



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Déardaoin, 26 Meán Fómhair 2013

Thursday, 26 September 2013

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

*Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.*

Business of Seanad

An Cathaoirleach: I have notice from Senator Thomas Byrne 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 Skills to improve the broadband at Scoil na Trionóide, Lismullen, County Meath, where e-mails cannot be opened, despite the fact that broadband sponsored by the Department of Education and Skills is supposed to be available.

I have also received notice from Senator Lorraine Higgins of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to investigate the setting up of an audit committee to audit all publicly owned grasslands in order to assess potential fodder supply so as to alleviate any prospective fodder crisis.

I have also received notice from Senator Averil Power of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Justice and Equality to outline the extra cost to the Garda of policing Arthur's day and to advise if he will ask Diageo to cover these costs, in line with the precedent already in place whereby concert promoters and sporting bodies have to contribute to the cost of gardaí on non-public duties during their major events.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: Hear, hear.

An Cathaoirleach: I have also received notice from Senator Colm Burke of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to outline the action he proposes to take to provide access to landline, broadband and mobile reception for the area known as Fox's Bridge and Courtbrack (near Blarney) which is less than 15 miles from Cork city, in view of the fact that such facilities exist for over 100 houses.

I regard the matters raised by Senators Byrne, Higgins and Power as suitable for discussion on the Adjournment and they will be taken at the conclusion of business. I regret that I must rule out of order the matter raised by Senator Burke as the Minister has no official responsibility in the matter.

Order of Business

Senator Ivana Bacik: The Order of Business is No. 1, motion re Ombudsman Act 1980 Order 2013, to be taken at the conclusion of the Order of Business without debate, and No. 2, statements on tackling bullying in schools, to be taken at the conclusion of No. 1 and to conclude not later than 1.45 p.m., with the contributions of group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes, those of all other Senators not to exceed five minutes, and the Minister to be called on to reply not later than 1.40 p.m.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Will the Acting Leader clarify whether the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Ruairí Quinn, is coming to the House for the debate on No. 2?

Senator Ivana Bacik: I will check that.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: If so, it will afford us an opportunity to discuss the forthcoming budget with him. The debate yesterday on disabilities was useful as we were able to outline to the Minister the various areas we want protected. That was in advance of the budget, and the Minister of State, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, committed to bringing the points raised back to the Government. It shows that the budgetary process has not changed. If anything, it is more controlled than ever by the four members of the Economic Management Council. We have not had a proper debate, with the exception of the debate on the Pathways to Work scheme with the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, last night, which was useful. We have not set up a schedule for discussing the various areas of expenditure and putting forward the views of the Seanad on options and alternatives to the Government. I get a sense from speaking to colleagues in the other House that even those on the Government side have no idea what is being discussed. The Cabinet met earlier in the week for one hour, two weeks in advance of the budget, and by all accounts the budget was not even discussed.

Senator Terry Leyden: The Senator is well informed.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I certainly am.

Senator Terry Brennan: The Senator is more interested in the Cabinet.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: It is a matter of concern that even the Cabinet is not discussing the budget with only about two weeks to go, and that we have not had structured debates in the House. If the Minister, Deputy Ruairí Quinn, comes to the House today I will use the opportunity to impress upon him the importance of not increasing the pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools. That is vital.

Senator David Norris: One can guarantee there will be no bad news before the referendums.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Certainly not.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: What is the Government's position? It is clear the process in both Houses for preparing for the budget is wrong. We have heard indications through the media from the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, that he will increase the VAT rate to 13.5% for the hospitality and food sector, but there is no debate on it. One initiative the Government took, which I welcomed at the time, was the reduction in the rate to 9%. It actually worked and I commend the Government on that. It has created in the order of 15,500 jobs in the hospitality sector but we have had no debate on the issue. With that in mind, I propose to table an amendment to the Order of Business - that the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, or the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Hayes, come to the House for one hour to allow us a debate so that we may try to elicit from him whether the Government proposes to increase the VAT rate to 13.5%. We have plenty of time as we are scheduled only to debate tackling bullying in schools. My Fianna Fáil colleagues and I contend that the reduction in the VAT rate for the hospitality sector was a good move from Government. We welcomed it at the time and it should be retained.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I laud some of the comments by Senator Darragh O'Brien regarding the 9% VAT rate for the tourism sector. The matter was debated in the other House yesterday afternoon and Deputy Brendan Griffin from Kerry, Deputy John Paul Phelan from Kilkenny and Deputy Derek Nolan from Galway took part in an engagement to which the Minister for Finance responded.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: What did he say?

Senator Paul Coghlan: We will have to wait for the budget on 15 October.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: What did he say yesterday?

Senator Paul Coghlan: I do not have it *verbatim*.

I wish to welcome a few other issues. The Constitutional Convention is meeting this weekend to discuss the possibility of allowing votes to our emigrants in presidential elections. I compliment Senator Lorraine Higgins on her Adjournment matter regarding Arthur's Day. Arthur's Day is a mixed blessing. I hope people enjoy it sensibly while lauding the spirit of what she has to say.

I am sure we all welcome the €770 million aid tranche and the eleventh review from the IMF. The economy is now formally out of recession.

Senator Mark Daly: It is not aid; it is a loan.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I said the aid tranche. Let us give it its proper title. Matters are fragile and we should not flinch, but we are set fair. As I have often said, let us be calm and cautious.

Senator Mark Daly: What if one owes the banks?

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: The Senator should be Taoiseach.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: In view of the Government's proposal to reform the Dáil - which we are supposed to be obstructing in this House, which is the reason it has to be abolished - I

draw the attention of the House to a message that arrived this morning at 10.13 a.m. inviting Deputies who wish to make amendments on Report Stage of the Taxi Regulation Bill to submit them by 11 a.m., as the debate is taking place next week. Deputies were given 47 minutes to amend a Bill that we in this House know was highly flawed from beginning to end. It started off in 2012. The Government not only holds the Seanad in disdain but gives Deputies little more than half an hour to submit their amendments. I ask the Acting Leader to seek, as part of Dáil reform, that this does not happen this morning and that Deputies get an extended time to submit amendments.

Senator David Norris: The Taoiseach should listen.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: This is a highly flawed Bill which requires amendment. It is yet another example of the contempt of the Executive for both Houses of Parliament.

I note the intervention in a domestic debate about the future of this House by Baron Hattersley of Sparkbrook. I do not know if he is sparking on all cylinders, but he says today that the Seanad is like the House of Lords, as no-one pays a blind bit of notice to it.

Senator Paul Coughlan: Roy was always a sparker.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: I say to his lordship that there are 550 amendments to prove the contrary. When one looks through his biography, it states that in 2008, Roy Hattersley appeared in a documentary on the DVD for the “Dr. Who” serial. “Dr. Who do you think you are”? is my response to his intervention in the affairs of this House. Baron Hattersley is the biographer of Lloyd George, who set up the Senate with provost Bernard and Arthur Griffith. While I want this to be recorded here, I do not wish to appear in the record as Lord Barrett, so that Hattersley will know the difference between this democratic Senate and the House of Lords of which he is a member.

Senator David Norris: Hear, hear. That is him with his spitting image.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: I think so. I think The Gathering has welcomed one person who seems to have landed in the wrong country.

I have asked my constituent and colleague in Northern Ireland, Dr. Jeff Dudgeon, to take up with Richard Haass and Dr. Meghan O’Sullivan who are currently investigating the causes of unrest and distress in Northern Ireland, the way the Taoiseach treats my Northern Ireland constituents. This causes trouble on the streets. We have raised the issue repeatedly here, but nothing has come back from the Taoiseach. He crudely scheduled a meeting of the North-South Inter-Parliamentary Association on the same day he was abolishing the votes of my constituents in Northern Ireland. I hope Mr. Haass gets a hearing from the Taoiseach because he does not seem to want to talk to anybody else. He has carried on in a disgraceful manner and that issue will be taken up. People in Northern Ireland do not like the way this partitionist Taoiseach and his hangers-on in the PR industry treat that province.

Senator Deirdre Clune: I agree with the sentiments of Senator Darragh O’Brien on the 9% rate and have made that case to the Minister, as have others. That rate has been a very successful job creation initiative and the figures speak for themselves. I know from members of the Irish Hotels Federation who are visiting the Oireachtas today and from the members of the Restaurants Association of Ireland who visited last week that the initiative has been extremely successful and both Ministers, Deputies Bruton and Noonan, acknowledge that.

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The measure, if retained, will cost €360 million. However, the Minister for Finance will not tell us that in the House. He will inform us of the situation on 15 October in the budget and we will not get a preview in this or any House. The initiative will cost €360 million and perhaps Senator O'Brien will indicate as to where that money could be found - the crux of the issue - when the Opposition is setting out its stall in the preamble to the budget.

I welcome Arthur's day, which has got significant attention this week, and hope people enjoy it. The attention has been focused on excessive drinking and binge drinking in our cities and towns. However, tomorrow night is Friday night and Saturday night is another regular night for drinking. Will the Acting Leader put pressure on the Minister responsible to produce the alcohol action policy? The policy has been dragging around over the past two years and there have been no developments with it. We hear it may be stuck on the sponsorship issue. If that is the case, that should be decided. However, alcohol here is cheap and this cheap availability is an issue. A can of beer is cheaper than a bottle of water now.

Senator Terry Brennan: Cheaper than tap water will be too.

Senator Deirdre Clune: The urgency should be around getting the alcohol action policy published and enacted.

Senator Terry Leyden: A report from the Council of Europe on the issue of trafficking looks at Ireland's implementation of the Council of Europe's 2005 anti-trafficking convention. Some 57 possible victims of trafficking were reported to An Garda Síochána in 2011, some 78 in 2010 and 66 in 2009. Only 40 of the 47 countries of the Council of Europe have signed up to the convention. Ireland has a proud record in this regard, because the legislation we introduced is the strongest in Europe. During our Presidency, the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter, introduced a proposal for victim support which has been adopted by the countries of the European Union and a directive is awaited. If the Acting Leader agrees, it would be worthwhile if the Minister got the opportunity to outline the progress Ireland has made.

In a detailed response to the report, the Department of Justice and Equality stated that Ireland was pleased to note that GRETA, the group of experts on action against trafficking, commends the important steps taken by Ireland to develop the legal institutional framework for action. In regard to the granting of a period of recovery and reflection for victims, it said Ireland's arrangements are in accordance with the provision of Article 13 of the convention. The report was compiled following a five-day visit to Ireland by GRETA.

This is a serious issue and must be tackled on a global basis. It would be worthwhile if the Acting Leader could arrange for the Minister to come to the House some time in the next few weeks. He should have the opportunity to study the report and to outline what has been achieved by the current and previous Governments in this regard. Trafficking is an insidious crime, mainly against women and children, which is linked to the issue of prostitution. TV3 carried out an intensive report into the issue at one stage. I believe Ireland has a proud record on this issue, but I do not think the Council of Europe is aware of the work Ireland did within the European Union during its Presidency. I wish to second the amendment raised on this matter.

Senator Michael Mullins: I strongly support the call made by Senator Clune for the Government to publish the alcohol action policy as a matter of urgency. The CSO figures show that despite the appalling effects of the recession in recent years and in 2012, alcohol consumption increased again. Alcohol related harm costs the country an estimated €3.7 billion per year. We

face a major problem and crisis in regard to alcohol and it is time the Government realised this and took decisive action to address the many issues that have been raised in this House in regard to alcohol abuse.

Alcohol abuse is linked with the ongoing and worrying increase in road traffic fatalities. Drink is a significant contributory factor to the increase in the number of deaths on our roads. As we head into winter, it is incumbent on all of us to conduct vehicle checks to ensure our tyres are in good shape and our lights are working properly. I am concerned that because of economic circumstances, people are cutting back on vehicle safety and that this puts lives at risk. I urge the motor industry to ensure this winter that its prices are competitive so that motorists will be able to take the opportunity to change their tyres and have their lights repaired at a competitive price. The result will be a decrease in the number of road fatalities throughout the country.

Senator David Norris: I have a serious question for the Acting Leader. Will she contact her colleagues in Government today and demand that the poster suggesting abolishing the Seanad will save €20 million be withdrawn immediately. They have already had to withdraw a poster which was illegal, which featured Björn Borg without his permission and which drew a comparison with Sweden which is defective because in Sweden the Whip was withdrawn. Therefore, the Taoiseach could not have fired conscientious objectors in his party.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: There is one Björn every minute, I think.

Senator David Norris: That poster is a lie and there is no doubt about that. Senator John Crown, our colleague, flatted the Minister for Transport, Deputy Leo Varadkar, on “The Late Debate” last night. Deputy Varadkar was reduced to saying that the Government says the figure is €20 million, the Seanad says €6 million, the Referendum Commission says €8 million and perhaps we should take the difference. That indicates we do not know anything about it, are completely ignorant on the cost and do not know what we are talking about. The important point however is that the Minister had to agree that whatever the figure is, it is not a saving. It is a cost and not a saving. Therefore, the poster is a deliberate lie.

11 o'clock

Taxpayers' money is being used to feed them lies. The poster must be withdrawn. I will also write to the Standards in Public Office Commission and the Referendum Commission. I put it to the Leader, as a matter of grave importance to democracy in this country, that this poster which has been demonstrated to be a lie, as admitted to by a Cabinet Minister, should be withdrawn. The Government is using its resources all over the city. We see nothing but poster after poster referring to the abolition of the Seanad and the saving of €20 million. We now know that it is not true and the poster must be taken down.

With regard to the comments of my colleague Senator Sean D. Barrett on the North-South Inter-Parliamentary Association, this is an arrogant and spiteful Government. It wanted to have its meeting in the Seanad Chamber on the day of the referendum. I am glad to say I scuppered it and that it will not happen.

An Cathaoirleach: That matter was dealt with by the Committee on Procedure and Privileges.

Senator David Norris: The behaviour of the Government is disgraceful. Take it down from the masthead, Fenian traitors.

Senator John Kelly: I refer to an issue in the newspapers concerning discretionary medical cards. The reduction from 80,000 to 56,000 in the number of discretionary medical cards was referred to by Ms Emily O'Reilly. When she asked for files on cases granted discretionary medical cards, she was told by the Primary Care Reimbursement Service, PCRS, that files were no longer available since 2011. I have raised this issue on numerous occasions in the past six to eight weeks. I have highlighted the fact that the PCRS is implementing measures not legislated for. It is depriving people of medical cards and making up the rules as it goes along. It has decided it will no longer allow home improvement loans or make any allowance for people to have a car to go to work. It will not allow crèche fees, unless the children are in a registered crèche. None of these elements is legislated for. Ms Emily O'Reilly has said financial constraints owing to austerity and cuts are not an excuse for poor service. I call on the Leader to bring this matter to the attention of the Minister for Health. It is not right that we deprive people of discretionary medical cards just because austerity is the way forward.

Senator David Cullinane: Yesterday the Governor of the Central Bank admitted to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform that he had not listened to the full recordings known as the Anglo tapes. I find this incredible. He acknowledged that he had not seen the full transcripts. He also acknowledged that he had access to the tapes, but that he had no intention of listening to the rest of them. Considering what the boys in Anglo Irish Bank said on the tapes about the Central Bank and the previous Governor, it is appalling that the Governor has not listened to the tapes. He, the Central Bank and the regulator are in the best position to determine whether there was any wrongdoing. There is huge public anger because of what is on the tapes. People realise there are hospitals and schools without funding, large classes, people unemployed and people who have emigrated because of what individuals in Anglo Irish Bank did. The bank cost the State tens of billions of euro and people are in poverty because of what happened in it. People are suffering every day of the week and in negative equity. We have no money to pay for public services, invest in job creation to get people back to work or spend on health and education services, yet billions of euro of taxpayers' money was put into Anglo Irish Bank to bail it out and pay its debt. The Governor of the Central Bank is telling us he cannot be bothered to listen to the full set of tapes. It is appalling.

Senator Martin Conway: I commend Senator David Norris for an excellent contribution and interview on Today FM. I have not yet heard it, but I have received a number of messages telling me it was powerful and that people who are undecided will veer towards voting in favour of keeping the Seanad. I commend my colleague from County Clare, Senator Tony Mulcahy, for his comments to local media that the €20 million figure is a lie. We all have a responsibility as public representatives to ensure accurate information is in the public domain. Politics as a profession is suffering enough in terms of cynicism without having posters with figures that are not correct. Would we put up a poster indicating that there were 33% fewer gardaí or teachers? The notion of having 33% fewer politicians demeans the profession of politics and the people who dedicate their lives to it. I describe it as a low form of a Tesco ad, the type of ad we do not like or an ad for cheap yellow pack products we do not like. Politics is a noble profession and the vast majority of those in it are dedicated to providing public service, improving Irish society, improving the lives of people, particularly those who are less fortunate than themselves, and doing good for their local and national communities. I still believe politics is a profession of which we should all be proud and that this attempt to demean politics, regardless of whether it is deliberate, will backfire.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: We are very privileged in this House to be able to raise

matters of national importance for the country and citizens. This morning I beg the indulgence of the House to listen to a case that is extremely urgent for a family in Galway. I ask the Deputy Leader to make the following request to the Minister for Health. The story concerns a young father of three children who is 40 years of age. He lives in Galway and earlier this year was diagnosed with colon and liver cancer. He told me the tumour growing inside him was so big that he could feel it. He has been to doctors in Galway and Dublin who worked in Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, a hospital of repute and the best in the world for cancer treatment. His best chance of survival and securing the best outcome, despite undergoing chemotherapy, some reversals and some success, involves him going to the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. The cost of treatment would be €93,000. If the family waits any longer, there will no longer be enough of the liver unaffected to accommodate the insertion of a chemotherapy pump inside his body.

An Cathaoirleach: That is a suitable topic to raised on the Adjournment.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: I appreciate that, but he must travel on 1 October and there is no time for an Adjournment motion. His family and 30 friends have borrowed €1,000 each to help fund the treatment, but we are under pressure to raise enough money next week to enable the family to travel. My request to the Deputy Leader which I ask her to put to the Minister for Health is that the treatment abroad scheme be extended to patients travelling to the United States for critical life-saving cancer treatment and that, at the very least, a contribution be made towards the cost of the treatment equivalent to the amount that would be granted if treatment to achieve a similar outcome was available in the European Union. The Ombudsman, Ms Emily O'Reilly, said discretion should be allowed in order that a person's rights could be met. It is a reasonable request. I will take up the Cathaoirleach's suggestion next week, but I am conscious that next Tuesday is 1 October. We are, therefore, under pressure.

Senator Susan O'Keefe: I echo the comments of others on the advertisements and the difficulty which stems from them. I join in asking the Acting Leader to write and seek some clarification or removal of those posters.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: Hear, hear.

Senator Susan O'Keefe: I add my voice of congratulation on another note to the three young girls, Emer Hickey, Ciara Judge and Sophie Healy-Thow from Kinsale Community School. I am sure others have already done so but I have not yet had the opportunity. I do so in support of those teachers and parents who help young children, and particularly young girls, in the science and technology area. It is an outstanding achievement on their part to win the European Union contest for young scientists. We may lose heart sometimes about bad or wrong elements in the education system, but when we speak of further investment this shows that there are young people willing to try something. I imagine these girls would not have had a significant amount of resources or special laboratories but they have achieved what others may have said was not possible. We congratulate them, salute their courage and wish them and their school well for the future.

On the related area of science, I thank Met Éireann for new research that suggests Irish summers may become warmer, although winters may be wetter. I ask the Deputy Leader for a debate on that research, which relates to climate change, and specifically regarding the bad weather. We all know what happened this year, with farmers in particular being affected, leading to difficulties with fodder. The young people in the Gallery who have just joined us may

be responsible for scientific research in future and know more about it but if we are now able to say that we believe winters will be wetter, we should have additional planning and resources in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, as well as the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. We must not find ourselves unable to feed cattle every spring when we rely on the food industry in particular for future economic growth.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I support the comments made in the context of the amendment to the Order of Business by our party leader, Senator Darragh O'Brien. It seems this Government plays around with figures whenever it suits, as we have heard in the Seanad referendum debate. With regard to the 9% VAT rate, the figure the Minister for Finance indicated in public within the last week or two was that there was a loss to the Exchequer of €350 million. That figure has been challenged by Retail Excellence Ireland, which has indicated that a recent Deloitte report relayed how the intervention cost the State €88 million in net VAT receipts, with the employment gain equating to €261 million. The net impact to the Exchequer is a benefit of €173 million.

These are the figures but the reality on the ground is that the reduction in VAT from 13.5% to 9% resulted in the creation of 13,500 jobs in the services and hospitality sector. I know from speaking to people in the sector who welcomed the initial reduction, telling me on a number of occasions in my own part of the country - where unemployment is significant - that they had taken on extra workers. The question remains that if the increase in the VAT rate goes ahead in the budget, what will happen all the small businesses? These are coffee shops which employed an extra person when they had two or three already, for example. That is where the 13,500 jobs have mainly come from, rather than the major hospitality areas. Will the businesses have to release the extra people that they took on if they have to pay extra VAT? It seems more likely that businesses will increase prices between now and Christmas, which will prevent people from spending. Getting people to spend money was the main purpose of the exercise.

The Minister for Finance indicated in the Dáil yesterday that this was a pump-priming exercise that had worked but I hope he is right. I understand perfectly well Senator Clune's question of where to find the money and the bouncing around of figures ranging from €350 million to €88 million. It is still a significant sum in the current climate. I plead with the Acting Leader to try to use her best influence in this regard and formulate an opportunity to debate this important for the hospitality sector in the House.

Senator Catherine Noone: I was delighted to hear this morning that Ireland has increased its haul of Michelin star restaurants to eight. They are the restaurant at Mount Juliet, the Cliff House Hotel, Thornton's, Chapter One, The Aniar House, Campagne, Bon Appetit and L'Ecrivain. This indicates that our food and restaurant sector is in great health, although many Senators have spoken about the VAT rate this morning. I requested a debate in the House yesterday and it is a serious issue; I was going to point to the figures that Senator Mooney mentioned from the Deloitte report, which indicates the actual cost at €88 million, with an overall gain to the Exchequer at €173 million. Senator Mooney also mentioned potential job losses. I support Senator O'Brien's call for a debate on this issue, and although it should not necessarily be today, it should come in the near future so we can fully discuss this matter, which is of critical importance.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: If it is so critical, why should it not be done today? There are only statements scheduled for today.

Senator Catherine Noone: If the Minister's diary allows it, I would welcome him here today. It might be unrealistic to expect that of the Minister for Finance, so perhaps it could happen next Tuesday.

I support Senator Clune's comments on the alcohol action strategy, and I have raised the matter *ad nauseam* at the risk of becoming a total kill-joy in the alcohol area. The sponsorship issue is holding up matters but we must see the matter in these Houses in the very near future. I commend Senator Power on raising an Adjournment matter relating to Arthur's day. Diageo will pick up most of the tab for the extra Garda presence but it will be interesting to see related statistics. The event is happening so we may as well embrace it and hope people drink responsibly. We hope to avoid serious injuries or issues arising from it. It may be the last year of Arthur's day, which I would welcome.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I join with colleagues who have raised the peddling of total untruths by the Government and particularly Fine Gael. At the 11th hour I ask the representative of the Fine Gael Party in the House, Senator Paul Coghlan, to insist that the posters in question are removed from lamp posts the length and breadth of the Twenty-six Counties.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Hear, hear.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: The Senator and members of his party know their use is wrong, and I ask them at this 11th hour to take them down, as they are misleading people into thinking there will be a substantial saving if we get rid of this House.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I will take the Senator's comments seriously.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I ask Senator Coghlan to give a commitment this morning that he will go to the director of elections for Fine Gael and insist that the posters are taken down. He should do it on behalf of his own colleagues and every Member in this House. The Irish people are being asked to vandalise the Constitution of the State on Friday week, so I make that request of the Senator as he is the representative of the Fine Gael Party in this House. I know the Senator agrees with me. I also agree with Senator Conway's comments. It is absolutely nonsensical to think that if we had fewer doctors and nurses there would be better hospitals and better schools with fewer teachers. I ask the Senator to go to the Minister, Deputy Bruton, and ask him to remove those posters today.

Senator Paul Coghlan: The last time he met me he had a large smile on his face.

An Cathaoirleach: There is no need for the Senator to respond.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I would welcome a response but it would be unusual to get it from that side of the House when the Leader is not here. Yesterday the Governor of the Central Bank was before a finance committee, and he basically admitted that he must cave into the wishes of banks. It was sad to hear that. I was also sad to hear that he will not investigate any further the tapes that comprise live evidence of what was occurring in Anglo Irish Bank at a time when the country was in crisis. Did he make that decision himself or was he persuaded to do so by the Government? Those concerned do not have a great history of investigating tapes that are released in the national interest.

This House has taken a lead in regard to banking. My colleague, Senator MacSharry, has published two Bills in this respect. On the Order Paper at present, there are three Bills, initi-

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ated by our colleague Senator Barrett: the Fiscal Responsibility (Statement) Bill 2011 – Second Stage (resumed); the Mortgage Credit (Loans and Bonds) Bill 2012 – Second Stage (resumed); and the Financial Stability and Reform Bill 2013 – Second Stage. Could the Acting Leader insist that the Minister for Finance come to this House to discuss banking so we can ascertain the up-to-date position from him and his plans to sort out the banks? We seem to be the only arm of the Oireachtas that can realistically debate anything of importance to this country.

Senator Jim D’Arcy: I do not know what poster Senator Wilson was referring to, but if it is the one stating health cuts hurt the old, sick and handicapped, it-----

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I was referring to the lie of the Senator’s party.

Senator Jim D’Arcy: Fianna Fáil put that one up. It hurt the old, sick and handicapped in a way in which they were never hurt before.

An Cathaoirleach: Has the Senator a question for the Acting Leader?

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: Is Senator D’Arcy standing over the lie on posters from his party throughout the country?

An Cathaoirleach: Senator D’Arcy without interruption. Has he a question for the Acting Leader?

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I am interested in seeing what-----

Senator Jim D’Arcy: The Senator is welcome to Haggardstown to view them. I cannot guarantee him he will get out of it but he is welcome to come up.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I was in it before I met the Senator and since, and I will continue to go there.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: Will the Senator pay €20 million to go up?

An Cathaoirleach: Has the Senator a question?

Senator Jim D’Arcy: I want to refer to the issue of cigarette smuggling. It may sound bizarre but a cigarette smuggling ring was thwarted this week only when al-Qaeda bombed a ship, the *COSCO Asia*, that was transporting illegal cigarettes bound for Dundalk. Investigators put a tracking device in the container containing illegal cigarettes and the container was tracked while heading up the M1 towards Dundalk. Subsequently, a Dundalk man was arrested and a number of houses were searched in regard to the criminal activity.

We are talking about sums of €20 million, €8 million and otherwise but we should note some €1.3 billion is lost in revenue in the State annually due to illegal cigarette smuggling and diesel laundering. That would build a lot of schools and hospitals, and it would provide many social services. That is real money. We need to continue to support the Revenue Commissioners, the Customs and Excise and other enforcement agencies in dealing with this criminal activity. Much of the revenue from smuggled cigarettes goes to illegal organisations in this country, including anarchists.

I would like the Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Deputy Brian Hayes, to come to the House again. We spoke about diesel laundering but we now want to know about cigarette smuggling. Carcinogens and poisons in the illegal cigarettes are even more toxic than

those in the legal ones. They are absolutely lethal. I am sorry that the young children have left the Visitors Gallery because I was going to ask them on this day, the day of their visit to the Seanad, to resolve not to smoke because of the health problems associated with the practice. I thank the Cathaoirleach for allowing me the opportunity to speak on this matter.

Senator Marc MacSharry: I join Senator Wilson in asking for a debate on the performance of the Governor of the Central Bank yesterday. It augurs very badly for democracy in the State that the Governor is essentially admitting to the capitulation of the Central Bank to mainstream banks. I am sure that if any politician had made a similar statement, people would be calling for his resignation today. As Senator Barrett has often said, it has always seemed, during the term of the past Administration and this one, that there is a mythical backstairs to the Department of Finance and the Taoiseach exclusively for the use of senior bankers and their interests. That has been borne out today considering the performance of the Governor of the Central Bank yesterday. It seems the same backstairs is available in this case. The people come last while the banks and institutional interests come first. We have seen this throughout a wide variety of Government policies and it certainly does not augur well.

Further questions must be asked on a slightly different issue, namely, media monopoly. We have had promises of legislation to govern this area. However, in the interim, we have seen a scenario in which one particular interest can gain control over what constitutes approximately 90% of the readership of the country. In a development this month, it seems one individual will have editorial control over the political writings of all the publications of one particular media grouping. That is not healthy and does not augur well for democracy. It does not augur well for politicians if they overlook such a scenario without trying to legislate for the protection of citizens. We have seen two instances of it today and perhaps a debate could be organised on both.

Senator Averil Power: Will the Acting Leader of the House raise with the Government the issue of whether Ireland highlighted at this week's Council of Europe meeting in Strasbourg Russia's anti-gay laws, which were introduced by its Government earlier in the year? Senator Bacik has expressed concerns about this issue publicly. I have written to the Tánaiste about it on a number of occasions. It is incumbent on the Irish Government, particularly given Ireland's track record in promoting human rights internationally, that it use its influence, including its influence gleaned from just having held the EU Presidency, to put pressure on states such as Russia.

Russia has signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights. The Council of Europe meeting this week was convened specifically to consider whether previous judgments against ECHR members are being implemented. One case on the agenda is a case against Russia. It is a judgment of some years back against the Russian Government's ban on gay pride parades. Russia is one of the few countries in Europe where gay pride parades are still not welcome in 2013. Not only has Russia not respected that judgment, it brought in more draconian laws earlier this year. These laws effectively ban any public expression of support for lesbian and gay people in Russia. People can be arrested simply for showing their support, taking part in parades, writing supportive articles or even raising publicly human rights issues concerning the treatment LGBT people. I ask Senator Bacik to use her influence on the Tánaiste to ensure we raise these issues more strongly. I understand we wrote to the Tánaiste and that he replied he was not at the ministerial meeting this week but that officials were at it on his behalf. I would like an update on what exactly happened. Did the Irish officials raise this issue? If so, what was the response? When will the Tánaiste arrange for a meeting with the Russian ambassador? He responded directly to me that he will raise this issue the next time he meets a Russian Minister.

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Is a date set for this? The issue is urgent, particularly in the approach to the Winter Olympic Games next year.

Senator Ivana Bacik: A range of issues have been raised on the Order of Business this morning. Senator O'Brien asked me a specific question on whether the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Ruairí Quinn, will be taking the debate on bullying in schools this morning. I am happy to say he will. Indeed, he has a strong record for appearing in person in this House to deal with education debates.

Senator Marc MacSharry: That is his job.

Senator Ivana Bacik: He makes a point of doing so where possible. This week we also had the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Burton in the House dealing with the Pathways to Work programme and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, was here twice, with the commencement order and then on the Protected Disclosures Bill. I am simply reminding my colleagues of that.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: There were a few Fine Gael Ministers in here too.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I cannot accept the proposed amendment to the Order of Business today. I absolutely accept the importance of the issue and am conscious that other colleagues have sought debates on budgetary issues on previous occasions. I will ask the Leader again about arranging those debates. In respect of the 9% VAT rate, which several colleagues have raised, there is universal acceptance of the benefit to the hospitality sector from the reduction in the VAT rate. It was a specific measure introduced by the Government early in 2011 to encourage job creation in the tourism-related and hospitality sectors. Across all categories targeted by the 9% VAT reduction, I have been informed that it is estimated that more than 21,000 jobs were created. That is a different figure to that proffered by Senator Mooney. Undoubtedly it has given a great boost to the sector and has benefited communities right across Ireland. However, as Senator Clune and others pointed out, the Government has committed significant resources - there are some differences on the actual figure - to fund the VAT reduction. This has to be balanced with the wider economic agenda of the Government. Of course, the budget is still under preparation and the tax measures, including any changes to the VAT rate, will be announced by the Minister for Finance on budget day. Senator Mooney described it as a pump priming exercise and there is no doubt it has had a hugely beneficial impact in that regard.

Senator Coghlan referred to the Constitutional Convention, which I will be attending this weekend in Malahide. We will be discussing the issue of votes for emigrants, specifically whether Irish citizens resident abroad should have the right to vote in presidential elections in the future. That is certainly something of which I am very supportive, as are many of my colleagues here from the universities constituency. Indeed, we have quite a number of emigrants among our constituents and voters, that is, Irish citizens who are graduates, residing abroad who have a right to vote in Seanad elections.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: We will defend that right.

Senator Ivana Bacik: We will defend that right, indeed. Arthur's day was mentioned by a number of colleagues, with Senator Coghlan describing it as a mixed blessing. The key message is for the safe enjoyment of Arthur's day. I know there is a matter on the Adjournment dealing specifically with the Garda costs and I understand that Diageo is contributing to those costs.

Senator David Norris: What about the medical costs?

Senator Ivana Bacik: I am sure we will get a full answer during the Adjournment debate. Senator Barrett referred to the tight deadline for amendments to the Taxi Regulation Bill. Staff of the Bills Office are extremely hard working and all of us will have found them to be most understanding and accommodating where Members have particular difficulties with tight deadlines. I agree that it is unfortunate when deadlines are very tight.

Senator Barrett also raised the issue of Roy Hattersley's intervention in the Seanad campaign. I must say I was not aware of that intervention. I would agree with Senator Barrett's sentiments in response to Mr. Hattersley. Comparing the House of Lords with Seanad Éireann misses the very particular circumstances of the creation of the Seanad in 1937 and the very particular constitutional framework we have, where nobody has inherited seats, I am happy to say, in this Republic. I also believe it is important to emphasise, as Senator Barrett did, the number of amendments made in the Seanad, as well as the number of Private Members' Bills accepted in this House, in order to counter some of the allegations made.

Finally, Senator Barrett also referred to Richard Haass and Northern Ireland. I would strongly disagree with the Senator's portrayal of the Taoiseach as partitionist.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: What about the three southern counties in Ulster?

Senator Ivana Bacik: Everyone is working together in order to ensure the continued progress of the peace process in Northern Ireland. It has been really important that there has been a cross-party consensus on that.

Senator Terry Leyden: I asked a question about the Council of Europe and the report ---

Senator Ivana Bacik: I am coming to that. I have not reached Senator Leyden's contribution yet.

Senator Susan O'Keeffe: Patience, Senator Leyden.

Senator Ivana Bacik: Senator Clune dealt with the ---

Senator Terry Leyden: Senator Bacik just said "finally".

Senator Ivana Bacik: I meant it in respect of Senator Barrett's contribution. Senator Clune also raised the issues of Arthur's day and the 9% VAT rate. In respect of the former, she specifically asked for the Government to bring forward the alcohol action strategy, which is something with which we would all agree. I will ask the Minister of State, Deputy Alex White, about that. I know he has been working on it and it is important that we see the strategy come forward very quickly. It has been promised for a long time now.

Senator Leyden raised the Council of Europe report on trafficking and I absolutely agree with his view on the need for a debate on that. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality has recently produced a report on prostitution. In the course of the preparation of that report, the committee heard evidence from senior gardaí about the prosecution of trafficking offences, where there is a disappointing rate of conviction. Evidence from Sweden suggests that taking a different approach to prostitution law can have an effect in reducing the incidence of trafficking because, as the Senator said, there is a very strong link between trafficking and prostitution. The Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter, has responded to

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the Council of Europe's group of experts on action against trafficking in human beings, pointing out that the publication of the council's report is timely, given that we are in the process of drafting a second national action plan on human trafficking. I agree with Senator Leyden that it would be useful to have the Minister in to speak with us about that report in due course.

Senator Mullins also referred to Arthur's day and expressed support for Senator Clune. He also spoke about the need for the motor industry to offer more competitive prices for repairs, given the effect that poor car maintenance can have in the context of road fatalities. I agree with that and suggest that it might be an issue to raise on the Adjournment.

Senator Norris raised the issue of the Fine Gael posters on the Seanad referendum and I would emphasise that they are not Government posters. I am very happy to write to the general secretary of Fine Gael to request that the posters be withdrawn because ---

Senator David Norris: Thank you very much.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Well done.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I will do that because the figure of €20 million has been disputed, challenged and contested by the Commission.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: The general secretary of Fine Gael is not an elected person, is he?

Senator Ivana Bacik: Well, I will make inquiries ---

Senator David Norris: It is not a saving.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: The Senator is right. I agree with him.

Senator Ivana Bacik: Genuinely, I will make inquiries as to who is the appropriate person to write to.

Senator David Norris: Well done. Thank you very much.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I should also say that I have also publicly expressed reservations about the Labour Party posters. In my opinion, perhaps the most objectionable aspect of the Fine Gael posters is the slogan "fewer politicians" ---

Senator David Norris: Hear, hear.

Senator Ivana Bacik: --- which undermines the democratic process and people's trust in democracy. That, in some ways, is more serious.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: Is "fewer politicians" an actual undertaking?

Senator Sean D. Barrett: Fewer Fine Gael politicians.

Senator Ivana Bacik: Of course, "fewer politicians" is a slogan that cuts across politics generally and does not just apply to the Seanad.

Senator Norris raised an issue which was dealt with at a meeting of the CPP and everyone present supported the Senator's view on inviting in an outside group on that particular date. Senator Kelly raised the issue of discretionary medical cards, which has also been raised by the

Ombudsman, Ms Emily O'Reilly. He expressed concern about such cards not being granted to people and I am happy to ask the Minister for Social Protection to come in to deal with this issue. I know that it is a huge challenge for the HSE to ensure that the PCRS budget services those who need it most and to ensure that it reflects the health reform agenda. It is a particular challenge now, with over 250,000 more people eligible for free GP care compared to 2011 when the Government took office. Approximately 43% of the population now has access to free GP care. There have been changes to the discretionary medical card process, aimed at reforming the system. When the Government came into power, discretionary medical card applicants were not routinely assessed by medical personnel. The Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly, instructed the HSE to establish a clinical panel to assist in the processing of applications for discretionary medical cards, which was an important reforming measure. It is also important to point out that the number of discretionary medical cards has fallen because more than 22,000 discretionary medical card holders now qualify for an ordinary medical card as they meet the income eligibility criteria. There are various factors involved here but I am happy to ask the Minister for Social Protection to come in, as she did yesterday, to speak with us about discretionary medical cards. My apologies, it should be the Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly.

Senator Cullinane raised the Anglo Irish Bank tapes and the Governor of the Central Bank's appearance yesterday before the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform. He referred specifically to the announcement by the Central Bank that, following its review of the issues arising from the tape recordings from Anglo Irish Bank, it does not intend to make any further reports concerning suspected criminal offences to the gardaí or the ODCE. We were all very disappointed to hear that. The Governor gave evidence to the Oireachtas committee yesterday to the effect that there was no clear evidence of criminal activity. That is often hard for lay people to understand but there is a high standard of proof which both the DPP and the ODCE must observe when considering these matters. It should also be noted that there are ongoing investigations by the ODCE into Anglo Irish Bank, as well as ongoing criminal investigations. Indeed, charges have already been made and trials are pending. Everyone is disappointed at the slow pace, but the DPP and the ODCC are independent of Government and that is an important principle.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: That does not bode well for the banking inquiry. They ran rings around the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Ciarán Lynch.

Senator Ivana Bacik: We debated the nature of the banking inquiry here with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, on Tuesday evening. Senator Conway praised Senator Norris's appearance on Today FM, which I hear was a very powerful performance. He also commented on the Fine Gael posters and on the integrity of politics as a profession. I agree with his sentiments. I have dealt with that. Senator Healy Eames raised a specific very tragic case in Galway. As the Cathaoirleach has said, it is probably more appropriate as an Adjournment debate matter if Senator Healy Eames can give me details to write to the Minister for Health to support her point.

Senator O'Keeffe raised the issue of the Fine Gael posters and congratulated the winners of the European Union Contest for Young Scientists, who are from Kinsale. We share her congratulations. It was a great achievement and brilliant to see those young girls winning at European level. Senator O'Keeffe also asked for a debate on the impact climate change will have on agriculture in the context of Met Éireann research showing, rather depressingly, that our winters will get wetter even if our summers are getting warmer. We can certainly ask for that debate.

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Senator Mooney spoke again about the VAT rate, which I have spoken about. Senator Noone welcomed the increased number of restaurants awarded Michelin stars, which is very good news. There is increasing understanding internationally of the importance of high standards in restaurants and food generally in a country in terms of tourism and attracting visitors. A huge number of people go to destination restaurants in very out-of-the-way places. I am thinking of places in the Basque country and Catalonia in Spain where there has been a huge surge of tourism interest because of the number of restaurants which have done very well and become very well-known internationally. That is very important. Senator Mooney also raised the issue of the VAT rate and the alcohol action strategy, which I have dealt with.

Senator Wilson spoke directly to Senator Paul Coghlan about the Fine Gael posters. I have already responded to that. Senator Wilson also called for a debate on banking with the Minister for Finance in the context of the Anglo Irish Bank tapes. My colleague, Senator Hayden, has sought a debate on banking on a number of occasions and we can continue to press for that. Senator Jim D'Arcy raised the issue of cigarette smuggling, which has been examined by the justice committee. It might be worth having a focused debate on the loss of revenue, which is the specific issue the Senator raised, and the health implications due to cheap cigarettes flooding the market.

Senator MacSharry called for a debate on the Central Bank with the Minister for Finance, which we can seek. Senator MacSharry also raised the issue of media monopoly. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Rabbitte, has been here to discuss that issue but we can ask him to come in again. Senator Power asked me to contact the Tánaiste to ask him to raise at the Council of Europe the very serious concerns about the new, draconian homophobic laws in Russia. I have raised that publicly and with the Tánaiste, and I will write to him and seek an update. I thank the Senator for increasing the pressure. The Irish Government is raising this issue, as are many other countries in the Council of Europe. It is a matter of real concern and has a very serious impact, particularly on young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, LGBT, people in Russia.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Darragh O'Brien has moved an amendment to the Order of Business: "That a one-hour debate with the Minister for Finance on VAT be taken today." Is the amendment being pressed?

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Yes.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 17; Níl, 27.	
Tá	Níl
Barrett, Sean D.	Bacik, Ivana.
Byrne, Thomas.	Brennan, Terry.
Crown, John.	Burke, Colm.
Cullinane, David.	Clune, Deirdre.
Daly, Mark.	Coghlan, Paul.
Leyden, Terry.	Comiskey, Michael.
MacSharry, Marc.	Conway, Martin.
Mooney, Paschal.	Cummins, Maurice.

Seanad Éireann

Norris, David.	D'Arcy, Jim.
Ó Domhnaill, Brian.	D'Arcy, Michael.
O'Brien, Darragh.	Gilroy, John.
O'Donovan, Denis.	Harte, Jimmy.
O'Sullivan, Ned.	Hayden, Aideen.
Power, Averil.	Higgins, Lorraine.
Quinn, Feargal.	Keane, Cáit.
White, Mary M.	Kelly, John.
Wilson, Diarmuid.	Moran, Mary.
	Mullins, Michael.
	Naughton, Hildegard.
	Noone, Catherine.
	O'Brien, Mary Ann.
	O'Donnell, Marie-Louise.
	O'Keeffe, Susan.
	O'Neill, Pat.
	Sheahan, Tom.
	van Turnhout, Jillian.
	Zappone, Katherine.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Ned O'Sullivan and Diarmuid Wilson; Níl, Senators Paul Coghlan and Aideen Hayden.

Amendment declared lost.

Question, "That the Order of Business be agreed to," put and declared carried.

Ombudsman Act 1980 (Section 4(10)) Order 2013: Motion

Senator Ivana Bacik: I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the following Order in draft:

Ombudsman Act 1980 (Section 4(10)) Order 2013,
copies of which Order in draft were laid before Seanad Eireann on 6th September 2013."

Question put and agreed to.

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Tackling Bullying in Schools: Statements

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am delighted to have the opportunity to update the Members of the Seanad on the work being done to help prevent and tackle bullying in schools. The programme for Government includes a commitment to encourage schools to develop anti-bullying policies and, in particular, strategies to combat homophobic bullying to support students. Since my appointment as Minister, I have believed delivering on that commitment is one of the most important actions we can take. We all know people who are victims of bullying, whether directly or indirectly. My commitment is to support the well-being of students and ensure all children have happy experiences of school.

During my first couple of months in office I committed to re-examining the guidelines issued to schools on bullying. I also began exploring the idea of a working group that would draft a roadmap towards the elimination of bullying in schools.

12 o'clock

In May 2012, along with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Deputy Frances Fitzgerald, I hosted a forum on bullying which allowed interested parties to come together and share ideas about how bullying could be tackled in our schools. I also announced the creation of a working group, under the chairmanship of Ms Deirdre McDonnell, principal officer in the Department of Education and Skills. The working group included representatives from interested NGOs as well as representatives from various sections of the Department and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The action plan set out 12 actions to help prevent and tackle bullying in primary and second level schools. The plan made clear that preventing and tackling bullying requires support from parents and wider society and is not a problem schools can solve alone. This point must be emphasised. Among the 12 actions recommended by the working group are the following: proposals to support a media campaign focused on cyberbullying specifically targeted at young people as part of safer Internet day 2013; the establishment of a new national anti-bullying website; beginning immediate development of new national anti-bullying procedures for all schools; devising a co-ordinated plan of training for parents and school boards of management; providing Department of Education and Skills support for the Stand Up! awareness week against homophobic bullying organised by BeLonG To youth services; and reviewing teacher education support service provision to identify what training and continuous professional development teachers may need to help them effectively tackle bullying. A new, ring-fenced budget of €500,000 will be spent ensuring we deliver on all 12 of these actions. The anti-bullying procedures I launched on 13 September represent the conclusion of one of these actions, and other actions, including awareness raising campaigns on cyberbullying and homophobic bullying, are already under way.

The new anti-bullying procedures are not the whole answer to this complex problem, nor are they intended to be. The procedures will apply to all 4,000 primary and post primary schools, encompassing a population of almost 900,000 young citizens. The procedures provide a great opportunity to reinvigorate and strengthen our approach to preventing and tackling bullying in schools. The key elements of the procedures include a strong emphasis on the prevention of bullying behaviour through the fostering and development of a positive school culture and climate based on inclusivity and respect, and a school-wide approach to preventing and tackling bullying behaviour; this is not “somebody’s” responsibility it is everybody’s respon-

sibility. There is also a requirement for all schools to adhere to the standardised policy template for developing their anti-bullying policy, and greater transparency for parents and pupils through the requirement for schools to publish their anti-bullying policy on the school's website and give it to the parents' association. It is made clear that the definition of bullying includes cyberbullying and identity-based bullying such as homophobic and racist bullying. There are also practical tips for building a positive school culture and climate based on inclusivity and respect, and clear procedures for investigating, recording and dealing with bullying, a point to which I will return.

The procedures emphasise the primary aim in investigating and dealing with bullying is to resolve any issues and restore as far as practicable the relationships of the parties involved rather than to apportion blame. It is about getting back to where we need and want to be rather than looking for culprits. Oversight arrangements will involve the school principal reporting regularly to the board of management and will require the board to annually review the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation. Confirmation the annual review was done must be provided to the parents' association and published on the school's website.

The procedures are written in a user-friendly manner and focus in a very practical way on what schools must do to prevent and deal with bullying. The key is to get the basics right in all 4,000 schools. Many schools already do this very well and the new procedures will simply underpin and improve what they already do. For those schools which are not as good at dealing with bullying the new procedures will provide a bullying policy template and practical guidance and tips so they are clear on what they have to do.

Arising from the commitments in the action plan on bullying, the inspectorate will place a stronger focus on the actions schools take to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying. These procedures update guidelines first issued to schools in the previous century, in 1993. The new procedures were developed following consultation with the relevant education partners, and I thank them for their input. These procedures will be effective in tackling a problem which affects every community in Ireland. Much of the media focus at present is on cyberbullying. This type of bullying is increasingly common and is continuously evolving. Access to technology means cyberbullying can happen any time or any place. The best way to address cyberbullying is to prevent it happening in the first place. The procedures make clear the focus of any prevention and education awareness measures in schools on cyberbullying should be on educating pupils on how to stay safe while online, and on developing a culture of reporting any concerns about cyberbullying. It is also important to note schools cannot solve all the ills of the world. Parents, pupils and wider society have an important role to play in preventing and tackling cyberbullying.

As part of our follow-through on the other actions in the action plan, I announced last week that €40,000 will be provided to support the delivery of up to 70 anti-bullying training sessions for parents between now and the end of the year. The anti-bullying parent training programme is run jointly by the National Parents Council Primary and the National Parents Council Post Primary. The initiative has been developed to support the implementation of the action plan on bullying which called for training and resources for parents and boards of management. I sincerely hope parents will take the time to attend these valuable training sessions. If Senators have influence or access to schools I ask them to encourage parents to do so.

Bullying is not a problem schools can, or should be left to, tackle alone. Parents, families and the wider community have an equally important role to play in tackling all forms of bully-

ing and in teaching children how to manage relationships, be resilient and have empathy and respect for others. The anti-bullying parent training programme will be available nationwide. It will be a two and half hour session to help parents support their children regarding issues of bullying, and to inform them about the new anti-bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools. These training sessions will mean parents will be better equipped with knowledge to support their children in issues relating to bullying. The National Parents Council Primary and the National Parents Council Post Primary are also developing an information leaflet for parents who attend the training sessions. The leaflet will be made widely available on both councils' websites and there will be ready access to the information. Nobody will be on his or her own when seeking support and advice on what to do.

Much evidence from throughout the developed world shows bullying can have a devastating effect on our children and young people. The publication of the anti-bullying procedures and the training sessions being provided for parents are important steps towards putting an end to it.

One of the unspoken core groups of victims of bullying are the passive, stand-by witnesses. There is now emerging evidence to suggest that, like the good Samaritan, the person who observed but did not intervene, the person who saw and felt but could not articulate a response, is a victim too. Their needs and their concerns have to be addressed.

To summarise, the action plan made clear that preventing and tackling bullying requires support from parents and wider society and is not a problem schools can solve alone, which is a point we have to understand. The new anti-bullying procedures are not the whole answer to this complex problem, nor are they intended to be. The procedures include a strong emphasis on prevention of bullying behaviour through the fostering and development of a positive school culture and a climate that is based on inclusivity and respect. The procedures apply to all 4,000 primary and post-primary schools. They give a great opportunity to reinvigorate and strengthen our approach to preventing and tackling bullying in schools. I am delighted to have the opportunity to present this to the House.

Thirteenth Report of the Committee of Selection: Motion

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Committee of Selection reports that it has discharged Senator John Kelly from membership of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs at his own request and has appointed Senator Marie Moloney in substitution for him.

The Committee of Selection reports that it has discharged Senator Pat O'Neill from membership of the Joint Committee on the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht at his own request and has appointed Senator Hildegarde Naughton in substitution for him.

The Committee of Selection reports that it has discharged Senator Imelda Henry from membership of the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection at her own request and has appointed Senator Terry Brennan in substitution for her.

I move: "That the report be laid before the Seanad."

Question put and agreed to.

Tackling Bullying in Schools: Statements (Resumed)

Senator Averil Power: I welcome the Minister to the House. He has been here on several occasions in the past year and a half to discuss the issue of bullying and mental health among young people, which reflects both the priority he has brought to this issue since he became Minister for Education and Skills and the interest that Senators have taken in it. During statements, in Private Members' time and when discussing legislation, Senators from all parties have expressed the view that this should be a priority and that we want to see the Government work on it. The process the Minister has undertaken through the action plan and in taking submissions from the education partners, from Fianna Fáil and from other Members of this House has been a good example of a partnership approach. It is perhaps also an example of the role of this House in feeding into legislation and into Government policy in a bipartisan way, and working with a Minister to get things done on an issue that is incredibly important to young people and their families. I commend the Minister on having taken that approach.

As the Minister rightly pointed out, bullying has a hugely debilitating effect on young people. At the very least, it makes it impossible for a young person to get the real opportunities they need at school. If somebody is depressed, upset or afraid of going to school, or afraid of turning on their phone between classes to see if somebody has sent them a text message or posted something nasty about them on the Internet - if a child is that unhappy - it is impossible for them to do well at school. That is very least effect it can have on our students. At the most extreme, of course, it has led to young people taking their own lives, and we have had several high profile cases of this in recent years.

This is an incredibly important issue and one that needs focus at all levels. I welcome the fact the guidelines have now been published and the Minister has outlined the details of what they involve. There is no doubt the previous guidelines were wildly out of date, having been adopted in 1993, a time before most of us had computers on our desks, let alone smartphones and all the new gadgets that are now available. Cyberbullying was non-existent at that point whereas it is a huge issue now, so there is no doubt the guidelines needed to be updated. Of course, there is now also much greater understanding of homophobia and the need for schools to ensure they do everything they can to crack down on homophobic bullying and ensure they are a safe place for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or any other differences between them.

As the Minister pointed out, the guidelines are just one part of the action plan to tackle bullying. I welcome the fact he has announced training for parents, which is essential given that schools will only be able to tackle this issue if there is a true whole-school approach with teachers, parents and, in particular, students. I have spoken in the House before, as have other Members, about the BeLonGTo initiative and Stand Up!, and the Minister kindly ensured money was set aside to finance these initiatives. This shows it is peer support and peer-run initiatives that can often have a far greater impact than initiatives led by parents or teachers, where adults tell young people what they should do. There has to be a sense of community among young people, an awareness of what is and is not acceptable and a determination to stand up for each other, to look out for friends and to make sure bullying is not acceptable in any form. When that culture can be brought about among young people themselves, that is when we will really eradicate

bullying from our schools.

I last week attended the launch of ShoutOut, where third level students from my former alma mater, Trinity College, who are members of societies including the Phil and the LGBT Society have put together an initiative that sends third level students into second level schools, and they have received support from the US Embassy to do so. The LGB students are fine ambassadors - we had some fine looking rugby players at the launch last week - and include male and female students of all different backgrounds, from different parts of the country and with different interests. I believe they will be a great inspiration when they go into second level schools and are able to say to young LGB students: "Whatever you are feeling now, things do get better. I have been where you are and I am now doing well in college and enjoying my life". To be able to hear that message directly from a student is very powerful, and I know they will also have an impact on non-LGB students in the school in terms of telling them what they needed from their friends at the time, and how that can make a difference.

I welcome all of that as part of the mix in regard to the bullying action plan the Minister has brought forward. However, I have a serious concern in regard to resources, which is an issue that has been raised by the education partners. While the schools should always have been dealing with bullying and positive mental health, it is somewhat contradictory to give them these extra responsibilities on guidelines and initiatives at a time when guidance counsellors have been cut and when schools are worrying about losing core teaching through an increase in class sizes and in the pupil-teacher ratio.

I agree with the Minister that dealing with bullying and promoting positive mental health cannot be the responsibility of one individual. We will not achieve any real culture change in a school through that kind of system. However, my concern with the guidance cuts is that, as much as everybody has to get involved in the broader project, it is essential there is a designated person in the school who has time for one-to-one counselling with students. I am particularly concerned that many of those services have been cut back in the health sector as well. Members are aware of the difficulties in getting children appointments through the child mental health services. The gap in the wider strategy, not just in education but also in the health sector, is in that one-to-one support. Organisations like Headstrong, which is doing amazing work with initiatives like Jigsaw, are working with schools in partnership and helping to give young people access to counselling, but Headstrong is still rolling out a programme and there are many counties it has not been able to reach yet. That is the big gap and I would like to see the Minister address it, both within education as well as by taking the issue up with the Minister for Health. It is not acceptable that when a young person presents with a mental health difficulty they cannot actually get help. We are always telling young people to talk, to ask for help and to seek support, yet when they or their families seek it, they cannot get it. I have a concern about the resources behind this.

I very much welcome the initiative. I commend the Minister on the personal priority he has given to bullying and to youth mental health. I assure him that he has our fullest support on this side of the House. I will take up his challenge about making local parents aware of the training initiatives and helping to promote the work that is being done.

Senator Martin Conway: I welcome the Minister to the House and thank him for his contribution, as I thank Senator Power. During my two years in Seanad Éireann I have learned that Senator Power has the good of the people at heart and will work with the Government when it is appropriate and correct to do so. Many of her colleagues in this House share that ethos; she

certainly does.

The Minister has diligently taken on the issue, set up a task force and made recommendations. There is also a clear and distinct timeframe, which is extremely important. Too often we have seen, over the years, proposals, recommendations and reports launched but no timeframe. In this instance a clear timeframe has been provided.

We are dealing with an absolutely awful development. Bullying has taken place in schools for many years. It has existed for as long as children have been educated. Now there is a different style and facet to bullying due to the use of modern technology. I have no doubt that in 20 or 30 years' time that there will be new ways to bully.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Super-cyberbullying.

Senator Martin Conway: Exactly. Bullying is an evolving problem that needs a multi-agency approach that starts in the home, continues in schools and, hopefully, will percolate into the community. I hope we will reach a situation in which all interventions where children are concerned will have an antenna for bullying and there will be procedures in place to identify and deal with the issue. There has been great success in recent times in terms of child protection. There are now protocols and procedures in place to ensure that child abuse is detected quickly. The measures range from proper Garda vetting of the people who deal with vulnerable young people to child safety procedures in sports clubs, religious schools and so on. What the Minister has started here will commence the process whereby the same types of interventions will eventually exist to identify the early stages of bullying.

There is no community at this point that has not experienced young people taking their lives as a result of bullying. In my community two years ago, just before the junior certificate examination, a young man took his own life. As a result, his family set up a very successful organisation called the William Winder Rainbow Foundation. It tries to organise for young people to receive counselling and interventions at an early stage. Elsewhere, similar voluntary organisations have been established following horrific tragedies, and they do a lot of good. There must be a multi-agency approach in order to provide a coherent anti-bullying strategy to deal with the issue. I want everyone to work in tandem and to at least ensure that bullying is identified early. I commend the many people who do exceptionally good work, raise money and provide services and support structures. I want to see all of their voluntary efforts pulled together into one powerful strategy.

The Minister of State, Deputy Lynch, has spoken about the issue in the Seanad and today we have the Minister for Education and Skills in the House. Other Ministers are very keen to play their part in dealing with bullying. We need to make sure all of the available resources are targeted. I want the Minister, the Minister of State and the many charitable organisations that collect money to work together. Let us all pull together to avoid duplication, thus using finite resources to greater effect and ensuring they are properly targeted.

Let us examine the types of work that people are doing. Senator John Gilroy is touring the country holding public forums in order to hear stories and learn how things can be improved. The whole area of suicide, mental health and bullying is definitely getting attention and is a priority for the Oireachtas, not just for the Government. It is a priority for all parties and none. The issue is not a party political one, although it is political. A united approach will yield results and I commend Senator Averil Power on her words in that regard.

All we can do is to wish the Minister well and play our part. It would be a good idea if the Minister could return in 12 months' time to report progress. We all need to be on top of bullying. We must ensure that we have the knowledge and can inform our communities about what the Government is doing and bring the response from communities to the Government. It is a two-way process and we must all share that responsibility.

Bullying is a scourge at present. It must be nipped in the bud and dealt with as much as it possibly can be. As has been said already, we will never eliminate bullying altogether. As long as there are human beings there will be bullying, but we can at least put safeguards in place to identify it at an early stage.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: I welcome the Minister, who has been a frequent attender of the House. His heart is in the right place as regards bullying, as stated by Senators Power and Conway. The Minister will always have our support when dealing with the issues of bullying.

Most cyberbullying is carried out by people who were bullies anyway - we were a bit obsessed by technology when the issue first arose - but that is the nature of bullying. Sometimes the people who bully are found to have emulated, as all children do, the adults in their lives. It is essential in the area for which the Minister has responsibility that teachers, for instance, do not shout or appear to resolve disputes by imposing their larger size on smaller people. That is a serious issue. A love of children and a willingness to be with them and tolerate them when they do things that are wrong must be inherent in teaching. I have wondered about that aspiration. Sometimes, when I saw some of my colleagues at third level being dismissive of students - not bullying - I wondered whether they had realised when they became lecturers that about 90% of the student population would be between 18 and 22 years. I thought it would be a good idea for them to get on with such people because there would be a lot of them around. That outlook applies even more so to younger people.

The Minister may recall that Tony Blair once got into trouble for saying that one could slap a child but only a small slap, or something like that, and got tied up in the issue. It may still be the law that people can slap their own children but such behaviour sets a bad example to children. It is not law in this country.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: It is very hard to legally define legitimate chastisement.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: Yes. In this House legitimate chastisement is verbal and quietly spoken. We do not want to set a bad example. Young people and small people will perceive our good example as the proper way to resolve disputes.

I recall the great Dr. Owen Sheehy-Skeffington - in a way, I am his successor - who came to the Seanad at a time when abuse, bullying and beating of children was acceptable and we had a *Tom Brown's School Days* tradition. Dr. Sheehy-Skeffington, Dr. Cyril Daly and others campaigned against the abuse, and they were magnificent people to do so. It is said that on one occasion a person who held the more traditional view in this House said he had been beaten in school and it had not done him any harm, to which Dr. Sheehy-Skeffington wittily replied, "I am inclined to put the question: in that case, what did do the harm?" However, he made a serious point.

Sweden banned all legitimate chastisement, as the Minister described it, at a very early stage. I think it is good for children to build up their confidence. I wish to recognise here today that Senator John Boland, the then Minister, abolished corporal punishment in schools, a

landmark decision. I think that the Taoiseach at the time was Mr. Liam Cosgrave. I recall old editions of teacher magazines containing an advertisement promoting a new reverse-throttle cane with the line “Guaranteed to subdue the toughest eight year old.” That was the culture at the time. We could not possibly think that way now. How do we advance the cause? We have made great progress. I favour stricter control of the chastisement the Minister mentioned. The duties of parents and all those who have custody and care of children are paramount because many of the problems arise from the bad example adults give to children. As the Minister said, bullying can have a devastating effect on children and young people. The publication of anti-bullying procedures and the training sessions being provided for parents are important steps towards putting an end to it. The Minister’s off-script remark about passive standby witnesses was most important. Unhappy incidents such as when a parent and a child have a difficulty in a supermarket and the child is slapped cause huge distress for most adults and certainly children. There is the old Irish language phrase, *mol on óige agus tiocfaidh sí*. Bad examples and traumatic experiences live on. Is it possible to devolve more powers in schools to children in order that they form little groups and have their own friends to give them positive protection? One of the successes at third level is devolving responsibility for activities to students in order that they can form friendships. Having good friends is probably the best protection. Parents will probably inquire of their children if there is anybody in their class or school who is not nice and I gather there is much concealed behaviour on the part of children who are bullied. They know it is going on, but they do not know what to do. If children have positive friendships with others with whom they get on well, they can bring it to the notice of the authorities. What children do together to promote friendships reduces bullying through school initiatives and sports clubs. The GAA is very strong in dealing with the issue. Professor Mona O’Moore, the well known expert, who gave me some notes on the issue said things like the new black card for persistent cynical behaviour in the sports arena could be transferred to schools.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: It is called expulsion.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: That is the extreme red card. This was contained in her speech of 11 May and she mentioned that possibility. It might be the equivalent of the black card which is to be introduced by the GAA for cynical behaviour, to be used for the perpetrators of bullying to participate in some form of aggression replacement therapy, together with their families, if necessary. She made the point that cyberbullying was simply an extension of the bullying taking place at any event. It is rampant. She supports the Minister’s action plan on bullying and recommends that future definitions of bullying make provision for isolated acts of aggression which have the potential to be repeated over time. On cyberbullying, she notes that Irish children have poor digital skills compared with their European counterparts. Does this make cyberbullying easier and a greater challenge as one seeks to cope with it? She also raises the question of silent witnesses. She said a professionally made DVD intended for use by SPHE teachers had been sent to all second level schools free of charge in 2005. It still has the potential to empower students to take action to discourage bullying and report it, yet my understanding is that it has not been widely used as a teaching resource. In our support of the Minister, perhaps he might ask how that initiative is progressing.

Most studies of bullying report the pitiful level of reporting to staff and the perils of bullying. Therefore, there is a need for those affected to come forward.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Principals will be required to present a quarterly report to the board of management on incidents that have come to attention. There will be a log book, so to speak.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: I thank the Minister. I also thank the Leas-Chathaoirleach for his indulgence.

In regard to the report on anti-bullying procedures, September 2013, research suggests children with disabilities and special educational needs are more likely to be bullied than others. That presents an incredible challenge to everybody in the House. It stops one in one's tracks when one reads that people with disabilities are specially singled out for treatment. We know what the budget programme is from the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan. The Minister mentioned that he had €500,000 for 900,000 students. That amounts to 45 cent per student in primary school to protect them from behaviour which we abhor. If we ever get the finances in some kind of order again, we will support him on increasing the figure of €500,000. We are carrying out the research and I hope it is covering the issue of teacher training. We need to change behaviour in society to take account of the fact that certain ways in which young people were traditionally treated are not acceptable. We will all benefit as a result. I have no doubt that John Boland and Owen Sheehy Skeffington were absolutely right to raise the level of our consciousness. I am happy to endorse the way the Minister, Senators Averil Power and Martin Conway have done it because we must look after our younger folk and support every endeavour in that regard.

Senator Mary Moran: I join in the welcome to the Minister who has been extremely proactive in the field of education and bullying, as has the Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch. Both Houses have debated on numerous occasions the issue of bullying in all its forms. I wholeheartedly support the guidelines published recently which were long overdue; the last guidelines being published 20 years ago. Nobody wants to see bullying. As Senator Martin Conway said, there has always been bullying in some form. Having listened to Senator Sean D. Barrett, it is clear that times have changed. It used to be "sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me"; now it is a case of name calling never hurting them because it is all done through cyberbullying and devious means of making comments on social media, probably the biggest source of bullying today.

On bullying in schools, what we need is positive education for children. That is very important. We want every child to leave school feeling he or she has had a positive experience. While that happens in the majority of cases, unfortunately, there are many cases in which it does not. That is where the guidelines will help to tackle and overcome the problems being encountered. We have had many debates and talks and it is great that the guidelines have now been published. It is welcome that school principals must report incidents of bullying to the board of management which it can put up on the website. It is a positive development that the information is fed back to the Minister and that there is a continuous circle. No school likes to be subject to bad publicity and no school likes to state it has a problem with bullying.

I would like all aspects of bullying to be introduced in teacher training and also in training provided in schools. Given that school principals must report to the board of management, members of the board of management should also receive the necessary training. Why give the board this information if it does not know what to do with it? I am delighted €40,000 has been made available to provide training and awareness for parents.

I do not mean to be a thorn in the side on this issue, but while we can all comment on the positive, there are issues that need to be teased out. The Minister has said there is €40,000 available for parents. That is brilliant, but will it be like the current situation with parent teacher meetings, where the same group of parents come in all the time, the parents we do not need to

target. Perhaps these are the only parents who will avail of the training. The Minister said the leaflet on this will be distributed by the National Parents Council to all parents who attend its courses and that it will be published on its website. Would it not be a good idea to ensure that not only does it go to parents who attend courses, but to all parents of the schoolchildren. Perhaps some of these do not know how to access the Internet or cannot, for work or other reasons, attend the courses. The leaflets should be made available to them.

Much of the time bullying also affects parents. It affects a whole circle of people. We cannot just say the school or home should deal with bullying. It must be a communal effort. Sometimes, parents are the last to know about or admit bullying. Sometimes, the parents of the pupils who are being bullied are the last people the bullied pupils want to know about it because they feel they are letting their parents or somebody down. There is a problem in this regard. Therefore, it is imperative that children are encouraged to report bullying. I take on board what Senator Power said about cutbacks in schools and the reduction in the number of career guidance hours. These teachers provide a valuable service.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: We did not reduce the number of career guidance teachers. We mainstreamed them, so that they reconnected.

Senator Mary Moran: Those teachers are not gone and that option remains, but it is up to the school to decide on the number of guidance hours. I understand the need for guidance and appreciate the value of the work done by guidance teachers. However, I believe dealing with bullying must be a whole-school approach. That is the reason I believe professional development on this issue for all teachers is important. Teachers must be allowed half days to attend training and courses so they can understand how to deal with bullying.

For various reasons students might often be unwilling to go to a teacher assigned to a particular area. They might prefer to go to another teacher, perhaps one who teaches them or does not teach them. Therefore, there must be a whole-school approach so that everybody in the school knows and recognises how to deal with these situations. I spent 25 years in the classroom and I know that often it is the pupil who is making the loudest noise or laughing the heartiest who is suffering the most deep down. Teachers need to have the ability to get to know their pupils and to recognise what is going on behind what they see.

I appreciate that bullying is also dealt with in the SPHE curriculum. I have a bugbear with regard to how this programme is taught. It is important that SPHE does not become a class where because it is not an exam subject, pupils are just told to study their books or that they will have a chat class. Sometimes, a chat class can be beneficial in dealing with bullying and aspects of mental health, but it is important that these issues are dealt with and that SPHE is taught well.

I noted that all the proposals in the Minister's speech were pupil oriented. What about teachers who are bullied? This is an important issue. Teachers do get bullied and these teachers, like some pupils, can be afraid to say that they are being bullied. Bullying of teachers can have a serious effect. Sometimes it is the best teachers in a school who are targeted and bullied by colleagues. This can be devastating. Something should be done to support these teachers.

Last January, as a result of discussions on positive mental health and mental health in schools and other areas, I helped found and set up a positive mental health group in Dundalk. We had no resources and knowing there was nothing we could achieve on our own, we decided to bring together all the groups offering services in the area. There is a huge problem with regard to

duplication of mental health services. As a result of setting up our group we got representatives from the HSE, Shine, GROW, LGBT, the Dundalk Outcomers and all the groups to come together. We meet now on a monthly basis and our steering committee invites people to deliver presentations on various topics. One presentation on bullying and cyberbullying was delivered by the juvenile liaison officer in the area. We got a fantastic response from pupils, children and teenagers in the Dundalk area to that. They came and said they could talk about it there, but they could not talk about it in school.

It is a good idea to get outside agencies involved in dealing with bullying in schools. I am aware that the HSE and its suicide officer in Dundalk, who is on our steering committee, see this as a great idea. It is like what happened with religious retreats years ago, where pupils were far quicker to discuss topics with the person who came from outside than they would be with the school teacher.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Even with the Redemptorists.

Senator Mary Moran: There were others. I see it as important that this is facilitated. I hope the Minister takes our suggestions on board. I applaud him on the work he has done and will continue to do in this area. He has our support. This is not a political issue, but an issue that affects all of us, across party and across Departments. It involves the Department of Health and the lack of resources available for mental health. When we discover people are affected by bullying, we need to know where to take them, how to access help and how services can be improved.

Senator Katherine Zappone: What a great teacher Senator Moran must have been and how blessed her students must have been. Well done to her.

Like other speakers, I am happy to welcome the Minister and compliment him on the work of the anti-bullying working group. As the Minister went through the steps, I remembered each of them. Many of the Minister's colleagues participated in this with him and I believe what he has achieved will be an integral aspect of his legacy. I believe all the Minister is doing will make a difference and will help to change the culture. From the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, LGBT, perspective, I welcome the measures. As the Minister is well aware, both homophobic and transphobic bullying are endemic in our schools. The proposed procedures and action plan on bullying are some of the most significant moves in the history of the Department of Education and Skills in regard to addressing this problem.

Earlier this summer, I put forward a Bill on gender recognition and I am heartened to see specific reference to transgender young people and transphobic bullying in the new procedures. I learned a lot and gained experience on this in putting together my Bill. I learned what it means to be transgender and to struggle with that and about how unusual and different that is. I learned how much learning we and teachers need to do on this issue. Who better to teach us than young transgender people? I certainly learned a lot from them. It is also important to know that young people who are not transgender are often bullied and targeted as if they are. This happens when young people are experimenting and stepping outside of rigid gender roles. There is a lot of learning in that arena as regards bullying. The Minister referred to oversight and Senator Mary Moran also referred to it in terms of ensuring the implementation of the guidelines. We all hope and believe that schools will take the opportunity presented by the guidelines so that the context is happier for their young people. In my community, I heard stories of young boys being bullied. It is so sad to hear it and it is very hard for young people. I hope this opportunity

is grabbed by schools. In the action plan, existing models for evaluating schools will be used to measure the effectiveness of anti-bullying activity. The Minister referred to the principal and the board of management. Is there potential in considering evaluating it in the context of school inspection reports? The inspector has strength and power in the school context and this may be another way of doing it.

From the action plan, I see that teacher education support services give priority to the gathering of evidence in respect of teachers' needs with regard to bullying and teachers' capacity to address it. I welcome this and I hope, like others, that sufficient resources will be made available for teachers to be trained specifically and equipped for bullying behaviour.

Senator Moran spoke about social, personal and health education, SPHE, and I also raised issues about the teaching of it in the past. I will highlight the integration of the SPHE support service into the professional development service for teachers. People who were once focused on SPHE are now fulfilling a number of other roles. How will this have an impact on SPHE, which is already a non-exam subject and not mandatory? Will the integration have an impact on the training of teachers who can teach SPHE? I am thinking specifically of the roll-out of an SPHE model on LGBT identities. It has been slow and I understand that it must be slow because teachers must be trained to teach it. The teaching of such a module could be one of many steps taken by schools to address bullying but, due to resource concerns, there is a challenge.

I praise the work that has taken place but I cannot finish without mentioning another group in our school system that experiences fear and worry on a daily basis because of their identity, namely, teachers. Earlier this year, my colleague, Senator Bacik, published the Equality Employment (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill which proposed to deal with the so-called chill factor for employees in religious-run institutions who, by virtue of their identity or family circumstances, may be said to undermine the employers' religious ethos. I welcome the efforts and I also noted the efforts of Senator Averil Power in this regard. Senator Bacik and Senator Power were told the Government accepted the issue, as the Minister said, but that it would be examined by the Irish human rights and equality commission when it is set up. Legislation to set up the new commission is in section A of the Government legislative programme and perhaps the Minister can inquire of his Cabinet colleagues when the new body will be set up and when we will see the legislation.

Senator Deirdre Clune: It is important to have this debate. The Minister has appeared in this House previously to discuss it and I thank him for his work. We have now established steps for how schools, principals, teachers and parents can deal with the issue of bullying, which has advanced into cyberbullying. Bullying was always with us and always will be. It is not technology that is the problem but behaviour. Technology makes it easier and ensures it can go beyond the school gate. I am not saying that schools have the solution to everything but they are an important factor in children's lives and the medium through which the State can interact and educate children. Therefore, schools are the focus when we come to delivering guidelines and best practice in dealing with bullying.

The Minister has been inclusive, has invited submissions and has worked with individuals, teachers and the National Parents Council at primary and post-primary level. These bodies will play an important role and I congratulate the National Parents Council on its excellent leaflet on inclusiveness. The Minister launched it and it will be very important in the debate we need to have.

Guidelines were last issued in 1993, the previous century, and it is important they are updated. Dr. Geoffrey Shannon, the Government's special rapporteur on child protection, produced a report on bullying and cyberbullying. He stated that legislation should be introduced compelling schools to have a strong disciplinary code. The concern about guidelines is that they will be implemented in a patchy rather than uniform fashion. In the case of 4,000 schools, it is different as they all have structures of the principal reporting to the boards of management. The guidelines establish that the principal should report on a quarterly basis. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Deputy Frances Fitzgerald, had to introduce legislative support for the guidelines for protecting children but that is because the sector is more diverse. I am interested in the comments of the Minister on the legislative issue but he will probably tell me that it is a step too far at this stage when we have structures under which we can manage bullying. We know the statistics and we have heard the headline statistics on how cyberbullying has contributed to mental health issues and young people taking their own lives. One in five teenagers are being cyberbullied. The issue involves awareness and educating parents on what their children are dealing with.

I support technology, which has been invaluable and has opened up the world for many people, including Members. Children need to be aware of the consequences of using online media such as Facebook, Twitter and texting. The potential consequences can be enormous in terms of job prospects and the situations we would like to keep private. An awareness of the issue is important. A presentation was made by Waterford County Comhairle na nÓg on tackling cyberbullying in the Waterford area. Peer support is very important as young people take a message from their own colleagues more than from teachers or parents. The lilac wristband is very successful in delivering messages to raise awareness. Any support that can be given to initiatives such as that is important. This is a positive step and is the result of consultation. The structures are now in place to support all involved in this topic that gets such attention that it must be addressed.

Senator Mary Ann O'Brien: I am so happy to have the Minister here and taking part in this topic. After 20 years, he has taken steps with such diligence in his consultation and action plan on bullying. There is nothing more important than looking after our young. I was pleased to hear the Minister saying that he will keep a constant eye and that the board of management will report every three months. The Minister will be able to keep statistics and keep his finger on the pulse of what is happening.

I refer to yesterday's briefing in the AV room by Waterford County Comhairle na nÓg.

1 o'clock

There is nothing like the young to talk to us, as it is really them about whom we are speaking. These are the people who are affected and seeing them speak was a powerful experience, which I wish the Minister had shared. They were very powerful young speakers. As the Senator mentioned, one of the beautiful teenagers told us "sticks and stones may break your bones", as mummies and daddies used to say; one would end up with a bruise and be very hurt but the bruise went away. She told us parents and friends could speak to her and one would feel better afterwards.

I am here to speak about cyberbullying, which is like a psychological cancer for our young because it is so permanent. We can consider all the forms of cyberbullying. With regard to social networks, I have a 13-year-old who has just started in a new school and I am glad to report

the school in Kilkenny has a wonderful principal. Little Molly has come back to me three times already and said, “My gosh, at assembly he is saying that he does not care what goes on in the school but if one pupil is responsible for any bullying through text or social networks, he will not stand for it”. He has told pupils to speak to friends or parents if there is an issue, so he is getting the message through. It is wonderful to hear that from teachers.

The young group yesterday spoke to us about Viber, and as I did not know what that was, I asked Molly last night. It is a group texting application, which means one text can go out to the entire gang for free. We have all heard of Ask.fm, which is really nasty as it is perfect for the profile of bullies. The user can be anonymous and say what he or she likes. It is perfect for Mr. or Ms Bully as they need never be found out.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: That is right.

Senator Mary Ann O’Brien: I would love to strangle Ask.fm, put it in the ocean and drown it forever. A person must be 13 to join Facebook but statistics indicate there are 5 million children aged under ten on it. We have Facebook, Google, Yahoo and Twitter in Ireland, and all the people behind them love to speak to Ministers. The Minister should keep himself informed and be sure to inform the people behind those companies, as they are powerful and can help us.

With regard to Internet safety month, I will again return to the cancer motif. October is coming and how powerful is that pink ribbon? This cancer is so powerful in our children that we must come together and help the Minister formulate a plan for people to use social media effectively in that month. I pity the Minister as 40,070 sessions for parents is not enough. I am a busy parent and I am ashamed to say I did not get to the information night last year at my school. Mums and dads must get to such sessions and become trained in these issues. I think I am a fairly hip mother but I really have not a clue. I have to teach myself how to speak to my child and let her know that I must set the proper boundaries, for example, she must share passwords and I need to know her privacy settings are safe. We all know this is an evolving area.

In my short speech today I am blathering on about the likes of Viber and Snapchat, which is another application that really worries me. My child is only 13 but what will happen when boys become interesting? With Snapchat I could send a picture that will disappear in 30 seconds so it is apparently “safe” to use. It may disappear from the phone but where is it gone? It goes to the cloud.

If I put a picture of the Minister on the Internet through Facebook, it would be shared through friends and friends of friends, meaning it can go viral. We are only having fun but if, for example, the Minister had been drunk and was photographed in a terrible state, what hope would he have of getting a job in the Cabinet? He would be done and dusted forever because it is a permanent process.

Senator Mark Daly: A few fellows got a job in the Dáil despite that.

Senator Mary Ann O’Brien: That is what is out there for young children, so we should keep a dialogue open. As well as the task force that has been set up, the Minister needs some young and clever minds that are up to date on these issues. We are a pack of old fogeys, which I am sorry to say, and anybody over 22 or 23 is not with the story.

Senator Aideen Hayden: I congratulate the Minister for the work he has done in this area over many years as well as the work done before that. I read an article in *The Irish Times* after

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the announcement of the strategy in September which argued that the universality of bullying comes from an almost instinctive human tendency to accept some and exclude others from the group to gain supposed social status among peers by targeting a weaker opponent. This is what makes it particularly difficult to eliminate. However, we all accept that dealing with this type of behaviour is what humanises us.

I will specifically address the procedures announced in September 2013. These are important not just as procedures for dealing with bullying but as part of a wider mental health strategy. If we manage to successfully deal with the issue of bullying in primary and post-primary schools, it will have a positive outcome as times goes on in adult bullying, for example. I do not know but I very much doubt that there is a single person in the room who has not been impacted in some shape or form by bullying, either by direct experience or that of a family member, child or friend. I know friends who have been bullied at work, and I also know children, nieces and nephews who have experienced bullying in schools. It is endemic in society.

I welcome the fact that there will be resources put behind this programme and, to be fair, €500,000 is a significant amount of money in current economic times. The Minister should be congratulated for that. I have some comments and observations on the programme nonetheless. I do not see any emphasis on peer-to-peer mentoring or support, which is very important. For example, a programme called Meitheal was introduced in Wexford, where there is a particularly high level of suicide among young people and it involves peer-to-peer mentoring with supports. Unfortunately, it will have to be discontinued because of a lack of resources. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence from the programme that it should be rolled out on a nationwide basis, and I ask the Minister to consider a nationwide peer-to-peer programme in schools.

I echo the sentiments of Senator Moran with regard to the role of parents and welcome the financial support in the document for parental training. There is an issue among parents in recognising bullying, as they believe that it reflects upon themselves; either they see the child as weak or, alternatively, the child is the bully. As a result, there is a reluctance among parents to accept the matter. Further, parents may be a problem themselves, so significant resources must be put behind this effort.

I was looking at the action plan against bullying and wider research in the area, and the issue is almost comparable to abuse. That is one of the reasons peer-to-peer mentoring is so important. Children are afraid they will not be believed or there is not enough evidence. They may also be afraid of retaliation and retribution. Peer-to-peer mentoring, for youths and potentially for parents who find themselves in a scenario where a child is experiencing bullying, could lead to a support group to combat the problem.

There is one statement in the action plan that I want to bring to the Minister's attention, as there has been much emphasis on bullying and abuse of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender children or youths with a disability. There is another group that should be mentioned. The report indicates:

It is important to remember that children can be bullied for no apparent reason. Sometimes, it can be as a result of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Physical attributes such as hair colour, weight or even the fact that someone wears glasses can sometimes be used to bully someone.

I was struck by the account of a young girl called Elaine Doyle. She came under the spot-

light because she had received 100% in a physics test, bringing her to the attention of the bullies. There is a group of bright children who experience bullying. In a way that was actually very disturbing and Ms Doyle set out the isolation, rejection, insecurity and depression that she experienced because she was a bright child.

The Minister has stated schools are only part of the problem, which I accept completely. There is a need for specific emphasis on the fact that schools are part of a community. My experience of children who have been bullied is that those who succeed and survive bullying the best are those who have an outside resource that protects and insulates them to some extent from bullying.

I am concerned about the cuts to youth services. It is very important that children have access to debating, sports and youth clubs, in addition to organisations such as BeLonGTo. I ask the Minister to support specifically the Centre for Talented Youth, Ireland, which offers support to bright children. There is plenty of evidence to show that bright children suffer because of their brightness and are isolated by it.

The only hope is that this will not be a box-ticking exercise. While we can require schools to fill in forms, engage in acknowledgement and take all sorts of steps, it is critical that there be adequate surveillance of the programme and expert reviews conducted to ensure it is actually working in schools.

Senator Mark Daly: I welcome the Minister. This issue was brought home to us by the suicide of two sisters, Erin and Shannon Gallagher, who were 13 and 15 years old. They had been subjected to bullying. I was watching the Minister earlier on the monitor and heard him discuss how bullying was not the responsibility of the schools. Emphasis is always placed on what schools can do-----

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: It is not just their responsibility.

Senator Mark Daly: I agree. Parents have a responsibility to ensure and check that their child is safe. Cyberbullying is an entirely different monster from other forms of bullying because it does not disappear after school. It comes home with the child, is on the telephone and the Internet and, as my colleague described, becomes a type of cancer from which he cannot escape. I am sure the Minister never received a clip on the year from parents over anything. Previously, however, if someone reported to a parent that his or her child was bullying or misbehaving, that child would get a clip. Now it is a case of the parent saying it could not possibly happen. That, in itself, is a considerable issue. Parents must be held accountable.

We are discussing cyberbullying, parents' reactions and the call for action in the media. One particular company produced dedicated anti-bullying software that could be bought for children to prevent bullying online. It does not prevent bullying in school, but it has online capability. Despite this, the uptake was appallingly low. While there is a call to action and services have been put in place at much expense, parents across the country do not ensure the technology is used. It is in the Minister's gift to consider issuing a circular to schools stating we would prefer students and schools to have anti-bullying technology on their phones. Obviously, there are all sorts of EU regulations on monopolies to be considered, but the technology should be referred to in school policies. It is up to the principal to say that if a pupil has a phone, it should go into a bag and that if one does not have an anti-bullying device on it, it must not be brought into the school. There is nothing like a small carrot and stick to encourage students. Children with

phones with anti-bullying technology would not be able to be bullied or to bully and those children without such phones would not be allowed to have them at school events or at anything to do with the school. In this way, irrespective of whether parents are active or inactive regarding school initiatives, progress could be ensured. As I know from having given talks in schools on drug and alcohol abuse, the most active parents are the ones who show up. The parents one really wants to see, whose children are probably the most vulnerable, are not the ones who show up. Preaching to the converted is never a great mission. I ask the Minister to address this point.

How many schools are there?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: In round figures, there are 900,000 pupils and 4,000 schools, including primary and post-primary schools.

Senator Mark Daly: A simple initiative would not require legislation or ministerial orders. It would obviously require good will. If every principal, especially at post-primary level, put an incentive in place, it would be useful. Most schools have a strict ban on the use of mobile phones, but a stick and carrot approach should be applied in regard to bullying such that children with anti-bullying technology on their phones would be allowed to use them at school events, take photographs and post them online. Children without the technology should not be allowed to bring their phones to any school-related event, including school tours. This would be cost-effective and encourage the cost of an e-mail.

Senator Hildegarde Naughton: I thank the Minister for attending. I greatly welcome the guidelines which are long overdue, as has been said.

Bullying affects all age groups and people from all walks of life. As other Senators have said, it is correct that this is not just an issue for schools. As a primary school teacher, I believe it is a question for wider society. It is important that young people be allowed to take the lead on it. Senator O'Brien and others said that if young people could take the lead and be mentors for one another, they would be far more likely to listen to one another than to parliamentarians. It is said one in five people is bullied in cyberspace. Some 26% of bullying is done via mobile phones. There is no escaping it. One carries one's phone around in one's pocket; therefore, bullying constantly follows the victim. It is permanent. It is important that young people understand that what they put up online reflects on them and what they stand for. They are in a position to acknowledge this.

Reference was made to Comhairle na nÓg in Waterford. It is having its cyber-day on 3 October. It represents 5,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 18 years. It is a very important movement and one I would like to see spread nationwide. It would be very important and change the culture. A cultural change is required across the community.

With regard to how we deal with bullying, primary school is a key area. SPHE has been mentioned. We really need to consider putting in place a programme in schools to teach pupils how to deal with day-to-day life, how to cope with a bad day and how to deal with their emotions if somebody says something that affects them. Young people today feel pressures that my peers and I did not have to deal with. There are many more pressures on them and it is essential that we start to take action in primary schools in order that young people will develop coping skills and be brave enough to report bullying. What is an important point in terms of cyberbullying is that young people understand that when they publish something on social media they are publishing their own words and there will be consequences, either in terms of future job

applications or in the context of bullying their peers. The consequences need to be highlighted to young people. That said, young people themselves need to drive this and there is a great willingness on their part to do that if they are given the opportunity. I commend Comhairle na nÓg in Waterford and Waterford County Council. We should be examining ways to spread their example right across the country.

Senator David Cullinane: First, I wish to welcome some visitors from Australia who are in the Public Gallery today with Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

I welcome the Minister to the House to discuss this important issue. I am sure, like me, the Minister has met parents and pupils in his constituency office who present with a case of bullying. It is a very difficult problem to deal with as a public representative, especially when one is a parent. My first thought is always about what I would do if I was in that situation. I have a six year old son who is in first class at the moment. If my son was to come home and tell me he was the victim of bullying, I would be very upset, obviously. We have tremendous empathy with the parents of children who are being bullied. Our first thoughts are always about how we can address the problem.

I went back over my case load and in the last three months I have dealt with six different cases of bullying in Waterford. I must say that the approach taken by all of the schools involved when I contacted them was first class. The systems they had in place were very good. The boards of management were very organised and took on board the points I expressed to them and worked with the parents of the children who were being bullied. Good work is being done in our schools in this area but is an area in which we are still learning. As previous Senators have said, the advent of social media and cyberbullying has made dealing with bullying an even greater challenge for all of us.

I missed the presentation given by representatives from Waterford Comhairle na nÓg yesterday but I heard that it involved young people sharing their experiences of what it was like to be victims of cyberbullying. We must learn from them and draw from their experiences. The Ombudsman for Children spoke at an event I attended when I was first elected to the Seanad. She talked about children's rights and said that the first thing we must do is listen to children. We are not very good at listening to children. We think we understand what they go through. We think we understand their issues but as a State, we do not listen to the concerns of children, as is clear from happened to children here over a long number of years. We do not listen to their concerns. We should draw lessons from the Ombudsman for Children in that regard. The best thing we can do to address the issue of bullying is to try to understand what children go through, how it happens and then learn lessons from that.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I think we have lessons to learn about listening to ourselves, let alone about listening to children.

Senator David Cullinane: I accept that. I welcome the recent announcement that parents are to receive special training in an effort to crack down on bullying in our schools. I also support the Minister's decision to allocate €40,000 to an anti-bullying project. Any steps taken by the Minister and his Department to deal with this issue will have the full support of my party.

Like the parents' and teachers' organisations, Sinn Féin is very concerned by the prevalence of this problem, especially in our national school system. The INTO recently estimated that up to 40% of nine year old children had been bullied at some stage since starting primary school.

Parents are key to solving the problem and will be central to addressing it at both primary and secondary levels. I know the Minister places parenting and the role of parents front and centre in how we address the problem and that is the correct approach.

However, while we welcome the aforementioned initiative, it is important to acknowledge that this issue is a difficult and complex one which requires a multi-pronged approach. The diversity of Irish society now is something we should genuinely celebrate. We are a much more multicultural society. There are children in our classrooms today of varied race, ethnicity, sexual orientation as well as physical and intellectual ability. However, that presents challenges, both to teachers and to schools. It also, as we know, throws up bullying. The Minister is aware that people who are homosexual, for example, often experience much higher levels of bullying. A lot of the new Irish, that is, immigrants to this country, have also experienced bullying, as have members of the Traveller community. We need to look at that because separate programmes might be necessary to deal with these specific forms of bullying.

We must also learn lessons from the past. Let us take the example of various gay rights groups. *BelongTo* and *GLEN* were mentioned by previous speakers. They embarked on three nationwide campaigns to tackle homophobia in the education system. Those campaigns actually became a national plan and what underpinned that national plan was a multi-agency approach to dealing with the issue. That is a useful lesson for us in dealing with this issue as we go forward.

It would be remiss of me, while the Minister is here, not to say that the cutbacks in the education system across the board make it much more difficult for us to deal with this problem. I am not going to pretend or claim that cutbacks alone result in bullying in our classrooms. They do not. However, they do make it more difficult for teachers to deal with the issue. Only yesterday, the INTO published figures which showed that 25% of all classes in the city and county of Waterford are so-called “super sized” classes of over 30. Does that present a bigger challenge to those teachers, given the diversity within those classrooms and the issues they have to deal with? Of course it does.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The Senator should ask the INTO to publish the figures for the number of classes that have 15 or fewer pupils.

Senator David Cullinane: I am presenting the figures ---

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I know.

Senator David Cullinane: There may be examples of that. There may be imbalances in the system but it is the Minister’s job to address that. I am presenting the figures for over-sized classes, which are an obvious problem and an obvious reality. Nobody can say that we have not had cutbacks in our education system. We have had many cutbacks and the Minister will say that they were necessary, as part of our economic adjustment. I am simply making the point that the cuts make it much more difficult for us to deal with bullying.

Generally, we support the guidelines which were published recently. Sinn Féin published a Private Member’s Bill on the issue earlier this year which was voted down by the Government. We believe that a legislative underpinning of the guidelines is the way to go but the Minister took a different view. That said, we are supportive of whatever measures the Minister puts in place to deal with what is a very complex issue but one with which we must grapple.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: Tá lúcháir orm go bhfuil an deis seo againn díospóireacht a bheith againn ar an ábhar seo sa Teach inniu. Cuireann an fhadhb seo isteach ar go leor daoine, ní hamháin sa chóras oideachais ach san earnáil fostaíochta freisin. Baineann sé le gach gné den saol. The debate we are having today is a very important one but debates such as this often go unrecognised in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Bullying affects people in many different ways. It affects people from all walks of life and is prevalent in the education system, the workplace and sometimes within families. It is important that we recognise and deal with this issue by developing new policies and by introducing legislation, where necessary.

Bullying occurs where the behaviour of one person has a negative impact on another. Before today's debate I was reading up on various definitions or classifications of bullying and found an interesting one from a Norwegian researcher named Dan Olweus. He defines bullying as when a person is "exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons", and he defines negative action as "when a person intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort upon another person, through physical contact, through words or in other ways". That leads me on to welcoming the Minister's publication, *The Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, which encompasses Dan Olweus's definitions.

The publication comes at an opportune time when the consequences of bullying have become a stark reality for many young people in educational settings, whether at primary, secondary or third level, although the policy only covers the former two. I am very much aware of the cases in my County Donegal constituency that have been mentioned. I know the families involved, so I know what occurred. Young Erin Gallagher, who was 13 years old at the time, and her sister Shannon, who was 15, were taken from this life because of online bullying or cyberbullying as it is commonly referred to. That was very difficult for the families concerned. The bullying obviously evolved over time. If the procedures that are outlined in the publication were in place, could their deaths have been prevented? We do not know, but my firm view is that it certainly could have helped.

Primary and secondary schools have an obligation to consult parents about and to outline and implement what is in the publication in as fast a timeframe as possible. Will it solve all the problems? Probably not. Is there a way to solve all the problems? Probably not. Is there a way to deal with cyberbullying? Probably not, but steps must be taken to eliminate, as far as possible, the consequences of cyberbullying. I remember professionals from the Health Service Executive and the educational sphere talking at the time about the incidents in Donegal and the other incident, too.

The Internet is a huge place, and 54% of all surfing in Ireland is done by the young and not so young on mobile phones. Everyone has a mobile phone. Indeed, every kid has a mobile phone at school, most of which are equipped with Internet capabilities, so the kids are not only carrying that capability around, but talking about it and being exposed to it right through the school and even beyond. Therefore, protocols must be put in place. However, no one government or country can do that without a link-up system being put in place across the globe involving every government and other type of organisation.

The publication is a great step in the right direction, and I commend the Minister and the Department on their action. We now need to see that followed through, which will involve the schools and the management boards stepping up to the plate and putting in place the procedures as quickly as possible. In particular, the Health Service Executive and social workers need to play a more active role. I do not place the blame on a lack of resources when I say that, but

there must be radical, out-of-the-box thinking by healthcare workers across the spectrum on the systems that are in place. It has been proven to be the case that a social work support system cannot be operated on a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. basis because when an individual who has a particular need or wants to speak to someone but it is after 5 p.m., the support is not there. It is unacceptable that the systems are in place but the service is not available. Changing that will involve cross-Department and interdepartmental work.

I welcome the initiative and the importance of having this debate not only today but in six months time so that we see how the recommendations in the report have been implemented on the ground. A group of children in the Killygordon and Crossroads youth club, which is in my constituency, came together to write a report with recommendations, which some 6,000 people living in Donegal signed, and sent it to the Committee on Public Service Oversight and Petitions to ask it to make recommendations on this issue to the Seanad and the Dáil and, by extension, the Government. Most of the recommendations in the youth club's report have been dealt with in the Minister's report, which I welcome.

I am not sure whether we have had a detailed discussion previously in the Seanad or the Dáil on bullying in education. I am not aware that we have; I certainly have not contributed to one, so I welcome that we are debating the issue today. Fianna Fáil will certainly support the Government every step of the way. No one should play politics with this issue and we should all work together on it.

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Eleven Senators have contributed constructively and positively to the debate. In citing some of the matters that stuck out for me, that is not to ignore other matters that were mentioned.

I welcome Senator Power's generous response on cross-party support and the fact that we need to listen to each other, a phrase that Senator Cullinane spoke about. There are continuous examples of good practice and the Senator referred to some of them.

Senator Conway talked about the fact that, sadly, no community is immune from juvenile self-harm or youths taking their own lives. We must be alert to a phenomenon that simply did not exist a long time ago or, if it did, it was not mentioned. It certainly exists now.

Senator Barrett made some interesting and constructive suggestions. He referred to pioneers such as Senator Owen Sheehy-Skeffington and Dr. Cyril Daly who articulated what was unacceptable to say at the time. Indeed, people thought that they were mad and that every parent had the right to beat their child. We have moved on from that. I pay tribute to the late Minister John Boland - he served his apprenticeship as a Senator in this House - for making corporal punishment illegal in our schools. The fact that it is not illegal in our homes has been raised. There is a definition about it and we have been cited on human rights grounds to the Council of Europe and we are dealing with the matter. Senator Burke also suggested that a new black card could be used for unacceptable behaviour. The difficulty is whether that means expulsion, which is why I intervened, or whether by using such a system we would be running away from the problem rather than solving it.

Senator Mary Moran had interesting things to say, particularly on teacher training and the whole area of CPD. I am aware of problems in the staffroom and bullying among colleagues. That is an issue that the teaching unions must face up to, because in a way they are not doing that. It is the elephant in the room, and it includes teachers bullying pupils and other teachers.

We must consider the whole question of how the SPHE curriculum helps to tackle bullying. That takes us back to the reforms of junior certificate. Due to the tyranny of that system, if a subject has no examination it is said not to count when in fact SPHE is clearly a critical subject.

That leads me on to what Senator Zappone had to say. Understandably, she focused on the question of homophobic bullying. The 1993 guidelines made no reference to homophobia - it was a word that could not be spoken about. It will come as no surprise to Members that, in the wider education community, some representative groups did not want to address the issue and took the view that because it was not a problem in their school, it did not exist. However, we all know that homophobia exists. Senator Zappone made an interesting point about progress on the legislation initiated by Senator Power on protection for teachers in the classroom. I will either come back to Senator Zappone on that or I will ask her to follow up that matter with Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter. The A list includes legislation to merge the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Authority and our reforms in that area are destined to go through. However, if we do not make the progress that I and this House want to see, it is open to this House to take whatever action it wants to. I hope that some of the bureaucrats that sit behind some of the committees respond to that threat. I hope it does not come to that. This House is sovereign in its own right and can decide what it wants to initiate. What happens in the future is another matter. We need to have teachers, as they are key role models in the classroom. If somebody who is openly gay or lesbian is part of the normal community, that gives great support and sustenance to young people who are struggling with their own identity. We know this struggle starts at a younger age now.

Senator Clune raised the necessity to promote best practice and a sense of awareness. Senator Mary Ann O'Brien raised the issue of cyberbullying and the cancer of sites such as Snapchat and others. The older generations have always struggled to keep up with younger generations. Some may be old enough to remember a famous book in the 1970s called *Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler, in which a person of considerable age on the west coast of America says to a cohort of young people that the problem with the future is that you will have to cope with change, to which the response is, that is your problem, we are doing it. It is so true. Senator Hayden referred to peer-to-peer mentoring and support. I see that as being of critical importance.

To echo what Senator Barrett said, we have to strengthen the student unions in secondary schools. The Dáil na nÓg and the student councils in many cases are a fiction. It is brushed off and opened out to the inspectorate when they arrive. It does not have teeth. We must try to reinforce student unions at second level. The student unions at second level are very strong in very many EU member states. Because of the inevitable turnover of students, they need more support and be given greater recognition.

It may have been either Senator Zappone or Senator Moran who commented that the implementation of practices must be part of the whole-school evaluation. Maintaining the logbook is critical. If an incident is reported, it should be noted. There should be a logbook, as there would be on a ship of incidents, so that if issues arise and must be dealt with, one should be able to look it up in the logbook to see the incidence of such events in the past number of years. Some people may say that is not a problem in their establishment, but the reality is that if one must report the incident, there is a record which must be communicated to the board of management. I very much welcome the reference to a school app, which seemed like a wonderfully simple and easy thing to get and both Senator Conway and I commented on it. Perhaps Senator Power might get her colleague to send it to us.

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Resources are necessary for most things but the first step to unlocking resource is the willingness to recognise that there is a problem. Money can be found to deal with most problems. We have just allocated €40,000 for 70 training programmes for parents. We will see how that works. Usually, it has been everybody's experience, whether constituents or members of our own party or the wider public, the people who complain the most are never there when one wants to talk to them or they do not show up and they will give one grief when one tries to respond. We can respond to the issues that have been raised. We are in a relatively better place now than we were. First, there is broad social consensus across this House and I think in society generally. I strongly welcome the cross-party support and the constructive engagement and criticism that it entails. I will respond to it.

The next stage is to implement this strategy and to monitor it. There are steps which the Members of this House as public representatives can take. Many Members are invited at regional or national level to parents' councils, management groups to teachers' councils. It is not just during the formal visit of the Minister in which people listen and talk about issues, everybody's engagement is critical and is part and parcel of raising the level of comprehension and support.

Many people felt in the past that one could not do very much about this problem. We can do a lot if we want to and the most important step has been taken. I want to confirm that it has been reaffirmed in this House that the most important step we can take is to acknowledge that we do have a problem, and that we must confront it, because sadly the poignant tragedy in County Donegal, in which two sisters died, is just one of the tragedies that brings home to us the extreme consequence of the failure to recognise the problem.

An Cathaoirleach: That concludes the statements. When is it proposed to sit again?

Senator Maurice Cummins: On Tuesday next, at 2.30 p.m

Adjournment Matters

Broadband Services Provision

Senator Thomas Byrne: Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach as ucht an deis seo a thabhairt dom an t-ábhar tábhachtach seo a ardú ar an Athló inniu.

I thank the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Quinn, for taking the Adjournment debate. I listened with interest to the debate. He has taken a very progressive approach to the issue of bullying.

I was contacted about the broadband service in Scoil na Tríonóide, Lismullen, a national school in the Hill of Tara area outside Navan, County Meath. It is impossible for the staff to download an e-mail. While the school is well equipped and has whiteboard technology, it is not possible to do anything online because of the lack of broadband.

I know the Department of Education and Skills has a scheme in place to provide broadband

to schools. It also has a more advanced scheme for second level schools. The broadband programme is certainly failing in Lismullen national school. After the people of Lismullen contacted me, the parents from Scoil Na Ultain Naofa, Baile Ghib, a Gaeltacht school between Navan and Kells, who experience the same problem with the inadequate broadband service contacted me independently. They too cannot open e-mails. Will the Minister outline the Department's position on this issue?

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I thank Senator Byrne for raising this important matter in relation to broadband. I am very aware of the importance of broadband for integrating ICT into teaching and learning. The ICT in schools programme addresses new policy challenges and opportunities, and Members will know all about access to broadband.

What we are doing for the 730 post-primary schools will be completed by the end of this year. Each of these schools will be connected up to the 100 Mb highway, which will enable them to access broadband.

If the schools in Lismullen and elsewhere are experiencing problems with broadband, the businesses located beside them must be experiencing it as well.

Senator Thomas Byrne: The schools are located in isolated areas. The businesses are suffering but there are just a few of them.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Yesterday I attended the launch of the schools digital programme. What I am hoping to do is see what we can do to start to link up the 3,200 primary schools to the service. Obviously isolated schools have a difficulty. I will raise the matter with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Pat Rabbitte, to see what we can do about rural areas. We must move towards connecting primary schools that are in isolated areas, otherwise their very survival will be difficult to sustain.

I have a note that might be of interest to Senator Byrne. Through the public procurement process, the Department has gone as far as possible to reduce the reliance on slower services or in this case non-existence services, and has seen the number of schools operating on a satellite connection fall from approximately 1,800 to 200 at present. Under the procurement process in 2012, the only broadband solution proposed for Scoil na Trionóide was satellite. Satellite connections and some other slower connections were only awarded where no other solution was proposed by the suppliers in the framework and contracts for these connections were only awarded for one year. I am referring to 2012. These schools, including Scoil na Trionóide, were retendered for a mini competition in August this year to see if better solutions were available. Officials in the Department are in the process of evaluating and awarding contracts from this mini competition. Contracts are being awarded to suppliers for 109 schools, which at present have satellite connections. This will see these schools move from satellite to faster broadband connections. I am pleased to say that Scoil na Trionóide is one of these schools. In relation to the remaining schools which were tendered under the mini competition awards, these awards will be made in the coming weeks, taking budgetary constraints into account. The Senator might keep in touch with me in this regard.

Senator Thomas Byrne: I am pleased with the Minister's positive statement. The school was slightly aware of what was going on but those involved felt everything was proceeding slowly. I take comfort from the Minister's comments that broadband will be provided in Lis-

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mullen school shortly and I am encouraged by what he said. There are other two schools I would like to check, one of which is Scoil Ultain Naofa in Baile Ghib. One of the parents attended a meeting there last night and relayed information to me. I will check with departmental officials as to whether the other school is on the list. There may be good news for that school as well.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I would be happy to deal with that.

Fodder Crisis

Senator Lorraine Higgins: I thank the Minister for coming to the House to take this matter. I would like to raise the fodder crisis earlier this year and what can be done to help farmers and to prevent future crises. I commend the Department for Agriculture, Food and the Marine on all the measures it put in place last spring to assist farmers in dealing with the crisis. The funds to help to transport fodder from the Continent and the availability of emergency assistance were instrumental in helping them survive this crisis. Thanks to the efforts of the Government and the good weather this summer farmers have, on average, an 8% surplus in feed for their animals. However, this figure is based on a strict 140-day winter feeding period, which does not allow for the risks of an early winter or a late spring and, despite surpluses for some farmers, one in five still faces a 20% deficit in food supply.

The Government's efforts fall a little short in the provision of longer-term assistance for farmers and the prevention of another serious crisis. The fodder crisis, although alleviated, is not over and farmers face even more problems with the reduction in the cost of beef. It is estimated they are losing up to €5 million per week. They also have reduced stock following the past winter. We cannot allow our farmers to suffer under these circumstances. Although I realise we are in times of austerity, this year's €1 million allocation for the fodder crisis is nothing near the amount that should be provided to assist farmers to head off another crisis this winter.

Additionally, importing fodder from the Continent turned into a logistical nightmare with some co-operatives only receiving 2.5% of what they ordered on time. Does the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and his Department feel this is an acceptable way to deal with such a crisis? The importation of fodder undoubtedly helped but we need solutions within Ireland, which is why I tabled this matter.

I propose that the Government sets up an audit committee to audit all publicly-owned grasslands as a means of identifying those lands that could be cut in the event of a fodder crisis. We need solutions within the country and using publicly-owned grasslands is a way to do this. While importing from the Continent is helpful, we can help ourselves by utilising the resources at our disposal. A number of farmers have contacted me to say next year's problems are starting now and, therefore, we need to ensure they have a reserve into the future. Many farmers feel the only thing coming down on them these days is rain. We must ensure the Government is proactive in helping with the lingering effects of the crisis earlier this year as well as addressing the potential for future crises in the coming years. The setting up of an audit commitment to examine publicly-owned grasslands is a necessary step towards preventing another crisis.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: On behalf of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, I thank the Senator for raising the important issue of fodder availability on farms for the coming winter. Furthermore I would like to convey the Minister's regrets that he cannot be here today,

due to previous commitments. This is an issue the Minister and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine have been monitoring and dealing with for many months. The Senator will be aware that a range of measures have been put in place in recognition of the difficulties experienced by a great number of farmers across the country resulting from the unseasonable weather in 2012 and earlier this year, which led to an extraordinary fodder shortage.

As part of the Government's response to the issue, an inter-agency fodder committee was established in early summer under the chairmanship of Dr. Tom Kelly of Teagasc. The committee comprises representatives of all agricultural stakeholders, including a representative from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine. The committee not only monitored the fodder situation but also co-ordinated actions to ensure sufficient fodder would be conserved for next winter, which is at the centre of the Senator's concerns. The committee ensured a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of a strong advisory campaign to encourage farmers to maximise grass growth and conserve sufficient fodder for next winter. It produced a fodder budget worksheet, which was widely publicised and allowed farmers to make decisions regarding feed planning for next winter.

In addition, the committee conducted a fodder survey earlier this month. The survey shows a major improvement in availability of fodder for the season ahead, with an overall average surplus of 8% across the country when considered on the basis of a normal winter period. The survey noted that with prudent management of existing stocks, along with appropriate supplementation with concentrate feeds, farmers are well positioned to come through this winter from a fodder perspective. The survey also shows that 72% of farmers said they had a "good" supply of grass going into the autumn grazing period, with the remainder saying they have "normal" levels of grass available in fields.

In April this year, a fodder transport subsidy scheme was established to help alleviate the difficulties being encountered by farmers. The scheme reduced the cost of imported fodder to farmers by approximately one third and supported the importation of almost 2,800 loads of imported fodder, amounting to more than 40,000 tonnes. A total of 81 different bodies participated in the scheme and the Department is paying claims as they are received and processed. I thank all those involved in implementing the scheme and making it a success.

In recognition of the severe difficulties experienced by farmers due to a shortage of fodder and the serious risk of a further shortage this autumn and winter, a temporary and targeted adjustment of two provisions of the nitrates regulations to support additional fodder production on Irish farms were introduced, that is, an extension of the period for the application of chemical fertiliser from 15 September to the end of the month and the discounting of the phosphorus content of a portion of meal fed to livestock.

The Senator will appreciate that publicly-owned grasslands are the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for the Office of Public Works, OPW. During the height of the fodder crisis, both Dublin and Shannon airports provided the grass cuttings from their lands to farmers for fodder use. This was a welcome initiative which provided much-needed additional capacity at that time. However, the favourable grass growing conditions over the summer, which has continued into September, have been of great benefit to farmers in addressing the fodder issue for the forthcoming winter. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine along with Teagasc and other agricultural stakeholders will continue to actively monitor the issue. The Minister has indicated that he will also consult our colleague, Minister of State with responsibility for the OPW, Deputy Brian Hayes, with a view to assessing the pos-

sibility of an audit of publicly-owned grasslands.

Senator Lorraine Higgins: I thank the Minister for his response. I would like to convey my thanks to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. This would be a progressive step and it would complement the committee's strategy to alleviate future fodder crises.

Garda Operations

Senator Averil Power: Today is Arthur's day, the annual event where Diageo encourages people to go to the pub and raise a toast to Arthur. The company has spent a significant amount on advertising, promotions and live music with the objective of getting as many people as possible to drink Guinness tonight. The vast majority of people will have a fun and safe night out. They will have a few pints, listen to live music and go home without any trouble but, unfortunately, if tonight is anything like previous years, there will be an increase of up to 30% in ambulance call outs and the Garda will have to deal with an increase in public order offences as people who raise a toast to Arthur at 17.59 fall onto the streets many hours later in Dublin and elsewhere.

Earlier this week, I called on Diageo to cover the additional policing costs of today because there is a precedent for this in the context of concerts and sporting events. For example, it will be the case on Saturday for the All-Ireland hurling final replay when the GAA will cover the cost of the additional gardaí deployed in Croke Park because they are not on normal public duty. The same applies to concerts. If MCD or other promoters put on a concert, they must cover the additional policing costs. I call on Diageo to do the same.

The company's spokesperson when interviewed on various programmes during the week has questioned whether today is any different from St. Patrick's Day or any other day when people go out to enjoy a few pints. However, while it is one thing for people to celebrate an official national holiday, sporting event or a similar occasion, it is another for a commercial company to concoct a national drinking day or a national alcohol day, as it has been called by Christy Moore.

2 o'clock

Diageo, as it has admitted in programmes during the week, has put together the event to get people out on a night when they would not ordinarily drink. It is to boost consumption of alcohol. It is a commercial event and it is wrong that a company would take the profits from that commercial event but not cover the public cost of it. Given that additional gardaí will need to be rostered tonight, they will not be available to work on some other night during the year. The extra pressure put on our health services tonight will have the same effect. We all know we are working in an environment of reduced budgets. That is why I issued my call to Diageo earlier in the week.

The front page of this morning's *Irish Examiner* reported that Diageo has agreed to contribute to some of the policing costs of the event. I know that the Minister, Deputy Quinn, is here representing the Minister for Justice and Equality and is not the Minister directly responsible, but I am hoping he can give me more details on what the company has agreed to do. Has it agreed to cover the full cost of the additional gardaí working on the streets tonight or just part of it? Perhaps the Minister can give us an estimate of the additional cost of Arthur's day on the

State. The Minister is always very frank as he was in the debate we just concluded. I ask him to give his views on the event.

We all enjoy a few drinks - I celebrated last week's all-Ireland victory in my local pub along with half of the people of Dublin. I am looking forward to going out and having birthday celebration drinks with a friend of mine tomorrow night. However, I also accept there is a problem with excess alcohol consumption in Ireland, which is why I have an issue with an event being concocted purely for the purpose of encouraging people to drink more. In recent years the alcohol industry has emphasised taglines such as "drink responsibly". Its representatives tell us they get the message that they need to move away from promoting consumption and be more responsible in their marketing. That is why I have a concern about this event. It is not because I am a teetotaler or anti-drink. I believe it is marketed in a very cynical way. I ask the Minister for his personal views on the event.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: As the Senator has pointed out, I am responding to her on behalf of the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter, who unfortunately is not available, and he has asked me to thank the Senator for raising these matters.

As the Senator may be aware, under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Síochána Vote and, accordingly, he is responsible for operational expenditure incurred by the force. Section 30 of the 2005 Act also provides a statutory basis for the Garda Commissioner to charge for police services on a non-public duty basis for certain events. This is a function which is undertaken by the Commissioner independently of the Minister for Justice and Equality and his Department.

The Minister has consulted with the Garda authorities which have indicated that Garda financial records are not maintained in a format which would provide a breakdown of the costs incurred in policing activities linked to the set of events the Senator has referred to. I wonder why they are not, but that is the situation at the moment. I would have thought that appropriations-in-aid would come in separately as would be the norm for other things, but that is another day's work. In addition, the Minister has been advised that the extraction of this information would require a significant use of resources - the usual excuse.

With regard to the question of charging for the relevant policing services involved, this is, as I have mentioned, a matter for the Garda Commissioner. In that context, I understand that arrangements have been made with the organisers of some of the events in question for the recoupment of costs in respect of the additional policing requirements that will arise. At present all of the relevant details are not available but I can confirm that the Minister is strongly in favour of this approach.

The Minister has asked me to say that he fully appreciates the concerns that have been raised by the Senator. In the overall context, the Minister would like to stress that, while people are fully entitled to enjoy the Arthur's day events, personal responsibility should play an important part in the way in which they behave.

From that perspective the Minister urges everyone attending the events to drink alcohol sensibly. As we are aware, this has not always been the case in previous years and the result has been that very heavy demands have been placed on the emergency services, not to mention the personal consequences for the individuals directly involved. In particular, the Minister emphasises the need for care on the part of persons who may be driving, especially either today or

tomorrow, and their responsibilities to other road users and to themselves. We are all aware of the consequences of drink-driving which has caused so many serious injuries and fatalities on our roads. Unfortunately, this has, on occasions, been the result of reckless driving by young people who have consumed large amounts of alcohol. In this context, the Minister would encourage parents of young people to urge them, not only not to drink and drive, but also not to get into a car with a driver who has been drinking.

The Minister has asked me to express his appreciation for the work done by An Garda Síochána in the policing of major events. It is often a very difficult task and at all times it is the policy of the force that the safety of the public must be the primary consideration. This will be the priority for the Garda personnel who are charged with policing the events the Senator has mentioned.

As regards my personal view, I would be very similarly disposed to the attitude the Senator has expressed. I do not believe we need specific saints of alcohol to encourage us to come out and have a go. It is a marketing event and I just hope it is not abused. As a nation we need to learn how to drink. I have made reference elsewhere to youngsters. In places where alcohol is banned or is at a prohibitively high price, there is still alcohol abuse. We need to get that balance right. I do not have a recipe as to how best to do it, except education.

Senator Averil Power: I thank the Minister. I appreciate he is responding for the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter. I am surprised, as the Minister has said, that the Department of Justice and Equality is not able to get figures from the Garda Síochána about the extra staff working tonight. I have spoken to gardaí working in different stations across Dublin city and they have said that they have them because obviously they know how many extra gardaí are working tonight. They say they need to staff the night as if it was a very busy Saturday night rather than an ordinary Thursday. I ask the Minister to ask the Minister for Justice and Equality to make an effort to seek those figures from the Garda. There is a district network there and it is not very difficult to ask the superintendent of each district to report back on the additional staff needed to be rostered to make Arthur's day safe.

I note from the response the Department of Justice and Equality supplied to the Minister that the organisers of some of the events this evening have agreed to pay for the policing costs, with "some" being the key word. I ask the Minister to convey to the Minister for Justice and Equality my strong view that because this is a commercial night from which it will make significant profit, Diageo should cover the all of the costs of Arthur's day. It should also be done in a consistent way across the country. I gather considerable pressure has been put on the company by the Garda in Cork, which is why the story is on the front page of the *Irish Examiner* today. Gardaí have been commenting to newspapers and raising it as an issue in recent weeks and that seems to be the reason behind the response in Cork. Is the same thing happening in Dublin and in other cities?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I will certainly bring this debate to the attention of the Minister for Justice and Equality and his departmental officials. I suspect that the note that was prepared was written in advance of what was reported in the newspapers today. No doubt the Minister will get a report of that. I share the Senator's broad sentiments that if this is to be a recurring event, an accountancy system should be introduced to enable extraction of that cost detail relatively simply - we do not want to overload it. If there is a spike on the normal traffic coming through emergency departments in our hospitals, it should be possible to monitor that also.

Seanad Éireann

The Seanad adjourned at 2.10 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 1 October 2013.