate that area and root out the bad practice.

Senator Nicky McFadden: Hear, hear.

Senator Maurice Cummins: However, I disagree with the way we are going about our business in this regard.

Deputy Michael Finneran: Members of both Houses and the public in general are aware that the legislation pertains to the welfare of dogs. That is the foundation of the Bill. It is not a question of something that arose lately. Members will be aware that the working group on the Bill sat initially in 2005. There has been a long lead-in to this legislation. It is not a knee-jerk reaction to the Lisbon treaty or anything else. It is a considered piece of legislation.

Senator Paudie Coffey: The change in stance is new.

Deputy Michael Finneran: In his Second Stage speech the Minister explained why the exemption of hunt clubs was not practical for reasons on which he received good advice. It is important that the legislation is effective and that it can be implemented.

I reject the insinuation that this is an attack on rural life or sporting activities. That is totally wrong. It is an inappropriate contribution to make. The amendment relates to whether one registers hunt clubs for the purpose of the Bill. We can talk about the legislation in general later but we are dealing with the amendment in particular. There is no basis to the argument that my non-acceptance of the amendment is an attack on rural life. That is generally accepted.

It is important that when the legislation is enacted it must be effective in its implementation and have the fundamental welfare of dogs at its core. That is what the legislation is about. I accept that all breeding establishments must therefore come within the remit of the legislation for inspection purposes. I know many hunting clubs. They are caring groups. The Roscommon Hunt was mentioned by Senator O'Reilly. It hunts on my family farm. I am not a member although it hunts in my area. Those people do their work well. They work on a voluntary basis to the highest standards. They do not have anything to fear from the legislation.

Senator Paudie Coffey: The Minister of State has not spoken to them, then.

Senator Maurice Cummins: What about the provision of names and addresses?

Senator Paudie Coffey: If the Minister of State spoke to them, they would inform him of their concerns.

Deputy Michael Finneran: The legislation will not place an undue burden on any of the hunt clubs. We should remember what the legislation is about, namely, the care and welfare of dogs. That is the fundamental reason for the legislation.

Senator Paudie Coffey: It is about breeding establishments.

Senator Maurice Cummins: We do not agree with that.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We have spent nearly an hour on this amendment alone.

Senator Maurice Cummins: The Minister of State did not address the publishing of the names and addresses of people involved in hunt club kennels, thus making them public. Other Members asked similar questions. Could we have a response? Is the Minister of State favourably disposed to leaving out the names and addresses of those who operate hunt club kennels, or at least not having them available for public consumption? If he responds favourably to that point we will consider not tabling an amendment on Report Stage. Questions have been posed to the Minister of State but we have had no indication of what he thinks on the issues.

Senator Paudie Coffey: I will be brief as we have given the amendment much time.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We have spent an hour on the amendment.

Senator Paudie Coffey: It is an important amendment in terms of commitments given by Ministers. We are seeking answers as to what or who influenced the change in stance by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The Hunting Association of Ireland met officials from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in Wexford in November 2007. There was clear dialogue and consultation at that time. The understanding was that agreement had been reached with the Department's officials. A subsequent commitment was made in writing following the consultation between Ministers, namely, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy Dermot Ahern. The Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, has given the impression that the Hunting Association of Ireland is happy with what has been a shifting of the goalposts at the last minute. We on this side of the House have a legitimate right and entitlement to question the Minister of State on what or who changed the views of the officials or the Minister. That is all we are asking.

Legitimate concerns have been raised by Senator Cummins on recorded criminals in other jurisdictions having influence in areas in which perhaps they should not have had. It is on the record that people are influencing this legislation. Senator Norris suggested they are in the minority. It seems that the minority is influencing legislation and the Minister to a great extent. The record speaks for itself. It is there in writing. That is why we are so exercised and why we have tabled the amendment. We are giving the issue the time it deserves. We deserve to get answers from the Minister and the officials in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on what essentially changed the fundamental agreements that were in place and committed to in writing between the Minister and the Hunting Association of Ireland. That is the fundamental reason I am concerned about it and I will put the amendment.

Senator David Norris: I would like to clarify that when I spoke about a minority, I was referring to the Animal Liberation Front and not any group lobbying——

Senator Paudie Coffey: It is influencing legislation.

Senator David Norris: I am not sure whether minorities or majorities were lobbying. I was lobbied by both sides. To a certain extent, I am supporting the Government against my own interest because I have been heavily briefed by opponents of the legislation, including in a rather interesting and intelligent letter from a constituent of mine, a Trinity graduate, who says he is very concerned about the impact that the Green Party is having on Government policy. It is perfectly legitimate for its members to have such an impact as there would not be much point in them being in Government if they did not. It is a measure of a civilised coalition when the parties listen to each other. That does not bother me but my constituent raised some interesting points. He states: "This piece of legislation is attempting to categorise hunt kennels under the same legislation as commercial breeding kennels."——

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We are on amendment No. 1.

Senator David Norris: I am well aware of that and this point is directly relevant. He continues:

Hunt kennels are very different, they are run on a not for profit basis, [I am sure the Chair can see now this is directly relevant] any hounds that are given to other clubs nationwide are gifted or drafted to other clubs and no money is exchanged. Similar legislation was put in

place in various parts of the UK, including N Ireland, and all registered hunt clubs were exempt from this bill.

I was not aware of this previously and presumably there is a need for a wider explanation to be given in this area. My constituent has illustrated in the final line of this paragraph the reason for the shrill chorus of opposition because he is concerned that the Green Party is attempting to ban hunting through the back door. That is not what is happening, particularly in this Bill, but that is the fear. This fear, rather than any logical resistance to kennels being brought under the legislation, is what is at the back of this. There is an anxiety that this is the wedge in the door, which will lead to the banning of all forms of hunting. There are different views in the House on that but that is a matter for another day. I thought it would be honourable and appropriate to put this informed view by one of my constituents on the record, although that is another vote down the drain because I will vote with the Government.

Senator Feargal Quinn: I declared my interest on Second Stage in that I was a member of the Ward Union Hunt 20 years ago and I have received requests from its members to make a case on their behalf. They make a strong case that the hunting lobby was consulted, including themselves, and they understood they had a commitment from the former Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche, and the current Minister but they now understand they have been let down.

There is concern that names and addresses of members will be published but there is a virulent anti-hunting lobby which has, in the past, behaved in a threatening and unacceptable manner and names should not be published on that basis.

The debate highlights that the Government should reconsider its proposal. Senator Norris is not enthusiastic about hunting but the issue raised by his constituent to which he referred is worthy of consideration. Kennels for hunt hounds were excluded in similar legislation in the UK and Northern Ireland. I can understand why the Government has included rather than excluded them but there is a difference between breeding dogs for hunting, which many may not approve of, and breeding puppies for sale, which is a serious problem, and that is why I support the general theme of the legislation.

There is a need for this legislation but it must go through in a way that is accepted. Anti-hunting legislation is likely to be introduced because the Green Party is determined to do so. Subsidiarity is a European Union concept. However, subsidiarity could be provided for in this legislation because decisions on such issues should be made at local level and individual county councils could make a decision for their area. If the people of Dublin do not want hunting, then there will not be hunting in Dublin. I doubt if there will be anyway but if the people of Meath or Kildare say it is a rural tradition that they would like to maintain, the local authorities can decide to ensure that happens. Hunt clubs should be excluded from the legislation and, therefore, I support the amendment.

Deputy Michael Finneran: The matter raised by a number of Senators was explained by the Minister on Second Stage.

Senator Paudie Coffey: It was not.

Deputy Michael Finneran: He made a long contribution on the matter and he explained the difficulties that would arise in implementing the regulations if there was an exemption. That was done following advice and due consideration.

The Bill is about the welfare of dogs and the amendment deals with hunt clubs. Many issues have been raised that are not related to the amendment. Registers and the use of names and

[Deputy Michael Finneran.]

addresses is covered in an amendment to section 8 while the local authority issue is subject of an amendment to section 16. Hunt clubs have nothing to fear from the legislation because, as every Member said, they run their operations in a humane way and they adhere to the highest standards. There will not be a financial imposition on them under the Bill. The issue is implementing the legislation properly and to do so, exemptions such as that being sought would create practical difficulties in the implementation of the regulations. The clubs have nothing to fear because they do their business well. It is a matter of regulation, inspection and the welfare of dogs and we are all agreed on that.

Amendment put.

The Committee divided: Tá, 14; Níl, 34.

Tá

Bradford, Paul.
Burke, Paddy.
Buttimer, Jerry.
Coffey, Paudie.
Coghlan, Paul.
Cummins, Maurice.
Fitzgerald, Frances.

Healy Eames, Fidelma.
McFadden, Nicky.
O'Reilly, Joe.
Phelan, John Paul.
Quinn, Feargal.
Regan, Eugene.
Ross, Shane.

Níl

Bacik, Ivana.
Boyle, Dan.
Brady, Martin.
Callely, Ivor.
Carroll, James.
Carty, John.
Cassidy, Donie.
Corrigan, Maria.
Daly, Mark.
Feeney, Geraldine.
Glynn, Camillus.
Hanafin, John.
Hannigan, Dominic.
Keaveney, Cecilia.
Leyden, Terry.
MacSharry, Marc.
McCarthy, Michael.

McDonald, Lisa.
Mooney, Paschal.
Mullen, Rónán.
Norris, David.
Ó Brolcháin, Niall.
Ó Domhnaill, Brian.
Ó Murchú, Labhrás.
O'Brien, Francis.
O'Donovan, Denis.
O'Malley, Fiona.
O'Sullivan, Ned.
Ormonde, Ann.
Phelan, Kieran.
Prendergast, Phil.
Walsh, Jim.
White, Mary M.
Wilson, Diarmuid.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Maurice Cummins and Paudie Coffey; Níl, Senators Diarmuid Wilson and Camillus Glynn.

Amendment declared lost.

Section 2 agreed to.

Progress reported; Committee to sit again.

Business of Seanad.

An Cathaoirleach: I ask the Leader to clear up the confusion regarding the Order of Business.

Senator Donie Cassidy: As it now appears Committee Stage of the Dog Breeding Establishment Bill 2009 will not conclude at 2 p.m., it is proposed that we resume the debate on Tuesday

of next week. I am still proposing a sos from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. No. 2, statements on CAO applications and college places, will be taken from 3 p.m. until 5 p.m.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Dog Breeding Establishments Bill 2009: Committee Stage (Resumed).

Sections 3 to 6, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 7.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 6, subsection (1), lines 27 and 28, to delete “*subsection (17) of section 8,*” and substitute “a provision referred to in *section 6(1),*”.

This amendment is necessary, as a number of offences are specified in section 6(1) as being summary offences only. Why should all of these offences, instead of the single offence of failing to display a certificate, not be capable of being dealt with by an on-the-spot fine? We ask the Minister of State to consider the matter.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I do not propose to accept the amendment. Section 8(17) provides that, if a dog breeding establishment does not prominently display its registration certificate, it shall be guilty of an offence. The proposed amendment would expand the number of offences included in section 8(17) to include offences already listed elsewhere in the Bill. These include offences provided for in section 8(16) — providing false information — and section 17(5) — obstructing or interfering with an authorised person or a member of the Garda Síochána and non-co-operation with a request for information.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: While I do not propose to push the amendment at this stage, I reserve my right to consider doing so on Report Stage.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Section 7 agreed to.

SECTION 8.

Senator Paudie Coffey: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 7, subsection (3), line 34, to delete “3 months” and substitute “12 months”.

We are proposing this amendment to qualify our general view. In principle, Fine Gael supports the Bill, since there is an obvious need for regulation of dog breeding establishments. However, we are seeking ways to improve the legislation and enhance the standard of current facilities. It is with this in mind that the amendment has been proposed.

On Second Stage the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government referred to the three-month lead-in time. He stated:

This lead-in time will allow dog breeding establishments to meet the necessary standards and avoid the problem of having to dispose of a number of unwanted dogs ... The Bill provides that a period of up to three months will be provided from the commencement of the Act for dog breeding establishments to be registered.

[Senator Paudie Coffey.]

While we agree with the notion that there should be a lead-in time, the newness of the Bill means breeding establishments might not be aware of its full implications. They should be given a reasonable opportunity to put their houses in order and, if necessary, the proper standards in place. The Minister has acknowledged the opportunity for establishments to address their standards, as he has allowed three months in which to do so, but Fine Gael believes a period of three months may be unreasonable in the light of the implications. For example, there may be planning implications if a breeding establishment has to apply for planning permission to bring the structures it currently uses to house its brood bitches up to standard. We agree that proper standards of housing for brood bitches and dogs of all types should be in place.

The amendment which would allow a lead-in period of 12 months is reasonable. We are open to the Minister of State's suggestions, but three months is too short a period in which to deal with any planning consequences as a result of these regulations. Let us take as an example a traditional farm that has entered the dog breeding business. That farm might be run to a very high standard with those dogs receiving the best of care but the old buildings that might have been used to house the dogs might not be up to the standard required in these regulations. There may be a need for that business to apply for planning permission. We all understand that planning permission is not granted quickly and that objections and so on may be submitted. It is a reasonable amendment, therefore, to provide for a 12-month period, during which all the consequences of the regulations regarding planning or otherwise can be considered, to give people the opportunity to put their house in order and have proper standards in place when the regulations and inspections commence.

I said during the debate on Second Stage that we need buy-in to this legislation from all the stakeholders. We need people to understand and agree to the regulations coming into place. One of the best ways to do that is to provide a reasonable opportunity for people to comply with the regulations and their consequences for establishments.

We propose this 12-month period to give people adequate time to apply for planning permission or otherwise to get their establishments up to the required standard. The Minister of State has already acknowledged that a lead-in time is reasonable. We are merely saying that should be extended to a period longer than that provided in the section. We have specified 12 months, but if the Minister of State was to provide for six or eight months, or longer, we would be happy to consider that.

I will be interested to hear the Minister of State's response. This is a reasonable amendment. It is tabled in an effort to be inclusive to try to involve the stakeholders, the very people to whom these regulations will apply, to get them to buy in to the legislation and not to give them any reason to complain that they were not given reasonable time or an opportunity to put in place the necessary requirements that will be needed as a result of these regulations.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I agree with the proposed amendment. Senator Coffey outlined the problems that might be perceived by people who are trying in good spirit to meet the regulations this new law will define. The problems are not just related to planning, although planning issues are a concern. They could be related to budgeting. People often put in place a budget for the year. They could be related to obtaining credit from banks to do any necessary upgrade or remedial works.

The three-month period provided is too short. We all want these establishments to be registered. The provision of a 12-month period is eminently suitable. If the Minister of State is not happy with this amendment, he might change the legislation to allow a staged process whereby if, after three or six months, institutions showed an itemised plan of work they intended carrying

out over the subsequent six months, that would suffice. I would be concerned about enshrining in law the requirement to complete any remedial works within three months because it would be very difficult in the current climate to achieve that timescale. It may have the effect of driving some establishments underground or some people out of business. We all appreciate the need for this but I ask the Minister of State to have some thought for the difficulties a three-month limit might impose on breeders.

Deputy Michael Finneran: I do not propose to accept the Senator's amendment to this section. The proposed amendment would extend the period in which dog breeding establishments have to register from three months to 12 months. It could be argued that the five years that have elapsed since the report on the working group should be considered an ample lead-in time for the new regulatory regime. However, I am seeking to ensure a smooth transition to full registration while also keeping the period allowed for registration meaningful. Therefore, I propose to retain the three-month period for registration provided for in the Bill.

This measure is for registration purposes. There is no restriction on a local authority carrying out an inspection and issuing an improvement notice. The local authority can and will have an itemised list if it is necessary but it may not be. Planning permission comes under a different code. It has nothing to do with this.

Senator Liam Twomey: Are all the regulations, standards and so on that would apply to these breeding establishments published? Are they all in the public domain to ensure anyone who has a dog breeding kennel knows exactly the standards that will apply to them once this legislation is enacted, or is there more to come? Given that this legislation is significantly different from the recommendations of the dog breeders working group that was established, perhaps there might be a need to extend this period because the full information is not available even as we speak?

Senator Paudie Coffey: The Minister of State said in his response that it could be argued that the working group was sitting for five years but, with due respect and in fairness to all involved, not every breeding establishment would have been privy to what was or was not said in the working group. That was a steering group set up to inform the Minister and his Department on drafting the legislation, and it made some excellent recommendations. It is not reasonable to say that breeders might have been aware of this legislation and its impact for over five years.

The thrust of this amendment is to try to bring reason, to get buy-in from people in order that they would accept the need for regulation, and to give them ample time to address whatever shortcomings they may have. The Minister has acknowledged as much by allowing for a period of three months. Senator Hannigan made a valid point, with which I agree, that many of these breeding establishments might have been traditional farms or otherwise and then went on to develop into a rural business. Many of those businesses would have year-on-year accounts, capital expenditure and day-to-day expenditure. To get the necessary people to buy in to this legislation and to win the trust of these stakeholders, the most important people to have involved, to ensure we do not drive this activity underground and have people hiding from registration because they might not have the adequate facilities, why not give them the opportunity at the outset to put their house in order and give them a 12 month lead-in time to do so? They could be given six months or eight months — we are open to consideration on that — but, from a planning perspective, we believe three months is too short. In the event that a well-established breeder's premises was not up to the required standard, as Senator Twomey said, and if information on the technical sizes for kennels for the dogs, breeding bitches and

[Senator Paudie Coffey.]

pups was not available to breeders, they would not have prior knowledge of the requirements with which they would have to comply.

This is a reasonable amendment. Will the Minister of State consider again accepting it? If he does not do so at this Stage, he might consider it at a later Stage to ensure there is more buy-in into this legislation. We do not want to be exclusive or give a message that could drive underground people who will not comply because they have not been given a reasonable time to meet the required standards. I appeal to the Minister of State in the interests of inclusiveness, which is what legislation should be all about, to extend the period provided. If he does not want to accept the Fine Gael amendment, he might table an amendment to extend the timeframe to give people a reasonable chance to comply with the regulations given the effect they will have on these establishments. That is what good legislation should be about, namely, getting people to buy into it, to accept what the law seeks to do and to comply with it. Extending the period provided would help in that process. I genuinely request the Minister of State to consider doing that.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I concur with everything Senator Coffey said. The Minister of State said that the details of proposed legislation have been known for some time, but what is the overriding need to limit this period to three months? What is the concern? Why can he not accept a period of 12 months? The argument why we desperately need a three-month limit has not been sufficiently made. What is the overriding need for it and why will he not consider the change proposed?

Deputy Michael Finneran: The working group's deliberations are available to the public and are on the website. It might be helpful if I were to explain to the House that once the legislation is enacted, there will be a public consultation period which will be announced by the Minister. Not until after that public consultation period will the regulations be written, with the three months kicking in from that stage. There will be ample opportunity for the public consultation process.

Once the regulations are in place, every establishment has three months to go to the local authority and register. After that, any of the issues raised here will be a matter between the establishment and the local authority. An improvement notice, as provided for in the legislation, must be issued and a timeframe has to be agreed with the establishment and the local authority. That could be related to planning permission or other matters. This will not be thrown on establishments the minute we are finished in both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Senator Paudie Coffey: I thank the Minister of State for his response but it still does not alleviate the concern we have on this side of the House. I accept his view that the three-month period will come into effect after commencement.

Progress reported; Committee to sit again.

Sitting suspended at 2 p.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.

CAO Applications and College Places: Statements.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State. We will now hear statements on the matter of CAO applications and college places. Spokespersons have ten minutes, while all other Senators have seven minutes.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): I welcome the opportunity to make a statement in the Seanad on the recent publication of details of applications through the CAO for third level places on courses commencing next September.

Our third level education system is critical in enabling people to reach their full potential as individuals and active citizens and in creating the skilled workforce that Ireland needs in order to develop an internationally competitive knowledge based economy. That over 70,000 people are considering embarking on a third level education programme is an extremely positive development for our ambitions to create a smart economy in which the vision, originality, creativity and invention of our people will support the creation of sustainable employment opportunities and high standards of living for everyone.

We have achieved an unprecedented expansion of educational opportunities in the last four decades. Ireland's higher education participation rate grew from 20% in 1980 to 55% in 2004 and is now estimated to be over 65%. There were 40,000 students in the higher education system in the 1980s, compared to more than 145,000 full-time students now, representing growth of almost 400%.

The number of applications received by 1 February for places in the 2010-11 academic year is up approximately 6% on the number for 2009. This increase is broadly in line with expectations and in line with the increase seen the previous year. The number of CAO acceptances in 2009-10 was 45,582, up 8.3% on the figure for the previous year which, in turn, had seen an increase of 5.4% on the figure for 2007-08. The trend of increasing applications for entry to higher education is to be expected at a time of reduced opportunities for direct school leaver entry to the labour market, reducing apprenticeship numbers and increasing demand for re-skilling and up-skilling among the broader adult population.

While demand from school leavers for third level places continues to grow, in recent years we have also seen an increase in the number of mature students in higher education. This trend is extremely welcome, given the up-skilling and re-skilling needs of the labour market. We are seeing evidence that people who have lost their jobs have taken the decision to return to education to improve their skill levels. This is an extremely positive development. While people at all skill levels are experiencing unemployment and new young graduates, in particular, are facing a very difficult labour market, a review of unemployment rates by age and educational attainment clearly shows that those with higher levels of qualifications are more likely to be in employment and less likely to be unemployed than those qualified at lower levels. People with higher levels of educational attainment will also be better placed to return to employment as the economy recovers.

Applications from mature students accounted for 14% of all applications in 2009, up from almost 12% in 2008. Last year more than 6,200 mature students accepted an offer of a higher education place through the CAO, an increase of 26% on the figure for 2008. Traditionally, higher education institutions have focused on the needs of the school leaver. The broader challenge now is to widen learning opportunities for all learners in higher education through more flexible modes of provision and more flexible entry mechanisms.

Research has shown that up-skilling adults requires flexible provision. The Department of Education and Science is working with the Higher Education Authority to support the expansion of opportunities for flexible learning in higher education institutions. An example is the recent development of www.bluebrick.ie, a website launched by the Minister for Education and Science last September. It is a flexible learning portal that lets a prospective learner search for and compare flexible learning courses in all the institutes of technology and also allows them to apply for courses on-line.

A number of new initiatives were developed in the higher education sector last year that specifically supported unemployed people to return to education and engage in up-skilling. These included the provision of almost 1,800 places for unemployed people on part-time undergraduate and postgraduate courses in areas that supported the goals of the smart economy, 900

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

places on short preparatory courses, 160 places on accelerated level 6 programmes and a special education programme for redundant apprentices. Higher education institutions demonstrated considerable flexibility and innovation in using the capacity within the system to deliver these responses by commencing programmes mid-way through the traditional academic year, providing shorter duration programmes and significantly increasing the opportunities for part-time study which enabled unemployed people to up-skill while continuing to seek employment. The higher education sector is committed to developing further up-skilling responses for unemployed people. Officials from the Department of Education and Science are working closely with other Departments, including the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Social and Family Affairs, to support the development of such responses.

Despite the increase in student numbers, there are no plans for the introduction of a cap on the number of places in higher education. Our higher education institutions have been responding to the increasing demand by increasing the number of places they offer.

The Government is investing unprecedented levels of public funding in higher education, with funding provision for the third level sector — capital funding, recurrent funding, student grants, etc. — having increased by 33% from €1.5 billion in 2004 to around €2 billion in 2009. In the current budgetary climate higher education institutions are being required to achieve significant payroll and non-pay efficiencies. This is in common with all areas of public expenditure. A minimum 3% payroll cost reduction is being sought from the sector this year owing to the operation of an employment control framework to give effect to the Government's moratorium on recruitment. At a time of considerable pressure on budgets and staffing resources, this demonstrates a significant willingness on the part of higher education providers to respond to increasing demand. The Higher Education Authority is working closely with the institutions to effect economies across all levels of activity. The commitment of the institutions to accommodating current increased demand at a time of significant budgetary pressures is welcome. I note recent press reports that half of CAO applicants will not receive an offer of a place in higher education for the next academic year. I am concerned that such reports are creating unnecessary anxiety for school leavers, their parents and other potential students. Based on CAO acceptances of some 45,000 in 2009 and the current number of 2010 applications at some 71,000, the current ratio of applicants to places is of the order of 1.6:1. While this ratio may appear to be high, it must be borne in mind that in any given year the eventual number of entrants to higher education will be considerably less than the number of applications received. This is owing to a wide range of factors, including the fact that some applicants will not meet the academic entry requirements for their courses of choice, some applicants may decide to repeat the leaving certificate exam, while other applicants will decide to defer a place when it is offered. Some applicants who apply through the CAO also apply for courses elsewhere, for example, in Northern Ireland or the UK, and may decide to take a place on such a course in preference to a course offered through the CAO. Other applicants might decide to embark on a post-leaving certificate course or another education or training programme or simply change their mind about the decision to go to college.

While the increasing demand for higher education is an extremely positive development, responding to the needs of a growing and diverse student population while ensuring the system can deliver a high quality learning experience poses a number of challenges for the sector. These challenges are being examined by the high level group the Minister for Education and Science established to develop a new higher education strategy. The strategy process will examine how well Ireland's higher education system is performing, how it ranks internationally, how well existing resources are being used and how the system can be reconfigured to best meet the many challenges it faces over the next decade having regard to the key role it has to play

in contributing to Ireland's economic recovery. The objective of this strategy process is to develop a vision and related set of national policy objectives for Irish higher education for the next 20 years with more focused targets for the sector for the next five years. The strategy affords a timely opportunity to review the environment for higher education and the challenges and changes that are having an impact on the sector. An examination of the overall operation, governance and resourcing framework are important elements of the strategy review. It is expected the new strategy will be completed before the summer.

I look forward to the debate in the Seanad and responding to comments made. As always, the quality of debate in the Seanad will be first class.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I welcome the Minister of State. As we said last night, we meet a lot on these occasions when it comes to education issues. I thank the Leader for arranging this debate in such a timely way because it is only ten days since I said it was needed. It is particularly appropriate in view of reports on increased applications to get into and pressure on places in college. I welcome much of what the Minister of State said, especially on flexible provision and delivery. He pointed out there are no plans for the introduction of a cap on the number of places in higher education. That is brilliant but I question how universities and institutes of technology will be funded. The seven heads of universities appeared before an Oireachtas joint committee two weeks ago saying they were terribly strapped for cash. The Union of Students in Ireland cogently put its case to us, proving that universities were putting their hands in the pie of the student service charge to fund core tuition. I am fascinated by how they will survive.

Some 71,000 applicants are seeking 45,000 places, an increase of 6.25%. I would like the Minister of State to answer the question of how funding will match up if there is no cap on places, which I welcome. The Minister of State also mentioned the issue of cutting back. The Government's moratorium on recruitment is putting pressure on teaching. As the number of students increases, there are more students per lecturer and there are no replacements when people retire. The quality of education suffers. Owing to the new employment framework, student service counsellors must also apply to get a post. They should surely be funded from the student service charge of €1,500 per year. The student service end is being hit. The Minister of State referred to 71,000 applicants and the 45,000 CAO acceptances in 2009, giving a current ratio of 1.6:1. It is not just about any place but about the place a student wants. A student lists ten preferences on the CAO form. Some courses are available with 130 points, which is fine for those who want it and if the course matches their ability and competence, but the place is no good to a student who wants a place in dentistry, science or mathematics.

I look forward to the report of the higher group but it was a bit much for the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, to deliberate on the closure of the NUI office in advance of the higher level group presenting its report. The key to economic growth, in this country or any other, is investment in human capital. When the IDA sells Ireland, Galway or any other place, it does so based on the expertise available and the quality of graduates as well as our corporation tax rate. In a downturn it is ideal that a nation invests in these people and mature students. This latter category has grown by 14%, a major growth, and it must be met by the courses needed. Mr. Michael Gleeson of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors said last week he is concerned a 1980s style points race will return. A spokesman for the Minister said that supply and demand would narrow in the months ahead. I understand that but these trends come at a time when workplace opportunities and apprenticeships were never lower. The number of students applying to Britain and Northern Ireland for university places has increased by 50% this year according to Mr. John Walshe in the *Irish Independent*. Students are nervous they will not get the place they need in this country. Last year almost 13,000 mature students

[Senator Fidelma Healy Eames.]

applied for places by August. This year that figure has already been reached. Late applications increased by 7,000 last year and I expect them to be higher this year. Ms Bernie Brady of AONTAS has called on the Minister of State to provide more training and education initiatives for the unemployed. We can assume that many of those applying for mature student places are likely to have lost their jobs.

The career expert writing for the *Irish Independent* refers to the sense of anxiousness among leaving certificate students about the scarcity of college places. It places students under extra pressure at a time when they should be focusing on study for their exams. Will the Minister of State provide a commitment to increase the places in areas where students are looking for study opportunities? For example, University College Galway always sees a significant increase in the numbers taking arts courses and the college is at its limit in the provision of arts places unless more Government funding is provided. However, this difficulty is not experienced in science and engineering courses. The registrar at GMIT, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, has told me that work experience as part of the training course for apprentices is badly needed. A forecast of what the demand in trades will be in three to four years is needed in order to develop apprenticeship courses. Is the Department undertaking this planning and why is the number of apprenticeships not being increased? The big problem is that employers are not employing so people are going back to education.

I note the very worrying trend of the numbers unemployed in the construction sector. Those people left school early, many with quite poor literacy skills and they also need opportunities. Before the economic downturn, the number of leaving certificate students going directly into apprenticeships was 18,000 to 20,000 and now the number is 2,000, a direct result of the downturn in the construction industry.

I wish to devote the remainder of my time to the crisis in the area of maths and sciences. A key adviser to Barack Obama, Dr. Craig Barrett, the former chief executive officer of Intel said that Ireland's education system needs to do better if the economy is to compete on a world stage. Along with Engineers Ireland, the area of learning he has flagged is that of maths and science. He spoke about setting our educational sights high and that we should aim to be the first in maths and science rather than just average. The Minister of State will be aware that PISA, the programme for international student achievement, shows that Ireland is just average. We are faring very badly when it comes to honours level maths at leaving certificate. The Government and the nation should be looking to the needs of the knowledge and innovation economy and deciding how to serve those needs.

We need to look at the early learning of maths and sciences. Our problem is that when a young teacher begins teaching at 21 or 22 years of age, they do not have the opportunity to observe science in action in the workplace at any stage. This is not satisfactory as they will not have the motivation and excitement to teach science as a subject that is alive. I propose to the Minister of State that there should be a new type of in-service training for teachers of maths and science which would provide a link between classroom practice and industry practice. For example, there are wonderful medical devices manufacturing companies in Galway and Mayo. I suggest that teachers should be released for one day or a few hours every month so they can observe industry practice. For example, Intel has been enthusiastic in its support, along with the Government, for the IT revolution.

The solution to the problem with maths and sciences is to do with the teaching of maths and sciences rather than the doubling of points at leaving certificate. I have been informed by University College Galway that we are starting from too low a base. Only 30% of junior certificate students gain an A or B in honours maths and this is where the problem lies and not at leaving certificate level. The in-service training needs to be aimed at those teaching

children who are leaving sixth class and entering second level. I ask the Minister of State to examine the link between town and gown, between teaching and industry.

I summarise by asking the Minister of State whether he will provide extra college places in the key areas of maths, science and engineering and arts in Galway. We must consider what the student wants and also what the nation needs so we can respond when the downturn is followed by an upturn. I ask the Minister of State if he will provide more apprenticeship places because not everybody is suited for a university place. I have heard Senator Ormonde voice the same opinion. I ask the Minister of State to commit to a new model of teacher in-service education in the area of maths and sciences. I do not agree with the former Intel chairman when he spoke about increasing the points for maths and science at leaving certificate level. In my view, those who study these subjects have chosen them out of interest. We need to focus on students who do not achieve sufficiently high grades in the early years, at pre-junior certificate level so they will choose to study those subjects at honours level at leaving certificate.

Education is the key to our future growth and the key to personal development.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: As Seanad Fianna Fáil spokesperson on education I am very glad to speak on this most important issue about college places and CAO applications. This is a very difficult time every year for students who are facing the leaving certificate and must decide on a choice of course and college. I am anxious that the process of decision-making is made as easy as possible. To that end, I have been continually asking that the grant application process be brought back to the date of the CAO application so that students can complete all the paperwork at this point in the year or preferably in January, to allow them apply for their preferred course and college as well as their grant aid. The Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe, has indicated that he is in favour of pulling back the CAO application dates to assist in the processing of applications. It is vital that the smooth running of the process can only be achieved when the grant applications have also been included at the start of the year, thereby allowing students to concentrate fully on exclusively academic issues. I would like to see the student support scheme being fully operational as soon as possible so all the dates would coincide, with paperwork kept separate from the academic work. This would allow for a more efficient system which would be in everyone’s interest, the people processing the applications and working in college administration as well as the students and their families who endure the trauma with them.

Many students who sat examinations last year may be repeating examinations this year in an attempt to achieve the few extra points for their chosen course and many other students will be attempting the leaving certificate for the first time. Newspaper headlines in recent weeks have highlighted there will be two students for every college place and more points needed for courses as a result. This news may have frightened many students. It is fair for journalists to report an increase in pressure but the way the information is being presented in the media will scare the life out of every student. We need to reassure those students and work to maximise their opportunities. The Minister of State in his contribution stated there will not be capping and that every effort will be made to expand the flexibility of the courses on offer. The Government has been proactive in delivering what students need.

The number of people applying for courses has increased over recent years and this is not a phenomenon of this year in particular. In 2007, a total of 61,961 people applied to the CAO process and in 2008 that number was 63,868; by 2009, the number was 67,634 and in 2010 it looks as if it will be 71,867. This is an increase of 4%, 3%, 6% and 6%, respectively in each year. These statistics are important in the context of this debate. When I filled out my CAO form, I had virtually no intention of taking up any of the places for which I applied. I applied to UCCA to get into a number of colleges in the North because I wanted to study music and

[Senator Cecilia Keaveney.]

the Northern Ireland system provided free tuition in a number of instruments. After I had gone through the hoops and hurdles of various interview processes, etc., I knew I would be going to college in the North if I did well in my leaving certificate. I was able to use the CAO system as a back-up. I also deferred a PGCE year at one stage. I remind those who think they will not be included because of the 1.6:1 ratio that I never thought I would be wasting the time of the CAO or deferring courses. That is the reality of what happens. In that context, it is worth asking why instrumental tuition in music is not a fundamental part of music degrees in this jurisdiction. Perhaps the House can debate that matter on another occasion. Why should one have to pay for such tuition separately?

I remind the Senator who made an off-the-cuff comment about those who have to go to another jurisdiction that many students do not mind having to do so. We are working in co-operation with the University of Ulster in Jordanstown, Coleraine and Magee College as well as with Queen's University and the other third level institutions in the North. The Minister, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, and the Northern Ireland Minister, Caitríona Ruane, MLA, spoke at last Thursday's meeting of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The authorities on this small island need to co-operate to maximise the opportunities associated with the courses that are presented in third level institutions and to minimise the obstacles to student mobility. Ultimately, we should seek to establish a university of the north west that would straddle the Border so that we do not have to talk about different jurisdictions. We would not be talking about the north, the south, the east or the west; we would be talking about the best way of meeting the needs of students.

The Department of Education and Science must take seriously the research being undertaken by Forfás and the implementation body on future national skills needs because it comprises a vital piece of basic infrastructure. At times, governance in this country is too departmentalised. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment can give one all the statistics one might want about the needs of those who are or are not employed. We need to ensure such statistics are taken into account when the Department of Education and Science makes decisions on what is taught, how it is taught and the manner in which young people are driven. I am not talking specifically about this topic when I say we sometimes wear hats. If it is the hat of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, it cannot be the hat of the Department of Health and Children. If it is the hat of the Department of Health and Children, it cannot be the hat of the Department of Education and Science. It is often the case that hats should be shared by the various Departments.

Many students know exactly what they want to do. They are clear in their goals and in how to get there. I refer to the colleges they choose, the CAO and the points they are striving for. Other people may not have decided what they want to do, even at this stage. We should give such students directions on the basis of our skill needs. We should ensure they are guided into courses that will yield jobs and careers for them in the short and longer terms. Social engineering is often referred to but the reality is that jobs are scarce and opportunities limited. By the time the current cohort of students comes out of college, traditionally strong sectors such as architecture, planning and construction may have recovered. While I agree that young people should follow their dreams, there are opportunities to widen the scope of what they tend to aim for.

Ireland has not maximised the strengths associated with being an island nation. Jobs on the water, for example, are available throughout the world. I refer not only to fishing, but also to merchant shipping, etc. Many fishermen are in limbo at present as a consequence of the lack of fishing rights. If their expertise is drawn on and deployed in our fisheries colleges in Cork and Greencastle, we will produce qualified mariners for Ireland and the rest of the world. We

need to ensure we are sufficiently innovative. I understand that 500 qualified people are needed to man ships in high-ranking positions in the merchant navy and elsewhere in the marine sector. No country is producing such workers with the necessary speed. As an island nation, we need to ensure we offer such opportunities and drive new ideas. Given that boats have to be laid up for short or long periods of time, it is obvious we should develop a marine car park. There are opportunities to provide berthage or boat parking along our coastline. While such examples might seem odd, surely it is by looking to our actual strengths as an island nation that we can become productive in a new way.

Entrepreneurship is a vital cog in our economic regeneration. I recently compiled a report for the Council of Europe on the issue of getting college places to match the numbers and needs of students. I examined how history is taught in areas of recent conflict. I suggested we need to teach certain subjects, specifically history, in a multi-perspective manner that develops the critical and creative thinking of students. If young people become more rounded adults, they will be able to push boundaries in college or in life as employers or employees. To that end, we need to strengthen the links between preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. I have said that links between Departments can sometimes be bad, but the links between the pre-primary, primary, post-primary and tertiary sectors can be just as problematic. I appreciate what Senator Healy Eames has said about mathematics and science, but I remind her that we cannot have mathematicians or scientists if we do not have people with creative thinking. We are getting rid of the arts as quickly as we can. We are not placing the necessary emphasis on them. The Minister of State, Deputy Haughey, is probably fed up listening to me talking about the arts. I reiterate that if we invest in the arts at preschool and early primary school levels, we will achieve much better results in mathematics. That is not just my opinion; it is what international best practice suggests.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I agree.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: Perhaps that is a subject for another day. We need to adapt the secondary education system. We need to improve the links between the pre-primary, primary and post-primary sectors. That might make the education system sound like a factory farm but being aware of the bigger picture should not be a restraint or constraint. We need to acknowledge that our economy needs employers and employees.

I recognise the plight of prospective college students. I accept that we may have many mature students, some of whom are people who have lost their employment. I commend the Government on programmes such as the initiative for unemployed people in the higher education system, the strategic innovation fund and lifelong learning and upskilling. I am aware of the role of the website, www.bluebrick.ie, and encourage those who have not investigated it to do so. In my local area, Letterkenny Institute of Technology has been flexible in adapting to the needs of its students and the unemployed. As I said at the outset, we have to consider our strengths as an island. We need to think beyond our boundaries. We should work with Northern Ireland Ministers like Reg Empey, MLA and Caitríona Ruane, MLA. As Minister for Employment and Learning in the North, Mr. Empey is responsible for lifelong learning which is treated separately from primary and secondary education. I am not sure that is the most constructive way of going about things although I do not want to tell the authorities on the other side of the Border what they should do.

I have been approached by a mature student who is attending an access course at NUI, Galway. When the person in question started the course, they thought they would be allowed to retain their back to education allowance, but that seems to be changing. People who were given the back to education allowance after they decided to take a course when they were in a position of disadvantage should not have that allowance taken from them. If one is already

[Senator Cecilia Keaveney.]

in the system, one might have a reasonable expectation of being able to continue one's course specifically because one is supported by the back to education allowance. I would like to think that the current approach to this matter can be reviewed and the small cohort of people who are in this position can be accommodated.

Senator David Norris: I would like to share time with Senator Quinn.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator David Norris: I welcome the Minister of State with responsibility for lifelong education. Many mature people are going back to college. I would like to raise two specific cases, the first of which relates to a woman who was born and educated in Ireland and lived here for some years. She has recently returned to Ireland after spending four years abroad working with a voluntary organisation. When she applied for a place in one of our universities, she was told she was being assessed as a non-EU student because she had spent four years doing good work outside this country. That seems to me to be thoroughly insane. This is the kind of person who should be encouraged. I suggest she has been deemed to be a non-EU student so that the fees being extracted from her could be tripled. I ask the Minister of State to investigate this anomaly.

The second case I would like to raise relates to a woman who has been offered a place in my university, Trinity College. The difficulty is that she does not receive financial assistance of any kind to return to university to get another degree, as we are urging people to do. As a result of paying to do her first degree on her own initiative, she cannot get the back to education grant and does not qualify for what are known as free fees. She is working part-time to make money to return to college and, as a result, does not even receive social welfare assistance. While I welcome whatever the Government can do to support third level education, anomalies raised by public representatives, whether they are in the Central Applications Office, grants system or social welfare system, must be examined and ironed out.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Hear, hear.

Senator David Norris: It is important we get this right and encourage people because the economy is in difficulty and skills deficits have arisen in certain economic sectors. For example, the medical technology, chemicals and pharmaceutical industries have increased their share of Irish exports from 32% in 2000 to 51% in 2008. As a result, the number of applications for science degrees has surged, which I welcome. This surge has been met by an inevitable decline in the number of people applying for apprenticeships and so forth, especially in the building and allied trades.

I raise again the extraordinary proposal from the Higher Education Authority to phase out plastering courses in the Dublin Institute of Technology and to transfer them to Athlone Institute of Technology which has only provided such courses for the past four years in response to the building boom. The Dublin Institute of Technology, on the other hand, has won gold medals in this area and its wonderful lecturers include a person who is doing a PhD in Trinity College Dublin and a member of staff seconded from the Office of Public Works which did the wonderful ceiling restoration in this Chamber.

In response to the economic situation, the number of applications to the Central Applications Office increased from 66,500 last year to 72,500 this year. The Minister of State listed the numbers of applications and indicated there was pressure on the system but did not indicate how the system would respond to this pressure. The nub of the problem is that core funding to the universities was cut by 5% in 2009, a significant amount. As a result of the moratorium

on the recruitment of staff, the number of staff will decline by 6% this year. While the number of CAO applications has increased substantially, the system which is supposed to absorb this increase cannot function efficiently without proper assistance. During the great days of the Celtic tiger we constantly heard that one of the reasons for the phenomenon of the Celtic tiger was the wonderful education provided in Ireland. We will support the Minister in making whatever provision is necessary to ensure we continue to have a good input in this area.

I thank God I am not involved in education any longer, either as a student or teacher. While students face a number of problems, I am pleased to note that the university authorities have some sympathy. For example, Trinity College Dublin, my own place, gives good advice to students to select two subjects in their TR001 option to ensure they have a fallback position if places are oversubscribed or there is competition for places. UCD had a similar idea and is introducing a new subject preference grid this year. The problem, however, is that the record number of applications will leave many students out on a limb. The Government must take a new initiative to respond to the surge in applications. I hope this debate will help spark such an initiative.

I note the chief executive of the Higher Education Authority, Mr. Tom Boland, has hinted that a new cap on the number of students could be necessary as underfunded universities struggle to cope with rising numbers. I wonder if this is the correct approach. On the one hand, we encourage people to study——

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator is almost halfway through the time available to him.

Senator David Norris: I have made most of the points I intended to make. I am sure Senator Quinn concurs with my final point given that he pioneered the advocacy of electronic communications in the House. It seems daft that we still send out 80,000 CAO application forms and handbooks to students when almost everybody applies on-line. Why are we wasting so much paper? The handbook is sent out in hard copy which means it is out of date almost immediately because new courses are constantly being added. I suggest the Minister save paper. He would do a good job if he succeeded in looking after the students who manage to get through the system despite the enormous increase in applications. If he does so, the House will support him.

Senator Feargal Quinn: I thank Senator Norris for sharing time and welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Haughey, to the House. I am pleased the points Senators raise will receive a hearing and look forward to raising several further points.

In December I raised the decision by Fáilte Ireland, based on a change in administration, to arrange for subsequent courses in hospitality training to be handled by institutes of technology which do not recognise the leaving certificate applied. The Minister of State will have heard me speak previously on the leaving certificate applied examination. Some years ago, I had the honour of chairing the committee which established this highly successful system. The proposed change means hundreds of students who will sit leaving certificate applied examinations in June this year will not be eligible for entry to Fáilte Ireland catering and tourism courses. The awards given for the leaving certificate applied examinations — distinction, merit and pass — are not recognised for CAO points but admission to most of the agency's courses will move to the CAO this year. Guidance councillors throughout the country argue that this change could discourage students who are not suited to the traditional leaving certificate from staying in school and taking the leaving certificate applied option.

In 2009, approximately 3,200 school leavers pursued the leaving certificate applied examination. In my experience, this examination is highly suited to students who wish to take courses in subjects such as retail and hospitality. The examination does not measure their ability to write down in three hours what they have learned in two years of study but uses different

[Senator Feargal Quinn.]

means, including continuous assessment, to measure their abilities, talents, skills and intelligence. One example of the benefits of the examination is its focus on oral as opposed to written communication skills. It would be a shame if talented, intelligent students were unable to pursue the courses provided by Fáilte Ireland as a result of the decision to transfer them to the institutes of technology which only recognise CAO points. I urge the Minister to address this issue as soon as possible.

Ireland is not the only country to experience a massive increase in demand for university places. In the United Kingdom a boom in demand has meant the British Government can no longer afford to fund university places with the result that approximately 160,000 people were recently denied places in universities.

A reappraisal of the higher education system in 21st century Ireland is required. When universities were established, information could only be distributed in books and lectures. Senator Norris touched on this issue in another context. Given that lecture notes and tutorials can now be delivered electronically, is it still necessary for large numbers of students to go to a physical place for lectures? Surely it is possible to make massive savings and eliminate inefficiencies. It is argued that in this respect the private sector is more innovative in designing higher education courses and more flexible in providing them than the public sector. There is little doubt that the private sector can provide high quality qualifications. The University of Phoenix, North America's largest private education provider, has increased enrolments from 384,000 to 455,000 in the past year. I gather this has been done without an increase in physical buildings. They are able to use electronic means of communicating and lecturing. Perhaps we are not doing enough to promote education by the private sector in this country. I urge the Minister of State to give some thought to this. It could be started by having stronger regulations in the area. Perhaps employers should also get more of a say on what they might consider as desirable attributes instead of completely relying on the academic scene. This is not to say there should not be education for education's sake. If higher education were driven by businesses, they would fail to understand how philosophy graduates such as Barack Obama and George Soros could earn a living.

I believe we must consider education in a different way. Let us not assume the only way is through the traditional books and lectures in physical buildings. We can learn in other ways. However, we must try to have a debate on how the private sector can make a very worthwhile contribution to education in this country. Let us avail of the opportunity for private education, which we do not do sufficiently. We also need to take action on the leaving certificate applied programme so those students who study for tourism and the hospitality sector are not debarred because of the new system.

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Haughey. This is a good and timely debate. I see Senator Mullen is leaving the Chamber. I was going to say the Galway——

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We do not comment on people who are not in the Chamber.

Senator Rónán Mullen: I have to come back now. Senator Ó Brolcháin has shamed me.

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: I apologise.

Senator Rónán Mullen: That is all right. I know it will be worth hearing.

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: Certainly not.

Senator Rónán Mullen: It had better be now.

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: I had noticed the Galway contingent of Senators Healy Eames and Mullen and myself. The CAO is based in Galway and every time I walk down Eglinton Street and see the CAO offices at the top level, it strikes terror into my heart because I remember the days when I was in the position myself. The letters CAO struck terror into many hearts. I grew up during the last recession at a time when the race for college places was extremely competitive. The Minister of State said that the likely number of applicants for university places this year is 70,000. This is a huge increase on previous years and includes many mature students. This puts a huge strain on the education system and it makes the CAO more important.

The CAO is a very good and fair system and perhaps a very brutal one. A difficulty I remember from my school days is that it needs to be properly explained. What tends to happen in schools is that the CAO system is explained to students during the leaving certificate year. The CAO should develop a far more friendly face than that which it has at present. I do not say this to denigrate it; I have worked with a number of people who now work for the CAO. It has a relatively small and mostly technical staff. As far as I am aware it does not have a public relations section. We now have great transition year programmes, a new innovation in education that has emerged since the 1980s. A transition year course to show students how the system works would be a very good idea. It would allow people to make decisions and choices before embarking on the leaving certificate programme.

We are left with a difficulty because 70,000 into 45,500 will not go. This is a recessionary time, and traditionally education has been the way out of difficulties faced in the employment market. People need higher qualifications to help them survive. It is a way of getting the country better qualified to be able to drag itself out of recession. It worked in the 1980s and can work now. I commend the Government on prioritising education in the recent renewed programme for Government. It is not the right time to introduce college fees and I am pleased they were not introduced at this stage in the history of the State.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: That is not what the university heads said. They said student service charges are——

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Ó Brolcháin without interruption.

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: I am more interested in the students——

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: That is what I said.

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: ——and their parents. Education is about students.

There is a noticeable decrease in other areas such as apprenticeships and other methods of entering employment after leaving school. Senator Quinn alluded to this. Going straight into college is not the best route for all trades. Unfortunately, apprenticeships are dwindling and we need to examine this. An arts degree is not necessarily the best qualification for somebody plumbing or in any of the building trades. We need to bring forward measures to encourage apprenticeship.

A total of 14,000 second level students are taking part in the Government-backed schools' business partnership project, with the Business in the Community organisation, to twin students with a local business and mentor for work experience and help with CV preparation and interviews. Various major companies, including IBM, Deloitte, Diageo and Eircom, take part in the project. It is important to examine as many different ways as possible to help school leavers

[Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin.]

compete with the huge number of mature students who will take up a number of university places. We need to get the balance right on this and ensure educational possibilities exist for all our people in so far as it is possible to do so. I hope we do the best we can in these difficult circumstances.

Senator Brendan Ryan: I welcome the Minister of State back to the House; he is spending quite some time with us in his roles at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Education and Science.

In the past year 110,664 people have joined the live register. Direct entry to the labour market for school leavers is much reduced and, where it still exists, it is a highly competitive environment. Part of the Labour Party's response to people losing their jobs in such massive numbers and to the lack of employment opportunities in the economic crisis is to provide higher and further education places. It is strategically more sensible to provide educational opportunities rather than the dole for people with the capability to avail of that opportunity.

The recent CAO application figures reveal that there will be in the region of a 10% increase in demand for college places for next September. As a result of these record application numbers, if college places remain as they are, there will be approximately two applicants for every place available. In his contribution, the Minister of State expressed concern that such reports create unnecessary anxiety for school leavers, their parents and other potential students. Senator Keaveney attempted to provide some comfort when she stated the increase in the number of applications is fairly routine and part of a trend and that everything appears to be fine. My understanding of the figures is that the ratio of 1.6:1 is based on the number of initial on-line applications. A number of applications were made other than on-line and late applications will also be made. Parents, school leavers and prospective students have legitimate concerns. There is little comfort in knowing whether the figure will be 1.6:1 or 2:1 and I ask the Minister of State to take that message back to the Department.

It is great news that so many people are turning to education as a means to prepare for the economic upturn, whenever it may come. Unfortunately, there will be bad news for the many who fail to get into college or start the course of their choice because the points have increased beyond their reach. Points for courses in the arts, business and science are set to rise with an ensuing increase in competition for places. We must not return to the points race of the past which was fuelled by demand or lack of capacity. Leaving certificate students who are almost three quarters of the way through their studies should still have a chance of getting the courses they have chosen and for which they have been working so hard. It will be devastating for many if points increase at such a late stage and many qualified prospective students will miss out.

Those who have lost their jobs must not be prevented from getting the chance to improve their skills and, therefore, employability. Despite some changes in the past year, the Government has not provided sufficient places and more must be done in response to increased demand. Unfortunately, the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, has stated that there will no more money for places. It is disingenuous to say there is no cap if colleges are not given the resources they need to deliver additional places.

I disagree with Senator Ó Brolcháin's contention that fees are not being charged. The Joint Committee on Education and Science recently heard from representatives of the Higher Education Authority who take the view that fees are charged at third level. Students recognise they are paying fees. One can call them registration charges if one likes but they have nevertheless increased from €900 to €1,500. The Government's response has been to hold back the increased amount in fees from colleges' budgets. Let us not be fooled, therefore.

In response to Deputy Gilmore's comments in the other House, the Taoiseach stated the HEA will monitor demand, identify opportunities to maximise places and respond to growing demand within existing and available resources. This approach is not good enough if it is the intention to stick rigidly to existing resources. We should by all means maximise the number of places for the existing budget first but additional resources must be made available as required. Growing demand at least calls for a preparedness to make additional resources available. Post-leaving certificate course numbers have been capped and must be increased. Apprenticeships have almost collapsed owing to the downturn and this route to skilled employment is almost closed off for young people. With the massive increase in jobless numbers, many redundant workers are seeking to go to college as mature students. An estimated 14% of the current batch of first year college students are over 23 and classified as mature. This figure is set to increase significantly next September.

When redundant young workers come to me for advice, I tell them to look for an educational opportunity for two to three years to upskill for the recovery. We must not close off that avenue for this group of people. Strategically and from an economic point of view it is the right thing to do. Unfortunately, teaching resources are being reduced in third level colleges. The number of full-time staff in our institutions dropped by 350 last year. At a time when student numbers are increasing, vacancies are going unfilled because of an embargo on recruitment and trained teachers are being left on the dole. The irony is that the Government is abandoning young people who, instead of benefiting from education, will find themselves on the dole alongside trained teachers.

The Taoiseach sounded hollow when he informed the Dáil that he hopes additional places can be provided but that no extra money will be available. He stated that the Minister for Education and Science will continue to work through the Higher Education Authority to maximise the use of existing and available resources in response to growing demand. At the same time the HEA is warning about capping numbers to protect the quality of higher education. A realignment in thinking between the Minister and the HEA is urgently required.

Unless the Government acts to increase the number of college and further education places, young people will be denied the courses for which they have worked so hard and those who have lost their jobs will be denied a second chance. They will remain on the dole indefinitely. The Government must act now in conjunction with the HEA to provide the necessary places by September. This should be a natural and instinctive response to the economic crisis. It should be part of our economic stimulus. It is not something that should be resisted by the Government because it is a question of being ready for the upturn whenever it comes. One of the main factors behind the Celtic tiger was our educated workforce and the large expansion of the third level sector. Ensuring access will help to drive the recovery.

Senator Ann Ormonde: I welcome the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science and thank him for listening so attentively to Senators' contributions. This is an important debate because, as the media have reported extensively in recent days, the CAO has experienced a huge increase in applications. This is a welcome development on one level because it reveals the strong education ethos in Ireland. Education is a great asset for young people because a certificate or diploma is a string to one's bow in a crisis. People should develop themselves to their full potential.

However, challenges arise for those among the 71,000 CAO applicants who do not achieve college places. These applicants include students on their way to college, young people who decided two or three years ago to take up employment instead of continuing in education, and graduates, such as young engineers and architects, who have nowhere else to go.

[Senator Ann Ormonde.]

There will be a fall-off in the numbers but it is important nevertheless that we examine how the system copes with the challenge. The range of educational institutions include universities, private colleges, institutes of technology, post-leaving certificate colleges, FÁS and local employment schemes. People will transition to third level in different ways. Young leaving certificate students have the best chance because their guidance counsellors will help them to choose the courses that suit them. However, I worry about those who have become unemployed since leaving the education system. For example, let us consider the national guidance service. How well equipped is it to know what kind of courses we should provide and what will be the jobs of the future? Have in-service courses been provided for those professionals to equip them to handle young graduates, early school leavers, those who dropped out of school but who had points and who now want to come back and those who want to go to an institute of technology for hands-on vocational training? Does the national guidance service have the necessary resources to do the job? Is the service available around the country? Is there a guidance service for adults? I accept it is part of the VEC system. The service was good in the past but I question how equipped it is today as things keep changing. Should we increase the number of guidance counsellors to ensure they are available in all areas? They are the core professionals who could help people in today's climate.

One is told in the local social welfare office that one can access the back to education allowance and that various courses are available. I do not think staff in those offices are sufficiently knowledgeable about the courses that are available. They should be able to direct people to a guidance counsellor through the FÁS system or the VEC system. A service should be available to the unemployed to help them find out what courses are available and which course would be suitable for each individual. It is important to consider the characteristics and attributes of individuals and their qualifications. Yesterday's qualifications might not suit tomorrow's requirements. We have to consider those issues now. In the long term, we need to increase the number of guidance counsellors.

We also need to consider the courses that are on offer. Courses should not start in October and finish in June. They should be available on an ongoing basis. Courses do not need to be of nine months duration. It should be possible for people to do course modules, for example between October and January. A second term could be available also which might be sufficient to tide a person over. Courses need to be more flexible.

Post-leaving certificate colleges, PLCs, are now considered to be at two and a half level. They are not full third level colleges but they are more advanced than second level colleges. PLCs should not close at 4 p.m. They should be open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. The system should cater for all people, those who are doing their leaving certificate and those who come back to education through the VTOS system. A guidance counsellor would help them. PLCs have to be developed more than is currently the case.

Co-ordination is required between the three Departments, namely, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. They have to work together. One cannot isolate them as the areas of responsibility overlap when one becomes unemployed. The Departments need to work closely together on the options that are available. I welcome the core group that has been set up to examine the ranking of our education system internationally, future challenges and what can be done with current resources. It is not always a question of money; it is important to consider the infrastructure that is in place and how we can provide the necessary service. We have enough professional people to carry us through while we work out our long-term vision.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chuir roimh an Aire Stáit. This debate is timely and opportune. I compliment the Fine Gael spokesperson on education, Senator Healy Eames, on a positive and worthwhile contribution which has enlightened the debate. I hope the Minister will consider her suggestions, especially on in-service training. As a teacher I am aware of how important that is. We need to change the *modus operandi* and allow teachers the opportunity and flexibility to further their education and to educate others.

The debate is especially opportune given that students from around the country are present in the Gallery. Education is the lifeblood of our knowledge-based economy. It is the platform on which we can rebuild this country. The young men and women in the Gallery require two things from Government; a plan, which needs vision, and hope so they will have a chance in five or ten years of being a qualified graduate with an opportunity to find employment within their own country. The Government has put up the “For Sale” sign and forced people to emigrate and to apply for courses in the United Kingdom, in effect, to opt for anything other than what they want. We must give hope to those in the education system. That means we must have a plan and policies.

I disagree often with Senator Ormonde but I agree with one thing she said, namely, that we must examine the PLC system. We must acknowledge the tremendous work they have done and the flexibility they have introduced. Many PLCs are open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 9 p.m., but they do not get due recognition. We need to strike a balance. A former principal used to say that one required the leaving certificate plus. As a teacher I recognise the importance of academic qualifications. The knowledge-based economy and the competitive global market dictates that we have graduates and post-graduates to PhD level and beyond.

However, we must also remember that some students will not attain the leaving certificate plus and will not go to college. They are the students who do the leaving certificate applied and those in Youthreach programmes who have an equal right to have their needs catered for and to be provided with an opportunity to flourish and let their light shine. The Government has dismantled the education system. Cutbacks have been made to special needs education, the VEC system and Youthreach. We are failing to allow young people to avail of education and therefore to flourish.

Let us forget the spin. The Minister of State’s speech was great. I could not criticise any of it. However, the reality and what he said are two different things. That is a fact. I accept we live in a competitive world where India and China are producing graduates of quality, but so are we. If one does not service one’s car or provide public transport one does not go anywhere. We have under-utilised our education system. The Government has demoralised teachers and university lecturers and created mayhem in the third level sector. The NUI has been abolished. Why did we abolish an independent awarding body of profound importance and impact? What message did that send to the educational establishments? The reason was to save a few million euro.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Only €1 million.

An Cathaoirleach: Does Senator Buttimer have a mobile telephone turned on?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: No.

An Cathaoirleach: Someone has. They should please remove it from the Chamber.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: It is important that the brand name of NUI is restored.

The Minister of State outlined the importance of third level in terms of enabling people to reach their full potential as individuals. He is dead right. I do not disagree with him. What has

[Senator Jerry Buttimer.]

the Government done? It has made cutbacks to third level education. No attempt has been made to tackle under-funding and under-resourcing of third level education. A ban on recruitment to the public service has reduced staffing levels in third level institutions. Later, we will discuss youth unemployment. Let us consider in particular the number of young men under the age of 30 who are unemployed. That is a damning indictment of Government and an indication of its lack of vision. There has been a jump of 50% in the number of people applying to attend third level colleges in the United Kingdom because they cannot get a place on courses in this country. I asked a third level graduate how he would describe his experience. He stated, "The system is shocking, there is shortened library hours, there is a cutback in facilities, there is a cutback in choices being offered and there is no guidance or help being offered to us." This young student paid a fee of €1,500 to his university. There is a lack of job opportunities and a demand for higher qualifications to educate a modern workforce which has caused the number of CAO applications to increase by 5% to more than 71,000.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: That is the same level of increase as last year.

An Cathaoirleach: No interruptions, please.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: What has the Government done? Why can it not lift the cap on PLC courses? The following statistics relate to three colleges in my city which do Trojan work in this area: Cork College of Commerce — number of applications, 3,500; number of PLC places, 1,940; number of unsuccessful applications, 1,655; Scoil Stiofáin Naofa, a tremendous college — number of applications, 2,765; number of PLC places, 600; number of unsuccessful applications, 2,165; and St. John's Central College — number of applications 4,500; number of PLC places, 1,200; number of unsuccessful applications, 3,300. These are three wonderful colleges in Cork. The Government has invested money in everything from PPARS, e-voting, Punchestown, the Bertie bowl, the back garden to the front door in Cork.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: And Cork Airport.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: There has been no investment in the airport. The Government cannot even break up Aer Rianta, which is the issue.

An Cathaoirleach: We are not discussing airports.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The restriction on the number of college places is linked to a lack of resources. Fianna Fáil kowtowed to the Green Party in not addressing the fees issue because it was afraid of the political ramifications.

The Minister is a UCC graduate and a former lecturer. He should know that his dismantling of the structure of education will have repercussions for much longer than his tenure and should be ashamed of himself.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: Like previous speakers, I warmly welcome the Minister of State. I commend him on the excellent work he is doing in a brief that is more important than ever in the current economic climate. Senator Buttimer made an outrageously political speech but his fellow Corkman, the Minister for Education and Science, is carving out a reputation for himself as one of the great education Ministers supplied by our party. We have had many of them; one or two Fine Gael education Ministers were also great but the current Minister's legacy will be respected for many years.

I will try to bring fresh thinking as the final contributor to the debate. Clearly, it is not rocket science to figure out why the number of CAO applications is increasing. There are few

opportunities for school leavers to enter the jobs market directly and the number of apprenticeship places is reducing because of the shrinkage in the construction industry. It is not rocket science to expect that there will be more of a preference for continuing in education than normal and we have to accept this. It is not doing a great service to students who are studying for the leaving certificate to exaggerate the uptake in demand because they have enough worries organising their study to try to get the points they need without being told there are two or three applicants for every place. The statistics show demand is increasing but it is not inordinate. It is in line with the trend of the past few years and in other European countries.

This is not a crisis. Ministers are faced with a challenge but this presents them with an opportunity like everything else they have faced in the recession. Sectors in which there was waste and services were inadequate have been isolated and tightened. The education sector was even worse than other sectors and, therefore, is no different. In response to demand additional third level places have become available, which might not have been the case had the squeeze not happened. More places might be found through reconfiguration and further economies.

I was shocked when the Minister referred to the paltry number of hours third level lecturers spent interfacing with students. That will ring a bell for those of us who attended university. I taught a full day at primary level and worked 22 hours a week at second level but I still had to bring my work home and correct copies and so on. Some university dons swan around the place and only interface with students for three or four a week. That was fine in the days of old style education and the ivory tower when there was no pressure on young people to qualify and be upskilled for the modern world. This issue needs to be examined further. I congratulate the Minister on having the courage to identify it.

Senator Healy Eames is correct about upskilling and how the Government is handling the teaching of important subjects such as maths and science. There is a question about whether we are at the cutting edge. Ireland was at the cutting edge 20 years ago and that is how we got the Celtic tiger moving. We led the posse on the smart economy but I am afraid that is not the case anymore. Major employers in the computer industry have sent out distress signals about future employment. They say workers may be sourced in emerging countries such as India and China rather than in Ireland. Having been head of the pack, we are losing ground. We need to get the whip out and all these issues must be identified and examined.

The Minister of State will say he has not capped the number of PLC places but we all know there is a cap. I contacted a few schools in County Kerry earlier and a number considered they could have taken on 50% more students in a number of courses had the resources and funding been made available. In some cases where, for example, 100 places were provided, they received sanction for the appointment of 0.8 of a teacher. Perhaps this issue can be examined. I am former member teacher unionist. Perhaps a little flexibility is required in the current climate regarding these courses in terms of the pupil-teacher ratio. A small bit of give on all sides would take much of the pressure off and help to remove the bottleneck at third level.

I would like VECs to have a more enhanced role *vis-à-vis* FÁS and expand the work they do in the community. Many VEC schools deal almost exclusively with second chance education and lifelong learning. There is no need for them to be closed for several months of the year. A school could remain open for 11 months a year without the need for additional hours for teachers. For instance, the VEC in County Kerry has signed a memorandum of understanding with FÁS which will reduce the duplication of services and lead to a better value product for the taxpayer. That should be considered throughout the State.

The CAO system is fair. I have never heard criticism of its operations and it is above board. More time will be needed for the processing of college applications and grant applications to

[Senator Ned O’Sullivan.]

be processed by local authorities and VECs because of the additional demand. Everything boils down to money. If we had enough, there would not be problems anywhere. There are many ways in which money can be saved in the education system. National schools were founded in 1832 and have served the country well. They educated and prepared us to become the nation we are today. They worked well up to the 1970s when, all of a sudden, people became inclined to be more selective, and there was a demand for other types of school, including gael scoileanna and Educate Together schools. Can we still afford two single-sex schools in one small town? Let us consider that. Primary schools are absolutely first class and are suitable for most parents. I would like to see people have a choice, but we simply do not have the resources any more.

Let us consider secondary schools. In a town such as my own, Listowel, which has a population of 4,000, we have three second level schools — a secondary convent school, a branch of the Diocesan College in Killarney and a vocational school. It is ridiculous and a waste of taxpayers’ money. There is duplication as taxpayers pay for buildings, teachers, heating, local authority charges and school wardens for each school. There is a major opportunity for savings.

Will the Minister of State inform the House of the whereabouts of the north Kerry education rationalisation programme, which was launched a couple of years ago under the aegis of a respected educator from the town, Frank Murray? We were assured it was proceeding but, all of a sudden, it has died a death.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): We have had a good and constructive debate on this matter. I agree with Senator O’Sullivan who said this was a challenge. However, the topic of CAO applications and college places is a good news story. During this time of high unemployment we are encouraging people to consider their options with regard to increasing their skills and learning new ones. The increase of 6% in CAO applications is a good thing. As Members know, 71,867 applications have been received for 2010. In 2009 there was also a 6% increase. In my role as Minister of State with responsibility for lifelong learning, based at two Departments — the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment — my aim is to bring about co-ordination between the two Departments in the provision of education and training and to consider increased activation measures for the unemployed. The fact that more people wish to return to or commence higher education is therefore a good thing, challenging as it is, and I do not think anyone in the House would disagree.

As I said previously, there are no plans to introduce a cap on places or funding. With the continuing growth in demand for places, there are clearly resourcing issues that must be addressed. The sector’s dependence on Exchequer sources of funding is high by international standards. The longer-term question of future funding arrangements for the sector is clearly relevant to the work of the higher education strategy group in preparing a vision and strategy for higher education over the next 20 years. In this context, the Minister, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe, has referred the technical report on student contributions, which was published last November, to the strategy group, and this will contribute to the broader deliberations of the group on additional resource requirements for the sector over the next 20 years. The commitment of the higher education institutions themselves to accommodating increased demand at a time of significant budgetary pressure must be put on record and is very welcome.

With regard to the importance of mathematics and science, a particularly encouraging development in 2009 was the significant increase in acceptances for technology related, engineering, science and computer courses, all of which increased by more than 20% compared with the previous year. Our development as a knowledge economy requires an emphasis on research, innovation and development and on the application of science and engineering to

discovering, developing and producing new products and processes, and we need a supply of skilled technology graduates to achieve this aim. I reiterate, as mentioned by Senator Healy Eames, the importance of mathematics and science. There is no doubt Ireland needs to boost attainment in mathematics if we are to maintain competitiveness and growth in the smart economy. That is why the Project Maths initiative was started in 24 schools in September 2008 and will be introduced in all schools in September 2010, despite the difficulties and challenges in terms of resources and personnel.

A national programme of professional development for all mathematics teachers is under way, and this will continue at least until 2013. The Department of Education and Science is giving high priority to providing resources for this initiative, with €5 million being spent in 2010 on training for mathematics teachers. This initiative represents a significant change for both teachers and students in the teaching and learning of mathematics. It must work in tandem with other approaches to ensure high quality applicants are attracted into science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In this way, students with particular aptitudes are recognised early and given support and mentoring, and the initiatives that are already under way in many higher education institutions to support mathematics are continued and strengthened.

The Minister is also establishing a Project Maths implementation support group to examine and report to him on how stakeholders from business, second level and higher education can work together to achieve the objectives of Project Maths and increase the take-up of mathematics at higher level. In the Department, we are determined to ensure a co-ordinated strategy will deliver effective collaboration and achieve optimum impact in this important policy area.

Senator Quinn and others raised the issue of apprenticeship planning. Apprenticeship is a combined training programme with part of the training delivered by employers and part by FÁS and the educational institutions. The number of places provided for phase 4 and phase 6 apprentices is determined by the number of registered apprentices ready to progress to these phases, while the number of apprenticeship training places is determined by the level of demand in any given year. There is no doubt the downturn in the construction sector has resulted in a significant fall-off in the number of apprentices being recruited nationally. The number of FÁS registered apprentices requiring education and training has declined from 8,300 in 2006 to 1,535 in 2009, a reduction of more than 80%. Construction related trades have been particularly affected.

To plan for the reduced requirement for education and training provision in construction related trades, a group comprising representatives of the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Higher Education Authority and FÁS was established to examine relevant data and forecast, as far as possible, expected construction related recruitment levels over the next few years. Based on the group's forecast, the HEA notified institutions of the reduced requirement for education provision and consulted individual institutions to assess the impact of the forecast reduction in numbers on the education sector.

Other suggestions were made about apprenticeship. The apprenticeship programme is delivered in co-operation between FÁS and the education sector and, while it has served the economy well in the past as a means of developing skilled workforce for the construction sector, it is timely to review its relevance and appropriateness to today's economy. The Minister, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, has already spoken to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment with a view to initiating such a review this year.

Many Senators, including Senator Ormonde, spoke about matching courses to skills requirements. The expert group on future skill needs was established to advise the Government on the long-term skill needs of the economy. The group's various reports are sent to higher education

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

institutions and used when developing new courses and changing the curricula of ongoing programmes. The Department of Education and Science worked closely with Forfás in developing the criteria to be used in respect of part-time places, which were rolled out last year. Places were offered on courses identified as being relevant to the smart economy, a matter mentioned by Senator Keaveney. There is careful monitoring by Forfás and the expert group when it publishes regular reports on various skill shortages.

I reiterate what my role is in the Departments of Education and Science and Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Many Senators referred to the need to co-ordinate activity between the two, an aim that can be challenging. A Cabinet committee on economic renewal examines issues arising from the Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal, the so-called smart economy document. The committee has been considering the need for activation measures for the unemployed as we deal with difficult circumstances. There is co-ordination via the committee, in which the Departments of Education and Science, Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Social and Family Affairs are active. The committee's work led to all of the Government's announcements on activation programmes, further education FÁS programmes, higher education programmes and so on.

There is also the upskilling co-ordination group. As one would imagine from its title, it is a co-ordination group which attempts to adopt a multi-agency approach. All of the relevant stakeholders in education and training are involved, including the Higher Education Authority, the VECs, FÁS and Departments. The group carefully monitors the situation and makes suggestions, leading to the co-ordination to which I referred. It is my intention to beef up this group and give it a key role so as to avoid duplication and iron out anomalies in the system.

A national co-operation agreement between FÁS and the Irish Vocational Education Association has just been finalised and will help to reduce duplication between FÁS and the VECs. I look forward to the agreement being rolled out and implemented, particularly at local level where local problems can be examined together in a bid to determine who does what best.

Senator Ormonde mentioned the key role to be played by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. I have been charged with responsibility for the implementation plan for the national skills strategy. The first phase of the plan will be published shortly. Overall, it will ensure co-ordination in determining who does what and what needs to be done in terms of upskilling, in particular. The Department of Social and Family Affairs is a key component in this regard.

The student service charge is levied by third level institutions to defray the cost of examinations, registration and student services. The range of student services may include on-campus medical and counselling facilities for students, access and disability services, career advice services and student facilities, clubs and societies. All of the Senators present are aware of these facts. The student service charge is not related to tuition fees and is targeted at services for students within each higher education institution. From initial examination of documentation, it appears that some universities are using part of the income from this charge to complement the core grant. However, this may be an issue of cost accounting presentation in the light of the effective cross-subsidisation of the cost of student services. The relevant question is whether the full cost of student services reflects the volume of revenues generated by the charge. The HEA has also been asked to examine this issue in all designated institutions to ensure full income from the charge is being expended on student services.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Hear, hear.

Deputy Seán Haughey: Senator Norris and others raised the issue of the moratorium. Under the employment control framework, higher education institutions must achieve a 6% reduction in staffing levels in the next two years. Subject to achieving this reduction, institutions are free to fill key vacancies. In this regard, I noted with interest Senator O’Sullivan’s comments. The position on the 6% reduction is not unreasonable, given the situation in which we find ourselves.

Senator Ormonde mentioned the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative, AEGI, a service in which I am particularly interested having regard to the considerable change in circumstances in the past two years. We went from virtually full employment to having a high level of unemployment. This service needs to be examined in view of the changed circumstances. A major assessment has been completed and later this month I will launch the findings which will form the basis of how we will gear the initiative. The service is specifically related to further education programmes. Although further education is not part of this debate, many Senators referred to the sector, one of my areas of responsibility in the Department. The AEGI will give advice to people contemplating participating in further education, VTOS, back-to-education initiatives, Youthreach and so on. However, it must be assessed to determine how it can be changed in consultation with everyone involved.

Senator Ormonde also discussed the FÁS career guidance service which is probably not as effective as it should be. It must be examined to determine how it can be improved.

Many Senators mentioned the need for more PLC places and the lifting of the cap. Despite difficult economic circumstances, we were able to provide an extra 1,500 places in the system. I acknowledge the major role played by the colleges of further education in providing PLC courses and the extra places that have not been officially sanctioned by the Department. They are doing their best to accommodate as many applications as possible. The number of applications for PLC places has increased significantly. I will be fighting on this issue within the Department and at Government level.

Senator Buttimer raised various issues. He asked specific questions about the National University of Ireland. The four constituent universities in the NUI have had independent awarding powers since 1997 and the awards they make are entitled “awards of the NUI”. The awards will continue to be entitled NUI awards. The Minister has commenced discussions with constituent universities about an appropriate mechanism to ensure the protection of the national and international reputation of the NUI degree.

I thank Senators for their contributions. The role higher education plays in society has never been more important. The challenge for us now as a country, as we seek to recover from the recession, is to advance our knowledge capacity and generate opportunities for new levels of efficiency performance, innovation and growth. The higher education sector will be crucial in delivering on this challenge. It is the cornerstone of national infrastructure for generating the skills, knowledge and innovation on which Ireland’s future competitive advance relies.

A particularly encouraging development in CAO acceptances for 2009-10 was the significant increase in acceptances for technology related courses. Engineering, science and computing course acceptances all increased by more than 20% over the previous year. Our development as a knowledge economy requires an emphasis on research, innovation and development and on the application of science and engineering to discover, develop and produce new products and processes as we need a supply of skilled technology graduates to achieve this aim. I am anxious to reiterate that.

Ireland has achieved an impressive expansion of higher education places over recent decades. Targets for increased participation in higher education set by the action group on access in 2001 have been achieved by both disadvantaged and mature entrants to the sector. Evaluations

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

of progress show that all of these measures have contributed to significantly increased participation rates in higher education. New targets have been set in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013. In 1998 the overall participation rate in higher education was 44%. By 2004, it had risen to 55%. The Higher Education Authority estimates that participation already exceeds 65% of the relevant age cohort. A target of 65% has been set by the national access plan for 2013 and a target of 72% by 2020.

In 1998 mature students represented 5% of entrants to higher education. In 2006 this had increased to 13%. A target of 20% by 2013 has been set by the national access plan 2008-13. In 1998 just 23% of young people aged 17 to 19 from a socio-economic disadvantaged background entered higher education. By 2004 this had increased to 33%. A new target of 45% participation by 2020 has been set by the national access plan 2008-13. While the significant rate of expansion that has already occurred has been primarily accounted for by full-time students, in particular school leavers, the higher education sector is also responding to the needs of adult learners by providing increased opportunities for flexible learning. More than 30,000 part-time students are currently being catered for within the system and the number of such learners is expected to grow significantly in the coming years.

The strategic innovation fund for higher education, which was introduced in 2006, had an overarching objective of stimulating innovation and creativity in addressing a number of identified challenges within the higher education system. With the support of the strategic innovation fund, higher education institutions across the country are developing a number of programmes to enhance flexible and lifelong learning. The increased flexibility being shown and developed by Irish higher education institutions, through initiatives such as BlueBrick and increased opportunities for work-based learning are evidence of the commitment of the sector to be responsive and adaptable to the needs of all learners in society.

The latest CAO application figures are a clear signal of the strong demand for higher education in Ireland. This demand is very welcome in the context of Ireland's objectives for developing the smart economy which will rely heavily on a well educated, skilled labour force. Students and their families have no reason to be concerned that they will not be accommodated in the system. The Government is committed to ensuring the sector can continue to accommodate growing demand for participation into the future.

The Minister for Education and Science, through the Higher Education Authority, will continue to work with the sector in monitoring demand and in identifying opportunities to maximise the use of available resources to growing demand. Collectively, our higher education institutions represent a very valuable national resource and it is imperative for Ireland's economic and social development that their full potential is realised.

The strategy group, which was established by the Minister for Education and Science last February, is addressing all the issues and challenges facing the sector and will report to the Minister within the next few months. Its report when published will be important. We have come through massive changes in the past two years and it was a very timely initiative on the Minister's part to establish the higher education review group. I, like all Members present, look forward to its deliberations in due course.

We have had a good debate on this in the Seanad. As I said to my officials prior to coming into the Chamber, one can always expect a very high standard of debate in the Seanad. This is because many Members are involved or were previously involved in education at all levels, primary, post-primary, further education and higher education and, furthermore, the university Senators have brought a particular input to today's debate.

We live in challenging times but I assure those who will sit their leaving certificate later this year and those who have just filled out their CAO application forms that the Government, the Higher Education Authority and the third level sector are responding to the changed demands. They should proceed with their studies and I wish them well in their examinations. Some of the media reports last week were a little alarmist. What was published last week in the press were the number of applications but many of those who have applied for courses will not take up the course places they are offered for various reasons. As Senator Keaveney mentioned, she did not take up her place. Did the Senator get an offer of a course place?

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: I got plenty of offers.

Deputy Seán Haughey: She got many offers.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: That is the story of my life.

Deputy Seán Haughey: The Senator did not take up her educational offer for various reasons. I mentioned the various reasons people do not take up courses.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: I went on to complete seven years in university.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I understand the Senator went to college in Northern Ireland to pursue her studies in music.

We have had a good debate and I am delighted to have been able to participate.

Youth Unemployment: Motion.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I move:

That Seanad Éireann notes with concern the rise in joblessness in Ireland, in particular the rise in youth unemployment; and calls on the Government to implement a jobs strategy, including retraining and back to education support, to tackle this crisis.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator has 12 minutes.

Senator Michael McCarthy: On a point of order, as there is nobody present on the Government side of the House, if I second the motion, will it be carried? Will the Cathaoirleach the matter?

Senator John Paul Phelan: Yes, as there is no one against it.

Senator Michael McCarthy: I second the motion.

Senator John Paul Phelan: The Cathaoirleach should put the question.

An Cathaoirleach: The Minister of State will have the opportunity to respond to the motion. If Members wish, the Minister of State can respond now.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I wish to propose the motion.

An Cathaoirleach: It has been moved and seconded. If the Senator wishes to speak to it, she has 12 minutes.

Senator Ivana Bacik: By agreement, I will use eight rather than the full 12, as I want to allow colleagues speak also. As Senator McCarthy said, there is nobody present on the Government

[Senator Ivana Bacik.]

side of the House to counter the motion we are putting to the House. As a result, I hope the Government will just agree to it, although that is unlikely to happen.

The motion tabled by the Labour Party calls on Seanad Éireann to note with concern the rise in joblessness in Ireland, in particular the rise in youth unemployment, and calls on the Government to implement a jobs strategy, including retraining and back to education support, to tackle the crisis. I welcome the Minister of State and hope the debate will not descend into platitudes. All too often, when we have debated the issue of unemployment in recent months, as we have seen horrific rises and the great human tragedy behind the figures, we have heard platitudes. Everyone on both sides of the House has condemned the rise in unemployment without offering any ideas on how it can be targeted or a real analysis of the figures. Too often the debates have been bland.

I want to change this by focusing on youth unemployment. We need to recognise the generational impact the unemployment figures have. We should move beyond speaking about unemployment, although I do not wish to dismiss the real problem and tragedy of unemployment for those at a later stage in their careers. The figures clearly indicate that the unemployment crisis we face is affecting school and college leavers particularly heavily, people who are seeking to enter the workforce for the first time. Over 74,000 people under the age of 25 years are unemployed. It was reported in a CSO quarterly household survey last year that more than one third of those aged 15 to 19 years and 23% of those aged 20 to 24 years were in neither full-time education nor employment. We are facing the reality of what has been described as a lost generation — a generation of young people for whom their only prospect of getting work lies overseas. Once again, we are facing the spectre that was present when I was in college in 1980s when many had to emigrate to find work. Happily, as things picked up, many of us were able to come back. Without any sign of an upturn on the horizon, it is difficult to see the prospects for so many young people lying at home.

The measures we adopt to tackle unemployment must be targeted at supporting school and college leavers in retraining, improving their education and skill levels and, ultimately, assisting them in finding work. If we speak about unemployment in too general a way, we will miss the point on the need for targeting. Interestingly, there has been more of a debate on this issue in Britain. Two weeks ago an article in *The Observer* by a young unemployed graduate, Andrew Hankinson, aged 29 years, caused a great impact. He did not pull punches and argued that graduates were picking up the tab for their parents' lives. The subtext of his article was that baby-boomers took all the good jobs, availed of free education and cheap housing, leaving their kids with nothing but the credit crunch and the bill for their pensions. His anger was focused on an older generation. This clearly expressed the fact that in Britain unemployment figures were particularly high among younger people. The article generated a significant response, mainly from older people who argued they should not be blamed for the recession. I will pick up on some of his points which are pertinent to this country. Ireland is set in a very different context because we had very severe economic problems in the 1970s and 1980s, when the rate of unemployment was much higher than it is now. The older generation did not have it easy and it would be unfair to suggest it did.

There are serious considerations in how we should tackle youth unemployment and focus our economic policies to take account of the generational impact of unemployment. We must remember that a significant portion of the population, largely an older demographic, have paid off their mortgages and are not facing the same massive credit issues as many younger people. We may say it is their own fault as they took out mortgages and bought big cars. I know from canvassing in different areas of Dublin that there are people still in work who are very con-

cerned about their futures as they see jobs being lost through redundancies in the private sector and pay cuts in the public sector. Such persons may have enormous outgoings on mortgages and other loans. They are being squeezed nearly as much as the twenty-somethings who are finding it difficult to find work in the first place.

The idea that events have a different impact on separate generations is recognised in the tourism industry which specifically targets the grey pound or euro. Fáilte Ireland has been offering packages to older tourists, in particular. There is a recognition that younger generations have less disposable income and wealth. It is important we look at this to try to find solutions to the current crisis. For example, there are questions to be asked about reforming tax policies and focusing on assets rather than income. That nettle has not been grasped. As the motion states, a focus on offering educational opportunities to younger people is critical to the solution.

The Government amendment to the Labour Party motion commends the Government on implementing policies and an employment subsidy scheme, etc. There are some impressive figures but the reality is different. The new graduate employment scheme can be condemned as tokenistic. Despite the figures given by the Government in the amendment, we still see very small numbers actually being helped by any of the measures announced by it with great fanfare.

In December Labour Youth produced a very useful document entitled, Tackling Youth Unemployment, in which it brought forward a critique of the Government's policy, pointing out that although the FÁS work placement scheme for graduates, announced with great fanfare last April, had been a welcome step, only 85 positions out of a potential figure of 2,000 had been taken up, even though nearly 2,000 individuals had applied to take part in the programme. Clearly, there was an inadequate number of placements available. I do not know what the Minister of State will say to me, but there certainly has been a much lower take-up of what was offered. The Government has not put its money where its mouth is in order to attract people back to education, especially part-time courses. If the Government was to expand the scheme of free third level tuition fees to include part-time courses, that would help to ease people back into education and an environment in which they would be likely to gain greater skills. Ultimately, they would become more employable.

The Government could adopt other measures to ensure greater opportunities for young people who are otherwise facing the dole. I urge the Minister of State to look at some of the more radical measures proposed by Labour Youth, especially the removal of tuition fees for part-time education courses, offering real work placement programmes for graduates, addressing the cuts in social welfare payments to young people that will have impacted on them very severely and not ignoring the social impact of unemployment. This applies equally to people of all ages if they are made redundant. There is a serious problem with increasing levels of depression. As such, we need to ensure there are counselling services and social supports available to those who are made unemployed.

While we need to recognise the impact of unemployment on our youth, we should note that those who criticised Andrew Hankinson for blaming the baby boomers pointed out that he should be counting his blessings for having an opportunity to write that article and to work in journalism. However, many others who were very angry responded favourably. One letter writer to the *The Observer* stated:

The politicians have devastated an entire generation. It was obvious that policies that favoured the financial industry and diminished all else would bring us crashing down — and they did. Get the heck out of England, kids. The wealthy have won; you have been pushed out of your own country.

[Senator Ivana Bacik.]

That expresses the anger felt in Britain and clearly places the focus upon the difficulties for young people. We will also see increasing levels of anger in Ireland among young people who equally feel they are being forced out of this country like previous generations. It is important for all of us on both sides of the House to work together to make sure that does not happen. I, therefore, urge the Minister of State to take on board the more creative solutions and suggestions offered from all sides of the House.

Senator Michael McCarthy: I second the motion. I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Calleary, and congratulate him on his appointment. One need only look at him to discover that he is nearer my age than many others in the House.

Senator Marc MacSharry: Maybe he is younger.

Senator Michael McCarthy: He is someone who might have a insight into youth unemployment, an appalling aspect of the current economic downturn. Returning to the dark, black and bleak days of the 1980s when we lost a generation of people to emigration owing to high unemployment is something we absolutely need to avoid, an issue on which there is consensus in the House.

I have become an active supporter of a Facebook campaign entitled, Grants for mature students. A number of individuals in NUIG, some of whom are present in the Visitors Gallery, are looking at the Access programme and the possibility of allowing mature students into third level institutions. It is clear from the current economic downturn that the place to be for many is back in third level institutions, they be institutes of technology or universities. The Government needs to look at ways of providing supports for those who have been made unemployed. It would be much better if we could provide grants for mature students and as much financial support as we can to up-skill and retrain them and give them a qualification. The only thing that is certain about this recession is that we will come out of it. It is a question of how well equipped we will be when that happens. What we do now will have an impact in that regard.

I have constituent who is in the fifth year of a degree course in University College Cork. That person left the workplace and has a young family but they never received one cent from the State in going back to do that degree which is nearing completion. They are on a placement in a hospital and will be paid by the HSE. That individual obviously has a burning desire and ambition to improve. Schemes such as the back to education scheme were designed in a very different economic climate and could not possibly have taken cognisance of people's circumstances today. The individual to whom I referred had to find as much part-time work as they could, has to go through the process of travelling to a university 50 miles from home and depend on casual employment to complete their degree. That is not good enough. They could easily have elected to revert to the social welfare system. Why not offer some other form of full-time education programme? Why pay people to stay at home and do nothing? A change of mind-set is required.

Just 257 people have taken up job placements under the FÁS work placement programme, despite moves to attract people to the scheme. The most recent figures show that there are 995 work placements available, in spite of a decision by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to relax the eligibility requirements. The slow take-up of place on such a scheme in the current environment almost beggars belief. The Government needs to look at this issue. Large numbers of unemployed people whom I meet in west Cork are completely unaware of the scheme. Not only do we need it, but we also need to communicate its importance, the eligibility criteria and advise people on how they can become involved.

In my home town of Dunmanway we have an employer who is ceasing operations and transferring them to Macroom. These two towns are in different Dáil constituencies, but that is neither here nor there. Job losses in a small town leave a black hole in the local economy. The Tánaiste met a delegation from the area. If an arm of the State such as the IDA can promote a situation where employers can leave one town and move to another, that has huge socio-economic implications for the town they leave. We wish any town that attracts jobs in the current climate the very best, but when that type of thing happens, it is ominous for rural towns.

The social welfare office in Dunmanway closed three years ago owing to the untimely death of the branch manager. The office has never been reopened, as a result of which people in the town now have to travel to other towns in west and north-west Cork in order to sign on for and collect social welfare payments. I know there is a ban on recruitment in the public service, but the reality is we must relax the ban, as practical circumstances should override such a policy. We were in a very different situation in 2007. Many of those on the live register in the area do not have access to transport. We do not have interconnecting orbital routes in a rural area. It is very difficult for people to go elsewhere and pick up social welfare payments. I ask the Minister of State to refer to this in his response.

Senator Bacik rightly points out the onus on us to provide policies and to show the way out of this jobs crisis. Our pre-budget submission considered enterprise support, including a PRSI scheme for new jobs, an additional 60,000 training and work experience placements and the fast-tracking of labour-intensive capital projects. I hope the Minister of State will take these points on board.

Senator Ivor Callely: I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “That Seanad Éireann” and substitute the following:

commends the Government for implementing policies which aim to support enterprises, protect jobs and stimulate employment creation, including the introduction of:

- the employment subsidy scheme which will between 2009 and 2010 invest €135 million in directly or indirectly supporting approximately 80,000 jobs;
- the enterprise stabilisation fund that will invest €100 million in supporting viable but vulnerable companies in these difficult economic times.

Acknowledges Government actions in support of activation and training for the unemployed through:

- its €1 billion funding for a range of labour force measures which will assist those who have lost their jobs;
- the doubling of capacity in job search support services for the unemployed,
- the continued increase in the number of training and work experience places for the unemployed, now standing at 147,000 places,
- that 30,000 trainees or 36% of those who participated on the FÁS training programmes in 2009 came from the under 25 age group,
- the introduction of new initiatives such as the workplace programme which includes special provision for graduate places,

[Senator Ivor Callely.]

- special arrangements to assist 4,000 redundant apprentices progress their apprenticeships,
- the provision of 40,000 full-time places in our further education sector,
- the 140,000 full-time enrolments in our higher education sector an increase of 4.5% over 2008-09 academic year,
- the significant increase in the numbers of back to education allowance recipients, up to over 18,000; and
- the introduction of a new €20 million labour market activation fund aimed at supporting innovative proposals that are progression orientated for the unemployed.

It is important we understand the position that prevails in our community and the impact this has on individuals and families. As the last speaker and Senator Bacik indicated, I hope we gain meaningful suggestions that can be taken on board. It is important we acknowledge what is happening, especially in the light of the motion referring to specific areas of the jobs strategy, the retraining and the back to education scheme. I will not address every point but the motion refers to the Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Social and Family Affairs and Education and Science. A number of additional measures have been taken beyond those to which I referred. I do not have time to address each and every issue but I have no doubt the Minister of State will do so when he has the opportunity.

We must take account of our domestic situation and the global situation that has an impact on us. It is all around us. The stark reality is that we are witnessing an exceptionally difficult period, with output reduced and stressful financial circumstances. There is no doubt we have lost our competitiveness, which is under serious pressure. I refer also to high unemployment across every community. Like many countries throughout the world, the United States has spent trillions of dollars in stimulating the economy but one issue that continues to cause difficulty is increasing the numbers in employment. The United States is not reaching the targets set in this regard. I agree with those who have proposed sensible measures to address the situation. I approve of a jobs strategy, retraining and back to education schemes along with all the other measures taken by the Government. Let us not lose sight of the fact there are the ingredients of a massive storm in our domestic situation. These are compounded by the global storm. We must take stock of where we have come from.

There is no doubt individuals, groups and their representative bodies have enjoyed rates of remuneration and conditions of employment that are no longer justifiable. The real answer is that we must create jobs and address our competitiveness. We know what the Government is doing with regard to debt and trying to get the banking situation under control. Unless we address the issue of competitiveness and create jobs at local level, there is no point in having a jobs strategy, retraining or a back to education scheme. We must ensure we can create opportunities and that people are prepared to accept the prevailing conditions, rates of remuneration and conditions of employment that go along with these opportunities. We must come to a clear consensus on what is just, reasonable, sustainable and what can be supported. We need to examine where we are and what we have tried in the past with a fresh pair of eyes.

I will not get into whether figures should be measured by the live register or the quarterly national household survey. The figures for unemployment are——

Senator John Paul Phelan: Appalling.

Senator Ivor Callely: —unacceptably high. I am struck by the terrible waste of time and energy these numbers represent. At the same time I am conscious of the real input some of these people can contribute to our community. Yesterday I met a solicitor who was unemployed and the day before I spoke to a qualified accountant who is unemployed. We are aware of the impact unemployment or underemployment has on individuals. In my area I witnessed the effect unemployment has on health issues, family issues, marital breakdown, addiction and mental health.

There is a pressing need in the community and voluntary sector for additional support. I propose the Minister of State examines how community and voluntary groups can be encouraged to provide short-term employment opportunities. I have referred to this as a national community volunteering scheme for the unemployed to carry out work in the community that would not otherwise be done. Community groups could pay the unemployed person exactly the same money he or she is claiming from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The scheme would operate similarly to the community employment scheme run by FÁS with a number of key differences, primarily related to eligibility. I would be happy to forward the scheme to the Minister of State.

Senator John Paul Phelan: I welcome the Minister of State. I support the Labour Party motion. It was interesting to note there were no Members of the Government parties present when the motion was proposed. I am not sure I agree with the ruling of the Cathaoirleach that the motion could not be put and carried at that juncture but I must have that discussion with him at a later time.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The ruling of the Cathaoirleach may not be questioned.

Senator Marc MacSharry: We still have a full complement of Members around the House.

Senator John Paul Phelan: I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the Labour Party motion as it is one of the most important motions to come before the House in some time. After listening to Senator Callely it is my view that neither the Government Members of this House nor the Government fully grasp the level of desperation among unemployed younger people in particular and the seriousness of the situation for the future of the country, the economy and the social fabric of Ireland. Unemployment is a very destructive force. It is not solely to do with people working and contributing taxes but it affects their health and future and the future of the community to which they belong. The Government in its recent budgets has not shown any regard for the disastrous consequences of unemployment on individuals and communities. This is the reason I fully support the Labour Party motion.

I listened with interest to Senator Callely's comments. He spoke about people having to accept the position. They might have to accept the position but the Government's duty is to make choices. The Government made a decision a number of months ago to inject capital into a number of our banks, some of which will never function properly again and yet the taxpayer has already invested €7 billion or €8 billion in them. The Government has not taken the same measures to address the issue of unemployment. If the economy and the country are to be anything like they were two or three years ago, we have to get people back to work. I do not agree with all the measures in the recent budget but the Government has taken necessary measures; I do not agree with some of the methods used to reduce the public service wage bill but it did not take the other necessary measure which was to promote employment. The Government amendment to the motion refers to what I regard as the pathetic little it has done and it refers to the employment subsidy scheme. It took six months before the first round of payments under this scheme were paid out. The Government has restated the projections that

[Senator John Paul Phelan.]

it would support 80,000 jobs but within its first six months the scheme was only supporting 8,000 jobs. This is a sign it is failing in what the Government set out for it to achieve and this is very worrying. The Government also announced a work placement scheme which, to the best of my knowledge, has fewer than 200 applicants. This is a pathetic result.

Ireland has the second highest unemployment rate within the European Union with approximately 88,000 people under the age of 25 unemployed, that is, one third of all men under the age of 25 are currently unemployed. This is completely unacceptable and young people are bearing the brunt. Senators on the Government side of the House as well as on this side deal with schools and educational institutions in the course of our work. I left school in 1997 which was a time of great opportunity when the Labour Party and Fine Gael had been in Government for three years. It was a time when 1,000 jobs a week were being created, there was free third level education and people like me had opportunities which existed for the following seven or eight years. It is a different situation for those doing their leaving certificate this year or coming to the end of their college education because those opportunities are not available.

The Government decided in the recent budget to cut welfare payments to younger unemployed people. The Government's message to that generation of Irish people was that they should get out of the country. For many years people were our biggest export and I never thought we would see the day when the Government would officially endorse by its own policy position that emigration was the best road for young people to take. Some of the measures taken so far clearly endorse the message that young people should head for the emigration boat. It is pathetic that the Minister of State in charge of employment does not seem to have any proposals of any constructive nature as to how jobs might be created. I am not suggesting this is an easy task but if parties in Opposition such as Fine Gael or the Labour Party or other individuals can come up with some realistic proposals, I do not see why the Minister of State and the Tánaiste cannot have some form of original thought on this issue which is the most significant crisis facing Ireland as a nation.

Fine Gael has proposed a national internship programme involving both the public and private sectors, where young people would be given roles within the public and private sectors on a part-time basis and also given the opportunity to continue on to further education and study at master and postgraduate level while in the national internship programme. Fine Gael has also proposed a second-chance education scheme. The Government has proposed a work placement scheme but this does not seem to be working and a radical rethink and change of direction is needed in that regard.

I refer to the community employment schemes which were much denigrated for many years. In the 1980s during the last economic recession, the Government of the time made moves to expand the remit of community employment schemes but it is not planning to take such action on this occasion. I presume the Minister of State can see the sense of giving somebody a small bit of extra money to do some work and contribute to the community. There are many unemployed people who would be willing to do this work if given the opportunity but the Minister of State could not even come up with this idea, which is not even new.

I have spoken about FÁS on other occasions as have other Members. It is very disappointing that at the time we need the State training agency more than we have ever needed it for the past 20 years, it finds itself embroiled in controversy. The Government has introduced legislation to reform the operations of FÁS but this is not sufficient. We need to restore confidence to the State training agency and I do not see that confidence being restored. The organisation is still receiving significant funding and I commend its excellent work and its training staff. However, that budget needs to be refocused on aspects of the economy which hold out the best prospect of success and recovery.

I support the Labour Party motion and I urge the Senators opposite to support it.

Senator Marc MacSharry: I join others in welcoming the Minister of State. I will be supporting the Government amendment. I wish to use this opportunity to make a few suggestions of my own and to thank the Labour Party for using its Private Members' time to have a discussion on this important issue. I apologise for using a script but I wish to cover some ground and I am conscious I may not have sufficient time to deal with it.

In October 2009, Ireland's unemployment rate was 12.8% with a eurozone average of 9.8% and Ireland's youth unemployment rate for under 25s was at 28%, which is obviously unacceptable. As we contemplate this issue there is no question that the destination for all of us is the same and what divides us, perhaps, are the vehicles or use of the vehicles to get us through the journey.

This rate is one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe. One in three men under 25 are now unemployed. Many of these were affected by the downturn in the construction industry. Many people who believed their future was in the construction sector now find they do not have the necessary skills to secure employment. A total of 18,400 Irish nationals emigrated last year, the majority being young people. This does not take into account in terms of net immigration the number of Irish people who returned but nevertheless, an unacceptable number of Irish people emigrated last year, which is more consistent with the trends of the 1980s than recent years. Unemployment harms young people in their psycho-social development. It reduces their opportunities to find a stable place in society and there are connections between unemployment and anti-social behaviour, substance abuse and crime.

In order to battle the jobs crisis, the Government must focus on reskilling these people so they may find a meaningful, fulfilling and self-sustaining role in society. We should not only reskill those who are now unemployed but be cognisant of those who are coming through the education process as they contemplate their futures.

With a number of others, in the last 18 months I was involved in preparing a paper on the country's entrepreneurship education strategy which was discussed in this House. If we are to develop a true entrepreneurial culture that encourages people to view entrepreneurship as a positive career option, we must start with education and young people. Among the recommendations we presented to the Government was the introduction of a field research project as an element of business studies subjects; the use of multiple and emotional intelligence theory as part of social, personal and health education; the launch of a young entrepreneur of the year competition, known as the Lemass award — that part has already happened, which is very encouraging; the establishment of a school awards scheme; and the development of an on-line entrepreneurship education resource for teachers. As we had an opportunity to discuss a variety of other proposals in this area previously, I do not want to dwell further on this aspect of the issue.

There is a growing body of international evidence to demonstrate that students who receive entrepreneurship education as part of their schooling show improved academic performance, school attendance and educational attainment; have increased problem solving and decision making abilities; improved interpersonal relationships, teamwork, money management and public speaking skills; are more likely to find employment; and have enhanced social and psychological development. Students achieve these benefits because the primary goal of entrepreneurship education is not to ensure everybody starts his or her own business but to encourage young people to think positively, look for opportunities, make things happen, have the self-confidence to achieve their goals and use their talents to build a better society, economically and socially. Entrepreneurship education should be an integral part of the country's ambition achieve a smart economy.

[Senator Marc MacSharry.]

Education must remain to the fore in any effort to curb youth unemployment. It should also drive development and growth. Senator Callely has mentioned a wide variety of the schemes that are being undertaken. I suggest more work should be done to ensure it is compulsory to finish second level education. It is unacceptable that 12.3% of Ireland's youth leave school after the junior certificate examination. The Senator mentioned a number of schemes such as the FÁS work placement scheme, the back to work enterprise scheme and the higher education and labour market activation scheme, which the Government should be commended for initiating.

We need to target the internships in which many under the age of 25 years find themselves. Many internships are being offered by firms which cannot afford to pay full-time staff. They offer graduates a chance to learn to work in an environment appropriate to their college qualifications. Subsistence is offered by many firms to cover travel and lunch costs. If a graduate takes up such an offer, however, he or she may lose his or her dole payment. As we know, the under-25 rate has been increased to €150. Internships offer between €50 and €80 a week. Highly qualified graduates with degrees or master's degrees are earning less than they would on the dole. Dole payments should be maintained for those engaged in internships, as they are under the IBEC GradLink programme.

While the initiatives I have mentioned are very welcome, we need to reassess our labour market policy to meet the future needs of the economy. Redirection of labour, reskilling and training in high skill areas will create the basis of the smart economy. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has responsibility for labour market policy, while the Department of Social and Family Affairs has responsibility for unemployment. Unemployment is seen by the Department of Social and Family Affairs as a welfare problem, rather than a labour market problem. This is an issue.

The division of responsibility for labour market policy between the two Departments has led to a variety of anomalies such as an absence of a focus on low skilled workers; a possible imbalance between the minimum wage and jobseeker's allowance; and co-ordination difficulties, including computer incompatibility between officials with responsibility for the jobseeker's scheme and officials in FÁS. It has been calculated that between 2000 and 2010 jobseeker's pay increased by 106%, with just a 55% increase in the minimum wage. In 2009 a person working 39 hours on the minimum wage would have earned €337.35 per week. If that person is an adult with an adult dependant, he or she is entitled to a dole payment of up to €326.10 in 2010. Even though we have one of the highest minimum wages in the world, a person with an adult dependant receives just 3% more for working a 39-hour week on the minimum wage than he or she would get on the dole. I am not saying we should decrease dole payments, nor am I arguing for an increase in the minimum wage, but we need to focus on this issue. A substantial debate needs to take place.

The labour market policy issues I have highlighted could be addressed by establishing a new Department of Labour. In addition to discharging the labour market responsibilities of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the new Department would also take responsibility for the unemployment and jobseeker's schemes from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The transfer of the planning, research and development unit of FÁS, with its six economists, to the new Department would largely solve this problem without additional costs. A similar step was taken by the Blair Government in the United Kingdom when it established the Department of Work and Pensions which I believe has worked very well. I would like us to move in that direction.

I welcome the proposed establishment of the international content services centre. I also welcome the innovation task force which will examine ways of increasing innovation, accelerate growth through research and development and strive to make Ireland attractive to knowledge-intensive direct investment. As a digital innovation hub, the international content services centre will liaise with IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and other agencies. It has the potential to create thousands of jobs. Digital literacy will play a pivotal role in getting people back to work. Ireland has one of the youngest populations in Europe. We are at an advantage because the level of digital literacy here is high. The youth of Ireland have the most to gain from the digital economy. The Government has taken many initiatives that will lead us on that path. I would like some of the suggestions I have made — provocative as they may be — to be considered by the Minister.

I have worked with the Minister of State, Deputy Calleary, in business and in the chamber of commerce movement for many years. In my eight years as a Member of the Oireachtas no other Minister or Minister of State has been better suited or better equipped to deal with the challenges of today, or has better expertise to do so. I wish him well in his endeavours.

Senator Shane Ross: I wish to share time with Senator Norris.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Shane Ross: There is no quick fix to this problem. One of the gloomy results of debates such as this is that people offer peripheral answers to a fundamental problem. Unemployment has spiked at a level that is quite uncontrollable. The Government, like everybody else, has been taken by surprise. The spike in unemployment cannot be solved by a short-term solution. In the 1980s, mentioned by Senator John Paul Phelan, we had an emigration outlet which we do not really have now. Therefore, we need far more imaginative solutions. Senators have been tackling the edges of today's debate by talking about small-term employment schemes. Everybody knows such schemes will not solve the problem — the unemployment of hundreds of thousands — that has suddenly popped up in a tragic way.

It is probably useful to look back at how the last unemployment crisis in the 1980s was resolved. It was not resolved by jobs strategy schemes such as the community employment programmes and other schemes mentioned. It was resolved in a twofold fashion. First, we have to admit that the take-off in the construction industry helped to solve the unemployment problem. We now regret our dependence on it, although if we had depended on it completely, we would be in an even worse employment situation than we are. Second, I do not think people like to admit that the arrival of the multinationals marked a fundamental change in the structure and planning of the economy. It had nothing to do with all these little schemes, FÁS or anything else mentioned. Donagh O'Malley went out on the plinth in 1966 to announce the introduction of free secondary education. It was a wonderful thing to do. It bore fruit in the 1980s and 1990s, when multinationals created whole industries here on foot of the reduction in the corporation tax rate to 12.5%. We should be mindful of this. It may not be very popular to say it, but if those guys go, we will be completely bunched. The twin pillars of the Celtic tiger in terms of employment were the construction industry which is now absolutely flat on its back and the multinationals which are still here — thank God — and providing a huge amount of jobs. Perhaps we should look to that historical event rather than local efforts, not to find a solution because this problem will not be solved overnight, but to devise a means of attacking unemployment in the long term. The possibility of reducing corporation tax further should be examined. The current rate of 12.5% will become uncompetitive if we are not careful. For this reason, we should consider reducing the rate further to create employment and attract more multinationals.

[Senator Shane Ross.]

Senator John Paul Phelan raised the issue of FÁS. The tragedy of FÁS is that the high profile discoveries we have made have penetrated the whole organisation. Senator Phelan, like all politicians, prefaced his remarks on FÁS by noting the wonderful work it does. While I accept it does wonderful work in certain areas, there are real problems in the organisation, especially in its expenditure and budget. Many of us who have visited FÁS courses and buildings have noted that there are empty FÁS buildings throughout the country. What the hell is going on? Moreover, courses are being given without subsequent checks or follow-up and in some cases those providing training are not properly qualified to do so. These types of problems have emerged.

FÁS is sloppy and uncontrolled from top to bottom. If the problem extended only to travel, it would be possible to solve it but it extends to the courses the organisation provides. The absence of controls means educational standards are deficient. This is not adequate. The FÁS budget needs to be used properly and the organisation needs to train properly to meet the requirements of particular jobs.

I overlooked to welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Calleary, to the House. Let us put pressure on banks to provide more money to small businesses which are the creators of employment. The banks are not giving out money and do not intend to do so. There is no prospect that they will lend unless the Government, which virtually owns them, insists that they do so. If the Government adopted such an approach, it would create employment at this critical time.

Senator David Norris: I thank Senator Ross for kindly sharing time. I do not need to welcome the Minister of State as the Senator already did so.

The Labour Party should have been allowed to call a division on the motion as it would have won it. That no Government Senator was present when the motion was moved created a rather awkward situation in such a serious debate. I remember winning a vote against the Government in similar circumstances many years ago on the basis that the Government benches were empty. It was argued that the Minister of State should be allowed to speak. Why? If the motion is proposed, seconded and unopposed, it should go to a vote. That option is no longer available.

I do not see a reason the Government side should not agree with a motion which states: "That Seanad Éireann notes with concern the rise in joblessness ... in particular the rise in youth unemployment". Is the Government not concerned? Of course it is, as are all decent Senators on the Government side. The motion also calls on the Government "to implement a Jobs Strategy, including retraining and back to education support, to tackle this crisis". Given that Senators on all sides have made that point, why are we going through this ritual farce of engaging in Ding Dong Denny O'Reilly, tit-for-tat rubbish every Wednesday night? Can we not grow up, put ideas together and get the country going again?

Ireland is in a serious position. According to the latest figures, unemployment increased in January by 3.1% to 436,936 compared with 423,595 in December 2009. The unadjusted live register increased by 110,664 or 33.9% over the past year. Dublin was hardest hit by the increase, with the number of people on the live register in the capital increasing by 38.1% in the past year. On a county basis, Kerry had the highest percentage increase of 6.2%, while Leitrim experienced the smallest increase of only 1%. There are not many people in County Leitrim and presumably most of them are employed. Men and women have been badly affected by the increase in unemployment. Figures show that 291,648 men and 145,288 women are on the live register.

I uncovered a very interesting statistic which shows that the number of workers from outside Ireland who are signing on increased by 5% or 3,876 in January. The number of Irish nationals

on the register increased by 9,465 in the same month. A sizeable proportion of those signing on are from abroad, although many workers from outside the country have returned home. Underlying the figures is the serious problem that not only are we confronted with immediate unemployment but a large number of unskilled workers, the most vulnerable group, will be permanently on the dole. Even when the economy recovers to positive growth, it is likely that the jobless rate will never return to a level of 4% unless serious action is taken. The general estimate is that we will be left with a permanent unemployment rate of between 7% and 8%, most of whom will be unskilled workers.

The House earlier debated education, an area which is being squeezed by reduced funding, caps on staffing and cuts in courses. The issue is not being addressed by the Government. In addition, emigration to Australia and Canada has increased significantly with the result that more people are leaving Ireland than are arriving. We have, therefore, the beginning of a haemorrhage.

Recently, the Governor of the Central Bank, Professor Patrick Honohan, addressed the launch of the Trinity alumni career network, a group which is trying to secure jobs for Trinity College Dublin graduates. The Governor spoke about the ways in which we could boost the economy, including recapitalising the banks and so forth. However, even Professor Honohan had to note that employment levels among young Irish people have deteriorated much more rapidly than in other countries. He provided facts and figures on youth unemployment which I do not propose to repeat.

The type of black hole economics which counts profits from multinationals generated abroad does not reflect the true economic position. I was interested to read what Dr. Craig Barrett, the former chairman of Intel, had to say about the Irish economy. Addressing the emergence of China, India, Asia and so forth, he stated that the idea of bringing in large multinational corporations was now unimaginative and Ireland had to rely on entrepreneurs, start-ups and new ideas to drive economic growth, especially in areas such as nanotechnology, micro-electronics, photonics, biotechnology and alternative energy. This is precisely the argument made by many Senators in this afternoon's debate.

Why are we having this divisive debate when we should have allowed the Labour Party to win a division on the motion before having a free and wide-ranging discussion? Everyone in the House agrees with the sentiments in the Labour Party motion.

Senator Dan Boyle: While I do not disagree with the sentiments in the motion, having a debate of this nature allows the Government to explain its policy on the relevant issue which demands that we go through the same process every Wednesday. The contributions thus far have reflected this.

There is no doubt the unemployment rate is the economic indicator of greatest concern to everyone involved in public life. Unemployment is the consequence of economic collapse, the position of the public finances and the decline in economic growth and spending in the economy. It is also true that as and when the indicators improve and we restore growth and stability in the economy, unemployment will be the last indicator to improve. This may not occur until one year after signs of growth in the rest of the economy have emerged.

The motion is well framed in the sense that youth unemployment is of particular concern. Unemployment among young people has reached one third and anecdotal evidence — we need to address the lack of concrete evidence — indicates that many of these workers are semi-skilled and low skilled. Not only is it a matter of finding new jobs for such workers but also of ensuring that such workers are appropriately skilled for such jobs when they are provided.

[Senator Dan Boyle.]

The one ray of light in the restructuring of the economy in coming years is that we cannot go back to where we were; it cannot be a construction-based economy depending on semi-skilled and unskilled people. The Government's smart economy document points out the growth areas from where jobs will come, particularly in the green economy with retrofitting housing and utilising our natural resources for better energy generation. There is consensus in the House that this is the road to take but to do so we need training opportunities. Senator Ross has been a trenchant, and very often justifiable, critic of FÁS. However, we should not confuse governance issues and the misappropriation of public funds by that agency in recent years with the valuable work done by many of those who work for the agency in providing useful and necessary training. That is the road we need to take. FÁS, as the State agency with responsibility for this area, should be particularly directed by the Government to offer training opportunities in the areas outlined in the smart economy document, in particular in the green economy.

It must be acknowledged that we have a difficulty with third level education that will come to a head next year. It is unfortunate that it will be more difficult for new entrants to qualify for formal university education and degree courses offered in institutes of technology. This will create further pressure and will reduce the opportunities for people to be armed with appropriate skills for when the economy improves. We must use the other parts of the education sector more efficiently, in particular further education which provides opportunities to upskill and reskill people in one or two year courses that will meet evolving needs in the economy. The Government would do well to seek specific resources for this area in the coming years.

Senator John Paul Phelan is not in a position to respond but it is not helpful in a debate such as this to describe the Government's policy as being framed on emigration. That is a trite political charge thrown out from time to time. The nature of the difficulty we have with youth unemployment is that unlike in other recessions the country has suffered, emigration does not exist as a stop-valve. The economies to which young Irish people would have gone in previous generations are, if not equally then almost equally, in similar economic situations. The unemployment rate in the United States is 10% and the rate in the United Kingdom, while lower than ours, is still 8% or 9%.

While one third of those available for work in the 18 to 25 year old category are unemployed here, the overall statistic for youth unemployment in the 27 member states is 21.4%. The variations between various countries indicate how the problem is being dealt with elsewhere and we are far from the worst. Admittedly, the lowest is 7.6% in the Netherlands but the highest, in Spain, is 44%.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: We are second last.

Senator Dan Boyle: We are well behind Spain in terms of absolutes and——

Senator Dominic Hannigan: We are 26th out of 27.

Senator Dan Boyle: Other countries among the newer members also have high rates. Part of the difficulty we have is the lack of a standard measurement in many European countries and the fact that social welfare is not taken to be a European competence which skews the pitch.

During the debate I heard mention of the budgetary decision to make a lower rate of unemployment payment available to younger workers. A payment being previously higher than it is now will excite political comment and cause controversy. However, a number of reasons exist for this being necessary. We do not have emigration as a safety valve and the call on the public purse is greater than it was during previous periods of economic stress. More importantly —

we lack this debate — it can be established as a principle that unemployment payment for younger workers is not a standard payment in terms of not getting into a culture of dependency and a young person's first income being a welfare payment. A lower payment is a form of incentive. We must remember that in comparison to our neighbouring jurisdiction the full rate of unemployment benefit here is three times the level of what is paid in the United Kingdom and even the reduced rate of unemployment benefit for younger people is still twice that level.

If we concentrate on what we pay as welfare and income support for younger workers we miss the wider picture. I accept the Labour Party's motion is framed in a wider sense. It is not about what we pay people in welfare, it is about creating employment opportunities for them and about the training offered to them to avail of such opportunities as and when they arise. In having a more constructive long-term debate on this I ask that we get away from the trite excuses and political charges about emigration and the structure of the welfare system and discuss common approaches to employment creation and the training opportunities that are necessary in the economy.

I accept that there are still deficiencies and gaps in services but there is also an intent to meet many of those inequities and a plan is in place on how we can get there. It is the nature of Opposition to point out how and when the Government does not do this. I believe that as and when economic indicators improve internationally and nationally within the next year we will have put in place and set in motion the environment required for an ongoing reduction of unemployment and youth unemployment in particular of which we will see the benefit towards the end of 2011. On these grounds, I support the Government's amendment to the motion, which states what the Government is doing about this in a proactive and positive sense. It should not be read, as it has been interpreted, as an outright rejection of the motion tabled by the Labour Party.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I wish to share time with Senator Prendergast.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Dominic Hannigan: I welcome the Minister of State and the opportunity to speak in this debate on the unemployment crisis that is hitting the country and the lack of implementation by the Government of a coherent jobs strategy. The most recent statistics from the CSO show that more than 400,000 people are out of work and seeking work in the country, which is almost 13% of the workforce. My home county of Meath has seen a dramatic increase of more than 200% in the number of people out of work in the past two years.

The day he assumed office the Taoiseach, Deputy Brian Cowen, stated that a focus on young people and their needs would be a particular priority for his Government. However, now more than 86,000 young people are on the live register, 2,000 of them in County Meath. As was stated by Senator Boyle, we have the second worst youth unemployment rate in Europe. One out of every three people under the age of 25 is unemployed. I do not accept the Green Party line that we should be cutting their payments. Young people are finding it increasingly difficult to survive. I am surprised at the Green Party espousing the notion that they can afford cuts to their social welfare payments.

Senator Boyle is correct that the spectre of forced emigration has returned. Up to 60,000 young people have left our shores in recent times. It is of benefit to many people; I spent many years outside the country and I think I gained significant experience from doing so. For many people emigration can be a positive experience but I worry about the impact that forced emigration can have on people, particularly those leaving Ireland with poor qualifications, little money and no support or social network at their destination. It is easy to fall on hard times and difficult to get out of situations when one cannot afford one's next month's rent or tomor-

[Senator Dominic Hannigan.]

row's food. That is why we need to provide proper supports for the Diaspora. That is why I am concerned. I have previously pointed out in this House that we are cutting back on funding for organisations such as the Federation of Irish Societies. I have called for a debate on the funding of our Diaspora groups and remind the Leader that he agreed to arrange such a debate in the near future.

The longer young people remain out of work, the harder it will become for them to find employment, even after the economy recovers. That is why I am appalled by the Government's response. In the absence of employment opportunities, internships and work experience opportunities are badly needed. The Government has reduced allowances for those participating in vocational training opportunity schemes and Youthreach programmes and cut support for those who want to return to education. I note the presence in the Visitors Gallery of mature students from NUIG. A key concern for those participating in third level access courses is the reduction in maintenance grants. Approximately 2,000 students are severely affected by these cuts, to the tune of several thousands of euro.

Last week I learned that FÁS had established a working group to develop a youth framework for the unemployed and school leavers. It is not fair to say the Government is doing nothing because it has implemented a number of worthwhile measures but more needs to be done. The ideas and proposals brought forward by Opposition Members can help in this regard. On the few occasions the Government has taken action it has been unplanned, poorly executed or on an inadequate scale. Some time ago my party leader, Deputy Eamon Gilmore, proposed a work placement scheme for graduates. While I welcome the fact that the Government accepted our idea, its strategy was poorly designed and provided for an inadequate number of places. We must do better.

We have to consider ways of increasing employment opportunities in particular sectors. We were overly reliant on the construction sector during the boom but there are opportunities in regard to green energy and retrofitting houses. Our counterparts in Westminster are implementing such a programme in the United Kingdom as a key element of its strategy to reduce energy wastage. This programme will present opportunities for Irish house builders and construction companies if they can retrain their workers in the necessary skills because millions of houses will be retrofitted as a result of the UK Government's fiscal stimulus package.

We urgently need a jobs strategy. The Government needs to demonstrate the political will and leadership to implement such a strategy at the earliest opportunity.

Senator Phil Prendergast: I thank Senator Hannigan for sharing time with me and welcome the Minister of State. I wish to add to Senator Hannigan's comments on the position in his own area of County Meath by outlining the situation as it affects the people of south Tipperary, in particular Carrick-on-Suir and Tipperary town.

Since the bubble hit the fan after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008, the Government has been consumed by the white heat of activity focused on bailing out the bankers and the builders who contributed greatly to the meltdown. However, it seems to have been too busy dreaming up a scheme that will lead to the taxpayer stumping up more than €13 billion to buy the banks to implement measures aimed at saving the real economy. When the Labour Party first proposed nationalising the banks, they could have been bought for around €3 billion but now we are on course to nationalisation by stealth at a cost of up to five times the original price. One can imagine what could have been achieved if some of the €10 billion the Government is overpaying for the banks was spent on training and job creation measures. This money could have had a massive impact not only on our competitiveness but also on the lives of the people. It would have gone a long way towards addressing the problems of leaking

water pipes, an inadequate electricity grid and broadband network and shabby public buildings and schools, as well as constructing community facilities such as youth cafés, centres for the elderly and homes for the homeless. Much of it would have gone into the pockets of the largest cohort of unemployed, namely, construction workers.

The male unemployment rate is around 40% among 15 to 19 year olds and 30% among 20 to 24 year olds. Many are construction workers who could be earning money, supporting the economy and building a better and more competitive Ireland but, as studies consistently show, there is instead a real danger that some of these young men will turn to crime. Even further social damage will be caused and financial cost incurred by the Government's decision to draw the wagons around the golden circle. If the Government could go into overdrive in tackling the fiscal crisis, why was there not a parallel effort made to tackle the jobs crisis? We have seen an *bord snip nua* and the Commission on Taxation but where is the equivalent to tackle the jobs crisis?

Since the start of the crisis, the Labour Party has been consistent in pointing to the need for a blend of policies if we are to achieve recovery. Central to these policies are ways to get people off the dole and keep them in employment and education. We were not alone when we said this and we are not alone now. Unlike the Government, we can honestly claim support for our policies. Since the turn of the year, US President, Barack Obama, and Nobel prize winning economists, Paul Krugman and Joe Stiglitz, have expressed the belief that jobs and investment are the key to recovery. However, the Government believes jobs can be created with virtually no investment.

My colleague, Deputy Seán Sherlock, and I have raised the example of the FÁS work placement scheme on previous occasions. This is a six month work experience scheme for 2,000 unemployed people. Participants must be unemployed for six months or more and, although they can retain their welfare entitlements, they receive no other remuneration. The Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment with responsibility for labour affairs, Deputy Billy Kelleher, described the scheme as an innovative approach to providing support and training for job seekers. It is worth examining what is on offer in order to determine how much support the scheme, in fact, offers. Among the placements recently advertised on the FÁS website was one in a hospital in Tallaght which offered a position as a medical typist. The skills required included experience as a medical typist. A café in County Westmeath advertised a position in which the successful applicant would learn how to make and serve lattes and cappuccinos, while a shop in Cavan kindly offered experience in stacking and cleaning shelves. I wonder who benefits at the County Meath firm which seeks a sewing machinist with previous experience in clothes manufacturing or the pre-school in north Dublin which is seeking someone with pre-school teaching qualifications? What about the County Louth facility which wants a caretaker who must take on key holding and security duties, as well as take charge of the disposal of internal and external waste and maintenance of toilets?

The Government's recovery plan comprises bank bailouts and bog bailouts. This is a valuable programme in principle but it is being used as a free labour scheme. In practice, it is another FÁS farce. Rather than reduce unemployment, it could actually increase it where cynical employers seek to pocket the wages they should be paying by hiring somebody for free. There is every likelihood that people who are casually employed will actually lose their jobs to those participating in the work placement scheme. Of course, there is little incentive to take up these positions because they offer little or no useful experience, even though they cost the worker money in terms of getting to work and other arrangements for household duties and child care. However, someone who refuses an offer of a place on the scheme will be liable to a cut in his or her jobseeker's payment under the terms of the Social Welfare Act 2009. This flawed scheme is a microcosm of the Government's approach to job creation. It is a no-cost programme which

[Senator Phil Prendergast.]

suffers from a lack of planning, monitoring and common sense. In short, when it comes to jobs, the Government does not appear to be interested.

Senator John Carty: I welcome the Minister of State. I know he will make some interesting figures available to Senators when he makes his contribution. I thank the Labour Party for tabling this timely motion on unemployment among young people. I will not rehearse the unemployment figures among young people.

The construction industry is on its uppers and I do not expect much to happen in the next three to four years. I hope I am wrong but we have built everything we want other than, perhaps, new roads and other infrastructure. Investments in that sector would help to create employment. There is still plenty of such work to be done in this country.

Apprenticeships are very important. I note that the Government has introduced a range of measures that will enable 4,000 redundant apprentices to progress their apprenticeships. I welcome the introduction of an employer-based rotation scheme at a cost of €4 million. I read in the past week that there will be a shortage of plumbers, electricians and other tradesmen. I hope apprentices who have been made redundant are encouraged to take part in the scheme.

I said previously in the House that I do not believe we should tamper with the minimum wage. I suggested to the Minister at the time that an apprentice rate could be introduced which would allow them to start off earning perhaps €5 per hour and after three years they could be brought up to the minimum wage or higher. They would then have completed their training and gained experience. One of the greatest difficulties for young people is that they do not have any experience when they apply for jobs. It is difficult for one to get experience without getting into a company. The Government will have to examine this area and provide encouragement to companies to take on young people so they can gain experience. One way to do that could be to offer a lower rate than the minimum wage until sufficient experience was gained. As it is, we are not getting anywhere in that jobs are advertised but young people cannot get them because they do not have the necessary experience.

The importance of education was alluded to by Senator Ross. Free education was introduced in the 1960s by the late Donogh O'Malley but we really began to reap the benefits of it in the 1980s. At that time we were seen as an upwardly mobile country of young people with good education standards who were able to adapt to the multinational companies coming in to set up high-tech industries. Boston Scientific proposed to lay off 175 people in Galway this week. We should bear in mind that more than 3,000 people are still employed by that company. The education system should be poised to take advantage of the turnaround when it comes. Multinationals are not leaving the country but it is vital that young people are prepared to take on those high-tech jobs. I am sure more jobs will come our way because of our tax incentives and our location on the periphery of Europe. It is important we are prepared to take advantage of the situation.

Community employment, CE, schemes have given a lease of life to people, especially in rural areas. I welcome the fact that Ministers have changed the requirements in terms of age to allow people to continue in such employment. I am delighted that 22,780 CE places are in the system. That was increased by a further 500 places in the 2010 budget, bringing the total to 23,300. We should welcome that. Those jobs are vital, especially in rural areas. Entire areas have been regenerated as a result of the schemes. Senator Prendergast referred to the successful renovation of old buildings and such work in towns and rural areas under the auspices of the CE schemes. It is evident that people involved in CE schemes have skills in stonework, for example, that have been tapped into. They do an exceptionally good job.

Many useful measures were introduced in the budget. A total of €90 million was provided for additional FÁS training schemes. The labour market activation fund will provide 3,500 places. A total of €14 million has been provided through the European globalisation adjustment fund. That is to be welcomed. It is not fair to say the Government is doing nothing and has done nothing. It is tackling the situation.

I compliment the Minister of State, Deputy Calleary. Prior to his getting elected to the Dáil he had vast experience through his work with Chambers Ireland of creating employment. I accept that might have been in the good times. He has brought that experience with him. I have no doubt he will continue with it. I appeal to the Minister of State to impress on the Government that the banks will have to make funding available to small businesses. They are the backbone of the country and they should be helped in every way possible.

Senator Paschal Donohoe: With the permission of the House, I wish to share time with Senator McFadden.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Paschal Donohoe: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Calleary. I commend the Labour Party on its motion. It is important that we are discussing the matter. As I was getting ready for this debate I was reminded of the film title, “No Country for Old Men”. That was adapted over the weekend by a newspaper which said it is no country for young men and women.

One of the figures I came across in my preparations is one that many of my colleagues have used this evening, namely, that one in three men under the age of 25 is unemployed. I spent some time trying to understand the reality of that headline figure and to get beyond it. That work was done yesterday by Ronan Lyons, an economist who works with the website, *www.daft.ie*. He has carried out a chilling analysis of the Central Statistics Office, CSO, figures to show what is happening to young people. I wish to focus on three points from his work that have not been made in this debate.

His first point is that in 2006 there were 175,000 people under the age of 25 at work. He estimated that 100,000 or 55% of the jobs available to people under the age of 25 are now gone. The second point is the degree to which emigration is hiding the extent to which unemployment is savaging young people. There has been some discussion about that in this debate. He estimates that emigration is hiding the disappearance of a further 20% of jobs that would have been available to men under the age of 25. He also made a point which is terrible to contemplate. He indicated that the population of men under the age of 25 — I am sure it is the same for women — was 325,000 but it is now 290,000. We have lost 35,000 of those people who were at their most productive in terms of working hours and the commitment and enthusiasm they brought to what they were doing.

He has carried out an analysis of what is happening on a county basis to try to understand where the real pressure points are. I am most familiar with what is happening in Dublin. Over the weekend it became apparent 22,000 people under the age of 25 are without work. Almost two out of every three young men in Limerick is signing on. The position is similar in counties Clare, Tipperary, Donegal, Louth and Waterford. Half of the young men living in those counties are signing on. My colleagues touched on the major blight this represents and the way it is scarring the ability of the State to move forward. The engines of economic growth in the past were the quality of the young people and the education, skills and understanding of computers they had accumulated. That stock of human knowledge and capacity to move our economy forward is in this state with half and, sometimes two thirds, of young people signing on in some

[Senator Paschal Donohoe.]

cities and counties. That is deplorable and must be recognised for what it is — a huge loss of human capital at a time it is needed to move the economy forward.

All the work done by economists establishes that if a person leaves the labour force when he or she is young, it is much more difficult for him or her to return. Danny Blanchflower is an economist in the UK who was formerly a member of the Bank of England monetary policy committee. He identified a group of people entitled NEETS, not in employment, education or training. The fact they are not working not only represents a tragic loss of human capital but also a loss of spending power and tax revenue because they are unable to contribute, and this is at the heart of the fiscal difficulties we face. Our party has identified that 40% of the budget deficit is due to unemployment and it is deplorable that much of that burden is falling on our young.

Senator Nicky McFadden: I thank Senator Donohoe and welcome the Minister of State. I would like to touch on two groups — lone parents and young farmers. Lone parents have always been an issue and a problem but I am more concerned now because it is even more difficult for them to find a job. One Family, the organisation that advocates on behalf of lone parents, conducted a survey, about which the Minister for Social and Family Affairs is well aware. The most outstanding fact in the report is that the majority of lone parents want to get off the one-family payment and into work. The impediments they face include access to quality child care. A total of 84% of lone parents are working, are in education or are actively seeking employment. How does the Minister propose to create employment for one-parent families? A cycle has developed where generations of single parents depend on welfare and are unable to access satisfying and stimulating employment and, therefore, contribute to society. They do not want to be on welfare. I would like the Minister of State to comment on how we can assess, help and motivate these individuals.

The issue relating to FÁS was referred to by my colleagues. I have come across individuals who had to take up a FÁS course to secure a social welfare payment. That condition is not tailored to long-term employment. It is a waste of money and bad value. For instance, the notion that somebody should take up a construction course now is farcical.

Significant employment has been lost on the land and rural Ireland is being eroded because young people cannot afford to stay at home. Farmers have lost the early retirement, installation aid, suckler grant and other schemes, which has led to emigration and young people having to leave the land. Boundless opportunities are available in agritourism and quality food production. These are two sound and accessible ways to keep young people on the land and in employment. Farmers' markets could also be used. There are ways and means to be innovative and to think outside the box.

Senator Pearse Doherty: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit chuig an Teach. Gabhaim buíochas leis an bPáirtí Lucht Oibre as ucht an rún seo a chur síos toisc go dtugann sé deis don Seanad an cheist seo a phlé. Beidh mé ag tacú leis an rún. Sin ráite, dá mbeinn féin ag scríobh an rún, rachfainn i bhfad níos faide na an Páirtí Lucht Oibre ag cáineadh an Rialtas. Tuigim nár chuaigh siad chomh fada sin ionas go mbeimid uilig in ann tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún. Tá an leasú atá curtha síos ag Seanadóirí as páirtithe an Rialtas náireach, go h-áirithe ós rud é go bhfuil siad ag iarraidh ar an Teach comhghairdeachas a dhéanamh leis an Rialtas nuair atá fios damanta maith againn agus acu go bhfuil slad déanta acu ó thaobh fostaíocht ar fud na tíre, go h-áirithe ó thaobh daoine óga atá dífhostaithe agus gan todhchaí breá rompu toisc na fadhbanna eacnamaíochta a chur an Rialtas sinn ann.

I welcome the motion tabled by the Labour Party Senators and I congratulate them on facilitating this important debate. The tone of the motion is one that seeks to achieve consensus and I do not see why we cannot do so. Last Monday, my colleagues on Donegal County Council tabled a motion calling for action on youth unemployment and they secured unanimous support on the issue. Relatives of Senators voted in support of the motion. The reality is that behind all the statistics is a human story and a story of hardship. It is important for us to ensure we do whatever we can in whatever capacity or role we have to address this terrible situation in which so many people find themselves unemployed.

The Leader must have seriously blushed when he drafted the amendment. It is beyond the best work of fiction to think the Seanad would commend the Government parties on their work in tackling unemployment when every month the CSO figures reinforce the fact that unemployment is escalating drastically, with 50% of young males unemployed in some areas. There is a need to take serious action. We all understand the position the country is in and the decisions the Government must make. Politics is all about decisions and priorities. I acknowledge it is easier for the Opposition to put forward proposals because we do not have to implement them but the decisions made by the Government have a serious effect on people's lives. I say confidently the Government has not implemented the right policies or taken the right decisions. We have seen this time and again, unfortunately, through the different policy proposals the Government has led, always favouring those who are most well off. It has dealt with the banking crisis but, unfortunately for the hundreds of thousands of unemployed and young people, it has not placed the same focus on dealing with their problems.

I have been talking about the high levels of unemployment in my own county of Donegal for the past decade. I have had to endure the sight of the Taoiseach or former Taoisigh and other Ministers coming to my area, whether it is to the MacGill Summer School or other events, and talking about how great the country was, saying they could not find people in during they day when they were canvassing because we had a zero unemployment rate. That was at a time when in County Donegal, at the height of the Celtic tiger, there was an unemployment level of around 18%. Elected Members from the west know we have always had higher levels of unemployment than in the rest of the country, but Donegal is the county that has been hit the hardest and the position is particularly bad in Donegal South-West. As I said, at the height of the Celtic tiger, the unemployment rate in County Donegal was 18%. Since then we have seen unemployment levels double in the county. In my constituency 2,269 people under the age of 25 years are registered with the social welfare office. State-wide, we know that more than 85,900 young people are signing on. I am being parochial, but County Donegal has been at the bottom of the barrel in terms of employment. Even when money was available, we did not see any substantial effort to create or sustain employment opportunities for young people in the county.

A number of years ago, when Deputy Mary Coughlan was given the role of Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, it was welcomed by everyone in Donegal South-West because if there was anything we needed in that constituency, it was jobs. However, when I asked the Minister about the number of companies supported by the IDA in County Donegal, I received the answer that there were 12. On being asked the location of these companies, she would not answer. The reason she did not answer this parliamentary question from my colleague was she did not want me or the people of Donegal South-West to know that out of the 987 companies supported by the IDA in the State, only two were in her constituency.

I am sure she does not want us to know either that since she became Minister, not one site visit has been conducted by the IDA in the constituency. Donegal South-West is the constituency with the highest level of unemployment in the country and the most young people unemployed, yet there has not been one site visit in the last three years and only two companies

[Senator Pearse Doherty.]

supported by the IDA — one quarter of 1% of the total — are located in that area, although it is the Minister's home constituency. This shows the lack of imagination, application and policy decision-making on the part of the Government, all of which are needed if we are to tackle the problems experienced not only in Donegal South-West but throughout the State.

The decisions taken by the Government, particularly in the recent budget, have hit the 2,500 people in my area under the age of 25 years who are unemployed. The decision to cut job-seeker's allowance to €100 for 20 and 21 year olds and €150 for 22 to 24 year olds is one of the worst it has made. How can it differentiate between a 24 year old and a 34 year old? It has targeted young people because it thinks they are easy pickings. We saw this again with the 5% reduction in third level maintenance grants. Some 2,500 students still have not received the first instalment of their grant. I know from trying to help people in my own area that, unfortunately, some of them have dropped out of college. These are all statistics. We can talk about figures until the cows come home, but unemployment destroys lives. It destroys opportunities and the chances that these young people could enjoy. What we need to do is not simply to attack the Government and say it is not doing enough. Last year we offered 80 costed proposals on how to get Ireland back to work. I ask the Minister of State and his colleagues to consider this.

I will finish with an example.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator's time is up. I am trying to hold Members to eight minutes.

Senator Pearse Doherty: It will take one sentence. A colleague of mine in County Donegal went to school with 31 other children. There were 32 children in her class. She is now 29 years of age and only seven of those 32 are still in the county. Of the seven, only two are in full-time employment. That is the impact the lack of a policy on unemployment is having in rural areas such as west Donegal.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): Gabhaim buíochas le Páirtí an Lucht Oibre as ucht an rún seo a ardú. I am not particularly interested in the mechanics of amendments and counter amendments. I agree we have a problem and I am interested in addressing it. There have been some good ideas and suggestions which I will deal with. The aim of the amendment was not, as Senator Hannigan said, to clap ourselves on the back but to point out that there were initiatives under way and that we were implementing policies in this regard.

The stabilisation fund represents an investment of €100 million this year and will support more than 148 companies. Senator John Paul Phelan referred to the temporary employee subsidy scheme, in which we are investing €135 million. We are happy that we will be able to sustain the figure of 80,000 jobs supported under the scheme. There were 2,700 applications for the second call under the scheme and up to €9,100 will be awarded for each subsidised job some time in March. I will happy to come back to the House and discuss the impact of the scheme around that time.

The Finance Bill which is on Second Stage in the other House and which will be taken in the Seanad imminently contains details of the employer job (PRSI) incentive scheme. Senator McCarthy referred to the need for such a scheme. The scheme provides that when an employer creates a new job and takes on somebody who has been unemployed for six months or more, that employer will be fully exempt from PRSI liability for the first year of that employment, which will provide a 8% to 10% saving on employment costs for each new job created.

Our enterprise agencies, together with the local enterprise boards, are involved in specific initiatives in their regions. Enterprise Ireland has prepared a recovery strategy to identify the actions that will be undertaken to help clients in 2010 and refocused its efforts on strengthening and sustaining companies of strategic importance through a wide range of initiatives, all of which will sustain and create jobs.

A review of a new strategy for the future direction of foreign direct investment, developed by the IDA under the instructions of the Minister, will be published shortly. The strategy will identify new opportunities in foreign direct investment markets which are, as Senator Ross said, the foundation of the economy and which we should encourage and foster. This will restore our international competitiveness. Last year was a challenging one in terms of inward investment; however, the IDA still won 125 investments. Already in 2010 there have been several announcements of decisions by companies to create at least 280 jobs in Dublin, Galway and Tullamore. As I said, the local enterprise boards are working on initiatives in their areas.

The new director general of FÁS is in place and the new board has been appointed since I was last in the House. A new chairman has taken office and the board met for the first time yesterday. This morning I met the new chairman — Mr. Michael Dempsey, a man with considerable experience in the corporate world and change management — and I am confident he will bring that experience to managing the board and his work with the director general in refocusing FÁS and addressing the issues referred to by Senators. It is important to remember that we will invest €1 billion this year in a range of labour force measures. We have already spoken extensively in the House about the specific programmes undertaken by FÁS and the doubling of capacity. Yes, there is a need, as Senator Boyle and others have said, to match that capacity and match the new training courses to the new jobs. I will happily discuss with Senators how we can change the first interaction with job seekers when they are first referred to the employment services.

The issue of community employment was raised. An extra 500 places on community employment schemes were provided for in this year's budget and they will be allocated accordingly. I support the community employment scheme, under which, as Senators said, much good work is done. However, it would probably be worthwhile having a debate — perhaps not in the Seanad but at committee level — about the actual impact of community employment schemes on the labour market. Are we training people for the labour market or providing a social economy service? A debate on this aspect of the community employment scheme is necessary.

Much work is under way under the Youthreach programme, with €110 million invested and 6,000 places. The Youthreach programme is directed at unemployed young early school leavers aged 15 to 20 years and provides them with basic skills and work experience. It facilitates them with opportunities to progress to further training or employment and continues to be a key element of our labour market activation provisions for young people. I engaged with some of my local Youthreach programmes before Christmas and found them to be excellent. We will invest further resources in this area next year.

In the region of 30,000 trainees or 36% of those who participated in FÁS training programmes in 2009 were from the under 25 year age group. I have asked FÁS to continue giving priority to this age cohort in 2010 and beyond.

Since there has been much discussion about the work placement programme, I will refer to several matters raised. Senators Bacik and McCarthy stated they had a number of ideas in this regard and I look forward to them sharing them with me. Senator Callely referred to the need for such a scheme. One is in place, but Senator Prendergast raised the concern that it was being used to displace those currently in employment. With FÁS, we invest considerable time locally in ensuring the places available under the scheme do not displace those of existing employees.

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

This is an important aspect of every work placement programme. A number of Senators referred to the need for communities to be involved in FÁS work and for people to be available to do community work. I would recommend any community organisation to use the work placement scheme to register with FÁS in order to provide people with work experience.

Senator Carty referred to the matter of apprentices, a particular challenge which I will spend much time tackling this year. Apprentices are affected more than most, with many being made redundant, having partially completed their apprenticeships or having only been taught the basics. The majority of apprentices are under 25 years. Given the nature of the apprenticeship system where being employed is a key requirement, the Government has initiated several measures that will enable 4,000 redundant apprentices to progress in their apprenticeships. We have agreed with ESB Networks that it will take on 400 redundant apprentices at phases 5 and 7 over a period of 18 months. We have amended the rules for off-the-job training to facilitate redundant apprentices to progress in their apprenticeships. We have also introduced the employer-based redundant apprentice rotation scheme to facilitate and support employers in providing on-the-job training for redundant apprentices. I am open to ideas where apprenticeships are concerned. As Senator Carty stated, there will come a time when we will need every apprentice. I am anxious that they complete their apprenticeships and that we keep them in the country.

This weekend we will give preliminary notice of our intention to advertise for proposals under the labour market activation fund which will involve a sum of €20 million in 2010. The fund which is being managed by my Department will seek to support innovative proposals over and above current provisions for the unemployed. We expect that this year the fund will support 3,500 training places. It specifically targets the low-skilled, those aged under 35 years and those formerly employed in the construction, retail and manufacturing sectors. Many Senators have referred to this cohort as potentially being the lost generation unless we intervene. I look forward to proposals being made under the fund. If it is successful, I will campaign to have it expanded next year.

The measures are not limited to training and work experience. There has been much discussion about education. There were people in the Visitors Gallery interested in the matter of mature students. The number of back to education allowance recipients has increased to 18,000. In the further education sector this year an estimated 125,000 learners will benefit from part-time learning opportunities, in addition to the 40,000 learners who will benefit from full-time further education opportunities under the vocational training opportunity scheme, VTOS, in PLC courses and the Youthreach programme. There is clear evidence of increasing numbers participating in the higher education sector, as there is in other economies.

During 2009 more than 900 unemployed young people participated in short courses in institutes of technology, while 160 students undertook accelerated level 6 programmes. In 2009, 1,800 unemployed people were supported to embark on part-time undergraduate and post-graduate courses in areas that support work on the smart economy.

Many Senators made points about the banks. Let us be clear that our intervention was to ensure a viable, functioning banking system which forms the basis of any economy. Working this out does not require a rocket scientist. We must see this intervention through to ensure the banks will lend to small businesses again. I reiterate the call made by many Senators and earlier this week by the Governor of the Central Bank on the banks to lend to viable small businesses to give them a chance to create employment.

I appreciate the large number of ideas expressed by Senators. It is regrettable that Senator O'Doherty felt the need to launch his by-election campaign with a personalised attack on the

Tánaiste who is leading many of the initiatives under discussion. If the Senator is half the representative during his time in this or the Lower House that she has been to the people of County Donegal, he will do a good job, but I am sure we will have more of the same in the coming months.

I thank the House for this discussion. I want to engage at committee level — I see Senator Ryan present — on this issue. Youth unemployment gives me great cause for concern and I will invest much time and effort this year in dealing with it. I am open to considering new ideas and suggestions in so far as that is possible.

An Cathaoirleach: I must call the representative of the Labour Party to conclude at 6.58 p.m. As approximately eight minutes remain, I will call on Senator Ryan next.

Senator Brendan Ryan: I will only take four minutes and can share time.

Senator Alex White: What about Senator O'Malley?

An Cathaoirleach: Unfortunately, I will be unable to call her in the time allowed.

Senator Alex White: On a point of order, if I have two minutes, I will be happy to give at least one to Senator O'Malley.

An Cathaoirleach: That is okay.

Senator Fiona O'Malley: I thank the Senator.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Ryan has four minutes.

Senator Brendan Ryan: I had intended to be parochial, but I will skip that part in the interests of time.

I wish to raise two issues associated with employment and unemployment. The unemployment figures, quoted by many, are distressing, but the trauma of being unemployed is more harsh for many. Anxiety, depression, stress and low self-esteem are just some of the social pressures with which an unemployed person may need to contend as a direct result of losing his or her job. People are forced to deal with social welfare services for the first time, possibly a lengthy process and soul destroying experience. It is a disgrace that it can take up to 22 weeks to receive job seeker's allowance. In the meantime, many of our constituents believe they must go cap in hand to community welfare officers to tide them over until their claims are processed. The social welfare system should act as a support system during this difficult period. However, owing to the massive increase in numbers, it is under considerable strain.

Those unlucky enough to be turned down and who appeal the decision must face a wait of six months on average, longer if granted an oral hearing. These waiting periods are too long for those who find themselves out of work. In 2008, 39% of appeals were granted in respect of jobseeker's benefit. The people concerned should not have been kept waiting. The statistic is too high and must be addressed urgently. Some 39% of deciding officers' decisions were found to be incorrect. The decisions in some 28% of jobseeker's allowance cases, equating to a figure of 660, were overturned, with the decisions in respect of 41% of jobseeker's allowance means tests. The number of successful appeals means there is an issue that must be addressed. If this is not the Minister of State's responsibility, I ask him to take up the matter with the relevant Minister. I could raise it elsewhere but doing so in this context is important.

The Minister of State has responsibility for another matter. Many employed persons are not receiving their legal entitlements and are being exploited by unscrupulous employers. The National Employment Rights Authority, NERA, revealed in its review of 2009 that more than 6,000 full-time and part-time workers — I am particularly concerned about the latter group as

[Senator Brendan Ryan.]

the people concerned are trying to earn a few extra bob to get themselves through — had been paid less than their statutory minimum entitlements to the tune of €2.5 million in total, or an average of €410 per person. Despite NERA's good work, Government cutbacks have forced it to reduce the number of labour inspectors from 80 to 69. Does the Minister of State believe like me that this is only the tip of the iceberg? Many are of the view that NERA should not be intervening and that in doing so it puts pressure on employers, but it is merely enforcing the legislation enacted in these Houses. It is examining these serious problems. Immediate action is required.

I will conclude on that point, as I want to share the remainder of my time with my colleagues, Senators O'Malley and Alex White.

Senator Fiona O'Malley: I thank my Labour Party colleague for sharing his time. More importantly, I thank him and his party colleagues for raising this issue, the consideration of which needs a good deal of time. A lot of our energy in dealing with the economy has been spent on addressing the banking crisis, which has also been necessary. As Senator Ryan said, unemployment is a scourge and it is truly appalling for a person to find that he or she no longer has a job. We, therefore, need to focus on addressing the issue.

I applaud the initiatives commenced by Minister of State. Clearly, he is somebody who is not interested in quoting statistics but in arriving at solutions. I accept that some of the initiatives, about some of which Senator Doherty spoke at length, are not easy to deal with. Under initiatives to tackle youth unemployment social welfare payments will be cut to encourage young people to participate in training, but that is what the Minister of State must do, as we cannot train people for a lifetime on benefits; we have to give them an education and some training. While such an initiative may not be appreciated by a young person who was on a certain level of income, it is in his or her best long-term interests. Therefore, our focus should be on education and retraining.

I am glad to hear the Minister of State will focus on apprenticeships. A person who learns a trade will have that skill throughout his or her life. While there are short-term difficulties, I am glad the Minister of State is taking a long-term view.

We must stand by small and medium-sized enterprises because it is through such enterprises that employment will be provided. I will welcome whatever initiatives can be taken to assist this sector.

I again thank Senator Ryan again for sharing time with me.

Senator Alex White: I thank all of my colleagues who participated in this important debate. I also thank the Minister of State for attending, being attentive and what he had to say in responding to the debate.

As Senator O'Malley said, job creation should be at the core of the economic debate we need to have. However, one could be forgiven for thinking otherwise in observing the Government's communication of its economic strategy. It has been successful in public information terms in communicating the necessity to deal with the deficit which we all agree it is necessary to address. It would churlish to suggest that should not be a central economic imperative for the country at this time. Obviously, it is, but it is what one does after that to genuinely and seriously address the jobs crisis that people want to hear about.

I welcome what the Minister of State had to say. He appears to be engaged with the issue, which is important, but that is the job he was appointed to do. However, there is no sense that there is a job crisis and it can be described as such. It can be described, as Senator O'Malley and others have done, by giving an account of the truly dreadful experience of individuals faced by unemployment. Young people are faced by it with little prospect of a future. The Govern-

ment is in the peculiar position where it is able to address the issue and do something about it, but I do not get a sense from it that there is a genuine jobs crisis. There are lists of various initiatives that have been taken, some of which are not new, having been in place for some time. Some of the initiatives detailed by the Minister of State only skim the surface. He has said the IDA has made seven announcements in 2010 involving the creation of 280 new jobs, which I welcome, but practically every second day a similar number of jobs are being lost. I am not saying it is not important that jobs are being created and that foreign direct investment is being attracted to Ireland — obviously that should be pursued — but we are only skimming the surface in terms of the problem with which we have to cope.

The motion was deliberately kept short and tightly drafted and is to the effect that we need a job strategy. Does the Government agree that we need a full-blooded strategy which is coherent and which people can understand? Instead, in the amendment to the motion, there is list of various initiatives, some of which are old and some of which do not address the issue with the strength of purpose required.

I thank Senators Bacik, McCarthy, Callely, John Paul Phelan, MacSharry, Ross, McFadden, Norris, Prendergast, Boyle, Hannigan, Carty, Donohoe, Doherty, Ryan and O'Malley, in the short time she had available, for contributing to the debate. It is vital that the Houses engages on the issues at the heart of the jobs crisis. I again thank everybody for participating.

Amendment put.

The Seanad divided: Tá, 28; Níl, 25.

Tá

Boyle, Dan.
Brady, Martin.
Butler, Larry.
Callely, Ivor.
Carroll, James.
Carty, John.
Cassidy, Donie.
Corrigan, Maria.
Daly, Mark.
Feeney, Geraldine.
Glynn, Camillus.
Hanafin, John.
Keaveney, Cecilia.
Leyden, Terry.

MacSharry, Marc.
McDonald, Lisa.
Mooney, Paschal.
Ó Brolcháin, Niall.
Ó Domhnaill, Brian.
Ó Murchú, Labhrás.
O'Brien, Francis.
O'Donovan, Denis.
O'Malley, Fiona.
O'Sullivan, Ned.
Ormonde, Ann.
Phelan, Kieran.
White, Mary M.
Wilson, Diarmuid.

Níl

Bacik, Ivana.
Bradford, Paul.
Burke, Paddy.
Buttimer, Jerry.
Coffey, Paudie.
Coghlan, Paul.
Cummins, Maurice.
Doherty, Pearse.
Donohoe, Paschal.
Fitzgerald, Frances.
Hannigan, Dominic.
Healy Eames, Fidelma.
McCarthy, Michael.

McFadden, Nicky.
Mullen, Rónán.
Norris, David.
O'Reilly, Joe.
O'Toole, Joe.
Phelan, John Paul.
Prendergast, Phil.
Regan, Eugene.
Ross, Shane.
Ryan, Brendan.
Twomey, Liam.
White, Alex.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Camillus Glynn and Diarmuid Wilson; Níl, Senators Dominic Hannigan and Brendan Ryan.

Amendment declared carried.

Question, "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to," put and declared carried.

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to sit again?

Senator Donie Cassidy: Ag 10.30 maidin amárach.

Adjournment Matters.

Schools Building Projects.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: At the outset, I would like to provide a quick chronology of events at Kingscourt. I would also like to acknowledge that Councillor David Blake from Kingscourt has been working very hard on this project and has been lobbying me intensely on it. He wants me to convey to the Minister of Education and Science the community's anxiety on the matter.

In 1968, Cavan VEC bought the requisite lands to provide a school for Kingscourt. Numerous submissions to the Department from the VEC on the provision of a school took place after that. A letter in June 1981 from the then Minister for Education, the late John P. Wilson, stated that the catchment for the proposed new school was decided. However, the position of three additional primary schools would be decided following consultation, which effectively gave further impetus to the school.

A report was forwarded to the Department of Education and Science in May 2007 in an effort to progress the case for a new school in Kingscourt. The Department forwarded a letter to the VEC in April 2009, giving approval in principle for the establishment of a new post-primary school in Kingscourt. At that stage, there was a ministerial announcement from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Deputy Smith, that he had been informed by the Minister for Education and Science of an agreement in principle to build the school, with all the usual media focus on that. Department officials visited Kingscourt at that time and looked at the proposed site and the existing accommodation. It was proposed that the existing premises be used temporarily for the new school until such time as a new building would be in place. This made logical sense and allowed for incremental growth of the school.

The VEC wrote to the Department in May 2009, outlining the potential primary feeder schools for the proposed new post-primary school. That was a further consolidation of what was already coming through. A letter to the Department in September 2009 from the CEO of the VEC in Cavan requested a roll number in respect of the new school, with a view to putting the necessary action in place to open in September 2010. There has been no response yet to that letter, which is the reason for this matter on the Adjournment.

Kingscourt is the only town in County Cavan with a population of more than 1,700 that does not have a second level school. There has been an increase of at least 13% in the new entrants to primary schools since the report was prepared by the VEC in 2007, so the case for a new school has increased. There are 400 pupils being bussed from Kingscourt to schools in Carrickmacross, Bailieborough, Nobber and Ardee. The 2007 report from the VEC, which was comprehensive and empirically and factually based, stated that Nobber would lose 35% of its pupils if a school was opened in Kingscourt, but that this was well compensated for by an increase in population in the area and by the growth of Nobber. That growth is demonstrated by the fact that there has been a request for an extension to the school in Nobber. There is also an overflow into Nobber due to overcrowding in Navan and Kells. Carrickmacross has four primary schools that feed into the town's post-primary school, with 680 pupils. The impact of a new school in Kingscourt would have considerably less impact in Carrickmacross than

Nobber, but Carrickmacross is a rapidly growing town. The impact on Bailieborough, and Ardee would be negligible. I can supply all the figures from this report to the Minister.

The physical facilities are already in Kingscourt. The building, the classrooms, the grounds and playing infrastructure are there to start the school. The physical space is there and the commitment in principle is there. Why should there be discrimination against Kingscourt? It has the fastest growth rate in the whole region. The dislocation involved affects society in the area as kids do not identify with their town when they are bussed out to schools in other towns. There is a revenue loss to the town of about €10,000 per week due to lunches and so on. There is also a transport bill for the pupils, but the big issue is that the sense of community is affected by the fact that the kids are bussed out and spend an hour and a half travelling to school.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): I am taking this matter on behalf of the Minister for Education and Science. I thank the Senator for raising this matter as it provides me with the opportunity to outline to the Seanad the Minister's proposal for a new post-primary school in Kingscourt, County Cavan.

The Minister was pleased to announce his approval, in principle, for the establishment of a new post-primary school for Kingscourt last year. An examination of the demographics and projected pupil numbers by the forward planning section of the Department satisfied the Minister that a facility for between 300 and 400 pupils will be sustainable in this area in the medium term. Plans for the new school are at an early stage and there are a number of preliminary investigations to be carried out before the project can be considered for inclusion in the Department of Education and Science's school building programme. This includes consideration on how the new school building should be procured and a possible timeframe for its delivery, given the availability of funding and the competing demands for that funding.

In considering procurement methods, delivery through the public private partnership model will be examined. Three separate public private partnership bundles have been announced to date and these are going through the procurement process. The make-up and timing of further bundles will be determined by the Department of Education and Science in consultation with the National Development Finance Agency. The issues to be considered in the timing and bundling of further projects include site availability for each school, geographical spread and the estimated total cost of the proposed bundle. When all preliminary matters have been decided in respect of the proposed project for Kingscourt, normal procedures will be put in train to advance the project. This will include the assignment of a roll number, the preparation of an educational worksheet and the drawing up of schedules of accommodation. This is a common approach by the Department of Education and Science for all such projects.

The assignment of a roll number, which is necessary when a decision has been taken to proceed with a building project, also sets a school up for the appointment of a board of management and teaching resources and for the payment of capitation grants and other grant aid. As the development of the new school is in the very early stages, it is not sufficiently advanced to need a roll number at this time. In keeping with its practices and procedures in this matter, the Department of Education and Science will be in contact with the school's patron at the appropriate time with a roll number for the school.

I thank the Senator for raising this matter.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. Does the Minister consider that with the physical building owned by the VEC, with classrooms, space and playing grounds, he should grant a roll number and allow the school to open with first-year students? I appreciate his comments on funding and arriving at public private partnership agreements later. Does the Minister of State agree with allowing the school to open? Would that not be necessary in light of the commitment last spring?

Deputy Seán Haughey: I listened to the Senator's proposal and will take the matter up with officials in my Department.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I appreciate that. Given that it was decided to go ahead with this project, and we have the space and classrooms, we believe we can make a proper start now.

School Curriculum.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: I thank the Cathaoirleach for allowing me to raise this issue. It has been brought to my attention that other parts of the world have self-awareness programmes for young people, particularly in respect of cancer. I appreciate that the Minister of State of the Department of Education and Science is present in the Chamber. Some might say the relevant Department is the Department of Health and Children but I specifically raised the matter with regard to social, personal and health education, SPHE, and civic, social and political education, CSPE, classes. It is important to promote the concept of cancer self-screening among young people, with a particular focus on young adults. Cancer is a leading cause of death around the world. The WHO estimates that, without intervention, 84 million people will die of cancer between 2005 and 2015. Intervention is the key word. Given the sheer magnitude of such a startling statistic, it is imperative we develop strategic efforts to enable the early detection of cancer. The earlier cancer is diagnosed, the more effective the treatment and the greater the opportunity for a cure.

In raising this matter I call for the development of a strategy on self-screening aimed at and for introduction in secondary schools with the objective to educate young men and women on how to carry out self-screening examinations. For example, in the US medical professionals come into classrooms with sample body parts made of latex or some such substance, similar to prosthetics, with different sized lumps. The children are encouraged to examine the prosthetics and know what a cancerous lump feels like as an early problem or an advanced problem. It teaches young male and female students to know what they are looking for. As part of the social, personal and health education syllabus, students are given support towards personal development, health and well-being and are aided in the promotion of physical well-being. In our days at school all of us remember horrific embarrassing moments where nuns tried to teach us and the priests took boys away for the class. Matters have moved on significantly since then and the SPHE syllabus allows students to become more in tune with personal development, especially with regard to the development of their bodies.

As with all types of cancer, prevention is better than cure. Within the remit of the SPHE class, students should be allowed to carry out a breast or testicle self-examination and most importantly informed what they should be looking for. Medically, it is advised that young women should begin breast self-examinations once a month, starting in their late teens from the age of 18 to 20 years. It has been advised that young male teenagers should carry out self-examinations of their testicles starting at the age of 15, to be carried out on a monthly basis. Self-examination will help individuals become aware of their own bodies and in turn means they will recognise changes that may have occurred. I ask the Minister of State if he will consider such a change to the SPHE syllabus to allow for such information and demonstrations to be given.

Such a delicate subject may be intimidating for some teachers so perhaps a trained medical representative would be best suited. However, I understand this would be up to the discretion of the school and board of management. The consequence of putting such a syllabus in place will be of great benefit in the battle against cancer as it will mean that symptoms are detected early and thus will be treated early, hopefully before the cancer becomes too serious. In Ireland and in Europe generally, one in three people will develop cancer at some stage in life. On consideration of this startling fact, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is for men and women to check their bodies regularly. This can only be done through education. Inspiring

young men and women to be more proactive with regard to their physical health and well-being will not only open up a line of communication but will also undoubtedly significantly reduce the numbers of cancer-related deaths in Ireland.

All of us want to see the economic benefits of dealing with less cancer in the future but more importantly we want to see greater survival rates in the future. This is not the most sensitive topic I can raise in the Chamber but an existing programme can be expanded and this is a matter of life and death. Therefore, it is important to the development of young people and, if sensitively handled, it could be an important step for the Department.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I am taking this matter on behalf of my colleague the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe. I thank the Senator for raising this matter. I welcome the opportunity to outline the position regarding the provision of self-awareness programmes on checking for cancer and whether these could be piloted in CSPE classes.

CSPE is a mandatory programme at junior cycle in post-primary schools. It aims to develop the knowledge and skills for critical awareness, ethical decision-making and participatory citizenship based on an understanding of human rights and social responsibilities. Issues explored include gender equity, racism, interculturalism, environmental protection, development education, poverty, unemployment and homelessness through group work discussions, activities and research and action projects. While the subject aims to develop critical awareness, it does not address awareness of health issues.

Therefore, the area of self-awareness programmes on checking for cancer is more relevant to SPHE. This subject has been a mandatory part of the junior cycle core curriculum in post-primary schools since September 2003. The overall aim of the programme is to help develop students’ confidence and self-esteem and promote the skills for living, for responsible decision making, including making informed decisions about their mental, physical and emotional health and well-being. The implementation of these programmes in schools is supported by full-time support services which provide in-service training for teachers and advice and support to schools. The second level SPHE support service is operated jointly with the health sector.

The content of SPHE at junior cycle is comprehensive and is presented in ten modules that address topics and issues relevant to the lives of students. One of the modules is physical health, covering topics such as body care, healthy eating, diet, exercise, relaxation and feeling unwell. The aims of this topic include enabling students to link common symptoms of illness to their causes, with particular reference to illnesses associated with adolescence, and helping students to appreciate the need to seek medical and other professional advice and help.

A cancer awareness programme developed by the Marie Keating Foundation, with support from the SPHE support service, has been designed to be used within the SPHE curriculum. The aims of the programme are to promote awareness among students at post-primary level of various forms of cancer and the importance of early detection in an age-appropriate way. A resource pack to support the programme was produced and sent to all post-primary schools in 2008. The resources include lesson plans, worksheets, learning activities, fact sheets, a CD, DVD and on-line resources, including podcasts. Among the topics covered in the cancer awareness programme are risks, symptoms, early detection and treatment of various forms of cancer, while procedures for self-examination to encourage early detection of breast, testicular and skin cancer, are set out in the resource pack. The early detection of lung cancer through medical examinations and cervical cancer through screening programmes is also covered in the programme.

Prior to the programme being circulated to post-primary schools, it was piloted by a number of groups. A preliminary study was conducted in a number of single sex and mixed post-primary schools in 2005 and 2006. The research was carried out with students in transition year, fifth and sixth years, in collaboration with their teachers. In addition to the resources detailed which

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

specifically aim to make students aware of the benefits of early detection of cancer through self-examination, the wide range of skills and competencies which SPHE aims to develop enables students to lead healthy lives and make informed decisions regarding their health, including being able to identify sources of medical and other professional advice and seek it when needed.

I thank the Senator for affording me the opportunity to outline to the House the current position on the provision for post-primary schools of self-awareness programmes on checking for cancer.

An Cathaoirleach: I will allow one supplementary question.

Senator Cecilia Keaveney: I thank the Minister of State for informing me that a programme is in place. Resources such as lesson plans, worksheets, learning activities, fact sheets, CDs, DVDs and on-line resources, including podcasts, are not as effective as the method of touch and feel. If we are telling people they should use procedures for self-examination to look for a lump or bump, it would be much easier to hand them a model and let them examine it rather than reading about the facts in a book. I know I would react far quicker and understand faster if this was the method used. I, therefore, ask the Department to consider expanding the resources available and examine the concept of using more tactile resource materials. I take the opportunity to congratulate the Irish Cancer Society which has expanded its services to include five new centres which opened this week. It is doing tremendous work in raising awareness and providing support.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I will convey the Senator's suggestion to officials in my Department. She might consider raising the matter with the Marie Keating Foundation.

The Seanad adjourned at 7.45 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 11 February 2010.