Déardaoin, 13 Samhain 2014
Thursday, 13 November 2014
Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

_________
Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.

_________

Business of Seanad

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I have received notice from Senator Rónán Mullen 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 implement a programme of funding, support and promotion of the rapid prompting method of education for children with learning disabilities.

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

The need for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to clarify the current position in respect of funding for the regeneration programme in Knocknaheeny, County Cork, and in particular if funding will be provided for the completion of phases 2A, 2B and phase 3 in 2015.

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

Order of Business

Senator Ivana Bacik: The Order of Business is No. 1, statements on commemoration planning, to be taken at 12.30 p.m., with the contributions of group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes and those of all other Senators not to exceed five minutes.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Yesterday, on the Order of Business, I raised the move towards a compromise between the Minister for Education and Skills and the teaching unions. It seemed that common sense had prevailed. However, overnight, the teachers’ unions, specifically the Teachers Union of Ireland, indicated it may embark on a series of one-day strikes. This has
not been supported by the representatives of the students, the representatives of the parents and my colleague in the Dáil, Deputy Charlie McConalogue, speaking on behalf of Fianna Fáil. My understanding is that both sides are very close in terms of a resolution on the junior cycle reforms programme and that the main bone of contention is about the teacher’s assessment. The Teachers Union of Ireland, TUI, in particular, and the other teachers’ unions do not want internal assessment. There is a proposal on the floor that these assessments, the 40% in relation to the junior cycle examinations, would be carried out by external examiners. In other words, the sides are very close on this. Perhaps there is a little bit of posturing going on on both sides. Perhaps there is a suggestion that neither side wants to back down because it might lose face. I appeal to the teaching unions and to the Minister for Education and Skills that she would compromise a little bit more on this and that perhaps the teachers’ unions might then move a little bit closer and we could have a resolution of this potential calamity that would be inflicted on pupils and on parents. I ask the Deputy Leader to use her good offices in this regard because she is a member of the Minister’s party.

I also wish to draw the attention of the House to the recent decision by a German court to refuse the payment of unemployment benefits to a Romanian national who had not been working in Germany or had, my indications are, refused to work but still wanted to claim unemployment benefit. As a result of this decision, the Court of Justice of the European Union, which is the highest court in the European Union, has now found in favour of the German state. This means that any member state of the European Union can refuse to pay unemployment benefit to those within its borders who refuse to seek work. I am not sure if this is a problem of significance in this country. Our colleagues in the UK have grasped this as being, as they see it, the opening of a door to the ultimate aim of a bunch of eurosceptics within the Tory Party to stop migration into the UK from EU countries, not from outside. I ask the Deputy Leader to establish if the Minister for Social Protection has any plans to introduce legislation in this country in light of the decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union.

I congratulate and wish the newly-appointed Irish ambassador to the Vatican, to the Holy See, Ms Emma Madigan, every success in her new role. It has been a ground-breaking decision on two fronts. One is that she is the first woman to be so appointed to the Holy See. She presented her credentials to the Holy Father within the last few days. She will be a permanent resident there. This overturns a decision taken by the former Tánaiste, Deputy Gilmore, three years ago, when we were terminating the appointment of an ambassador to the Holy See. Following a very strenuous lobby - particularly by a group called Ireland Stand Up, that many of us would have visited during its lobby briefing at the time - I am sure they and all of us would welcome the new appointment.

As we are entering into a weekend of sporting activity, I wish the Irish football team every success against Scotland and congratulate Stephanie Roche of Peamount United and now working with a French football club on being one of the top ten contenders for the FIFA Puskás goal of the year. I would recommend to Members, if they have not seen the goal, to look at it on YouTube. Finally, I wish everybody involved in the rugby at the weekend the very best of luck. Go raibh maith agat.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I more than broadly agree with the various contributions of Senator Mooney on the junior cycle reform programme. Hopefully a desirable compromise will be achieved. I note what was said, it was interesting and I look forward to the Deputy Leader’s response in regard to whether there is, or is likely to be, anything following that European Court of Justice ruling which was referred to.
I very much welcome the appointment of Ms Emma Madigan as permanent ambassador to the Holy See. That is hugely important and of great significance for us. As the Holy See has been mentioned, I would like to remind the House that this is the Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty weekend in Killarney. He was the scarlet pimpernel of the Vatican-----

**Senator Martin Conway:** It will be a good night tomorrow night.

**Senator Paul Coghlan:** ----- or so he was known. There will be nights in Killarney. There is the humanitarian award on Saturday night and a function also on Sunday. All are very welcome.

I welcome the fact that it now looks likely, thanks be to God, that the Central Bank might ease the 20% deposit requirement for first-time purchasers. That is hugely important. A sum of 10% is enough. It is a huge strain on young people. Now that we have been given the variation in house prices, particularly with regard to the proximity of national schools, it makes it more important that it be eased and made more amenable for people. I greatly welcome that.

**Senator Sean D. Barrett:** Go raibh maith agat, a Leas-Chathaoirligh. I ask the Deputy Leader if we could have a debate on the rules that Senator Coghlan has just described. It is stated in the Nyberg report that had we had those rules on a 20% deposit and three and a half times income, the banks would have saved €62 billion. That is virtually all of the €64 billion we needed to bail them out. There is opposition in the property sector and from the banks. However, we have to have macro-prudential rules to ensure we do not have another bubble. These rules worked in other countries. However, I agree with my learned friend, Senator Coghlan, that there is something to debate here. When the Governor raised the rules first, there was a strong wave of opposition. It was not a moment of unthinking behaviour by the Governor of the Central Bank. These rules have proven highly successful in stopping the kind of bubbles which did so much damage to this country.

I note the decision this week of Kerry County Council to declare itself an island.

**Senator Paul Coghlan:** Who is building the moat?

**Senator Sean D. Barrett:** In the opinion polls this morning, the question “Should Kerry go it alone?” has a strong majority in favour.

**Senator Martin Conway:** I know a very good man for president of Kerry.

**Senator Sean D. Barrett:** I understand that the island status is already there, in Valentia, the Blasket Islands, the Skelligs and so on. Of course we would miss Senators O’Sullivan, Moloney, Daly and Senator Coghlan himself. However, would the right side of this not be that the other 31 counties might win the Sam Maguire on the odd occasion? I wish Kerry the best of luck in its new status.

**Senator Michael Comiskey:** I am delighted to have attended the launch yesterday evening of the 2016 commemorations in the GPO. I look forward to Seán Mac Diarmada’s birthplace in Kiltyclogher, County Leitrim, and the cottage becoming a major tourism attraction. It is in really good condition as, I suppose, Seán Mac Diarmada left it in early 1912 or 1913. I look forward to the cottage in Kiltyclogher playing a pivotal role in the commemorations in 2016. Towards the end of this month, the interpretive centre in Kiltyclogher will be opened. That is a step in the right direction. It will be a major asset. As my colleague promotes Killarney as a
tourism destination, I would be delighted to promote north Leitrim and Kiltyclogher as a tourism destination in the north west.

I welcome the outcome of the beef talks last night. Hopefully this will bring an end to the problems that we have had between factories and farmers and that this will increase the incomes on farms and get farmers back to doing what they do best, namely, producing a top quality product for the market.

**Senator Terry Leyden**: I wish to bring the Seanad a bit away from its parochial situation to look to the stars and to mention Laurence O’Rourke from Westmeath, one of the joint leaders of the Rosetta project. He is one of the two scientists coordinating the Rosetta mission at the European Space Astronomy Centre in Madrid, a mission that has been very successful. It will give people great support and hope that such a project can be brought about in this era. He graduated from NUI, Maynooth, with an honours degree in physics and mathematics and went on to UCC where he obtained a master’s degree in micro-electronics. The asteroid “9524 O’Rourke” was named in his honour. He stated in *Astronomy Ireland* that this mission was to unlock an icy treasure chest. It is a great achievement, but it is more than that.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach**: Does the Senator have a question for the Leader?

**Senator Terry Leyden**: This is something historic which has been ten years in the making, as the probe has made a 4 billion mile journey through the solar system. It is a great success story and nice that an Irish scientist is involved. That is why I would like to recognise him in the Seanad and us to send our best wishes to him in Madrid and wish him well on this great achievement for Ireland and the world.

**Senator Martin Conway**: Like others, I welcome the launch of the 2016 commemoration ceremonies programme which took place yesterday in the GPO. It is fitting that the Minister for the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is coming to the House today and in his absence I thank the Leader for facilitating this discussion. We talk about lasting legacies. The 2016 commemorations will have an impact and, I hope, rekindle an interest in our history among young people, in particular. I would like to see a real lasting legacy from the 2016 commemorations, namely, a rekindling of the teaching of history in second level schools. It is most regrettable to learn that history is no longer a desired subject at leaving certificate level. Senator Paschal Mooney spoke about the junior certificate cycle. It is my understanding that the teaching of history will not be compulsory at that level either and that many schools will not even offer history as a subject. This is something about which I am really concerned because it suggests that in 20 or 30 years time many more young people will not have any understanding of the 1916 Rising, the First World War and its impact and the Second World War, the development of Nazism and that terrible period in the world’s history. We cannot plan for the future and certainly cannot equip young people for it unless they have an understanding of past events, both good and bad. Will the Deputy Leader facilitate the Minister for Education and Skills in coming to the House for a debate on the teaching of history at second level? The commemorations in 2016 present us with an wonderful opportunity to do something tangible in developing a love of history among young people.

**Senator Marc MacSharry**: May we have a debate on the resourcing of the health service, in particular, diabetes services throughout the country? Tomorrow is World Diabetes Day. I ask for the support of the House in seeking resources for the north west region where, for the first time, insulin pump therapy for people with diabetes is being made available at Sligo Regional
Hospital. It does, however, require substantial investment. While I appreciate that we are in very difficult times from a capital and current expenditure perspective, there have been some improvements in the national finances and I hope additional resources can be made available. I met ten year old Troy Gilgarra who was promoting World Diabetes Day and he explained how he had to travel to Dublin for treatment. We now have the potential to provide this treatment in the north west, in one of only four centres throughout the country. However, the decision to allow this service to go ahead - we have a qualified endocrinologist on site - is not enough. Additional capital support is required to have a modular unit brought up to speed.

Following on from my unsuccessful amendment yesterday, I propose an amendment to the Order of Business that the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government come to the House to explain the discriminatory approach he is taking to small local authorities, in particular, Sligo County Council where it appears that at a secret meeting lately with his colleagues in the Labour Party and Fine Gael he indicated his intentions to abolish the council without providing necessary support for it. This is an important debate to have and these questions need to be answered. As I said yesterday, for the Minister to do this to small local authorities - in this instance, the people of Sligo - is to do to the north west what Brussels, the ECB and Jean-Claude Trichet did to Ireland.

Senator Lorraine Higgins: I am calling for a debate on our financial regulations in the light of an issue brought to my attention by a constituent recently. A lady contacted me about the fact that her mortgage with Bank of Scotland had been sold to a private equity firm, Lone Star. The concerns she expressed were twofold. One relates to the fact that the transfer was made in breach of her mortgage agreement with the bank, which clearly provides that “information will only be disclosed to a bank or financial institution on the understanding that it intends to participate in funding the mortgage”. While I understand Lone Star subsequently acquired a banking licence through buying out Start Mortgages Limited, it is not established as a bank or financial institution as per the requirements to be met under her mortgage agreement. In exacerbating the problem Bank of Scotland gave no substantial information to its customers on the future role of Lone Star in dealing with their mortgages and has not told them about the possible consequences of its actions, which is contrary to the Central Bank of Ireland’s code of practice on the transfer of mortgages. The code provides that a loan secured by a mortgage on a residential property may not be transferred without the written consent of the borrower. I am clear that my constituent did not give her consent. Furthermore, she was very clear that she had not been informed when Bank of Scotland rebranded first as Halifax and subsequently as Certus when it became the public face of the bank in Ireland. Presuming that the loans were sold at a discount, as I would expect when private equity companies are involved, this begs the question as to why it did not give its customers the opportunity to buy out their mortgages at a discount in the first place. I have written to the CEO of Bank of Scotland, the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland and also the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform about what has happened in this instance. I am also looking for the Minister for Finance to come to the House for a debate on the issue of financial regulation in Ireland as it may apply to the Gordon Gekkos of the private equity world.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I want to address the issue of teachers as addressed by Senator Paschal Mooney. We are at a very delicate stage in negotiations between both sides which have moved a considerable distance such that not a lot divides them. I would hate anything to be said by anybody at this stage that would derail what are very sensitive negotiations. The teachers of Ireland have driven the economy to where it is. They have been willing at all
I want to address the issue of the 20% deposit suggested by the Central Bank of Ireland. I would have no difficulty in watching that figure fall back to 10%, but most of us in this House when we purchased our first house needed substantial savings before we could take out a mortgage. The country went mad. We were offering people not just 100% but 120% mortgages. It was a case of “buy the house, buy the furniture and buy two cars while you are at it and we will stick it all on the mortgage.” It was long-term borrowing for short-term purchases. That is what destroyed the country. If we are going to try to relax Central Bank of Ireland regulations, I agree with Senator Sean D. Barrett that we need a debate in this House to explore fully what the implications would be. I want to see first-time buyers of houses, but I do not want to them to be locked into crazy debts for the rest of their lives. Before we start mucking about with the macro economy - the house purchasing economy - we need to sit down and think very carefully about what we are doing. Whether we like it, there is a bubble on the east coast. I have seen houses put on the market for €390,000 sold for €480,000, which is crazy. I appreciate that I have exceeded the time, so I will finish. I have concerns about local authorities and their funding and about local education and training boards. All of these issues are a concern, and for that reason I will support and second Senator MacSharry’s call for the Minister, Deputy Kelly, to come to the House.

Senator Colm Burke: We have not had a debate in the House for some time on the issue of local authority housing and its future. We need a discussion on this issue. Many people whose economic circumstances have changed would be prepared to purchase their houses from the local authority, but there is no provision in place to allow them to do so. It is important that people be given that opportunity. They have put time and effort into improving the houses for which they are paying rent and would like to hold onto them. They would like to continue to live in the same areas because they are part of their communities. They should be given the opportunity to purchase their homes. We need a discussion on this and it would be helpful if the Minister came to the House to deal with the issue and inform us whether a programme will be introduced over the next 12 months that will allow for purchase. Economic circumstances have changed for some people and they would have the ability to purchase a houses and service a mortgage. Some people have sufficient money that they do not to need to borrow money to acquire their homes.

We also need to look at the issue of first-time buyers and the requirement for a 20% deposit. A number of years ago, the system did not require people to have any deposit to acquire a property, and they came through that system quite successfully. I am not talking about 110% or 100% mortgages, but about a system in which people surrendered local authority houses and bought their own properties privately. I do not agree with how that system operated, but people were able to buy property without a substantial deposit and were able to service the loans they got. We need to look at what has happened in the past and plan for the future. We have not had that debate here yet.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Bhi díospóireacht an-mhaith againn anseo inniu le chúrsai aiscaireachta. Fáilte roimhe sin, ach tá neart eile fós le rá faoin ábhar sin.

I concur with fellow Senators who have spoken about the space mission and the brilliance
of being able to land a probe on a comet that is hurtling through the stratosphere, or whichever sphere it is. I am not a scientist, so I would not be 100% sure of the sphere. I was told about a comment made on the radio by a lady who lives in the Aran Islands to the effect that it was absolutely fantastic that they could land a machine the size of a dishwasher on a comet, but they still cannot deliver proper broadband to the Aran Islands. Hopefully, we can get some of the brilliant scientists involved in that project to come and help us out with the technological challenges we face in rural Ireland.

I thank Members of the House and others who have congratulated me on being appointed party spokesperson on the diaspora, a challenge I look forward to. Over the past couple of years, I have been lucky to travel to North America, Canada and a number of European cities, where I have spoken with Irish citizens. Some of those people are doing well and others not so well. I welcome the report published today by the Oireachtas committee regarding voting rights for the diaspora. The report recommends that the Government should accept the principle that voting rights should be extended to Irish citizens abroad, that it should proceed to design a workable system to accommodate that and that an electoral commission be established to implement these recommendations. We have had a number of general discussions on this issue, but we should have a debate on the report and its recommendations. I call on the Deputy Leader to take this into consideration.

**Senator Michael Mullins:** I agree with much of what was said by Senator Craughwell about mortgages. We all understand the situation he outlined. Those of us who are a little advanced in years recall the torture we had to go through to secure a loan for a home years ago. We need to ensure we have a balance in the mortgage arena, but we do not want to disincentivise young people from owning their homes. I support the call for a full debate in the House and I believe it would be appropriate. We never want to see a repeat of a situation in which banks were offering people unlimited cash to buy jeeps, second homes, home fit-outs or landscaping - loans they would never be in a position to repay.

I join in the good wishes to our new ambassador to the Holy See, Emma Madigan. As one who campaigned strongly for our embassy to the Holy See to be reopened, I was pleased to hear that she presented her credentials to the Holy Father in Rome this week. I look forward to the reopening of the embassy in the near future.

I wish to draw the attention of Members to a document presented to us yesterday, entitled Winter Ready, which was published by the Office of Emergency Planning and the Department of Defence in conjunction with various State agencies and local authorities. The document provides sound, solid advice to citizens on how to prepare for severe weather conditions in the home, on the roads, on farms and in schools. I know we will probably not get the opportunity to discuss this document in the House, but as Members we should e-mail it as widely as possible because many people do not prepare properly for severe weather conditions. Many lives could be saved and much hardship reduced by proper planning. I commend the document to everybody as an essential read, particularly for the elderly. It is incumbent on all of us to publicise its contents and help people prepare for the coming months.

**Senator Mary M. White:** I am privileged to have been appointed by Deputy Micheál Martin to the Taoiseach’s commemoration committee for 2016. Because of illness, I was unable to attend many of the committee’s meetings last year. However, I am now reinvigorated. We had a meeting last week, and last night our programme was officially launched at the site of the Easter Rising of 1916. This was an emotional event at which the Minister, Deputy Heather
Humphreys, stressed that inclusivity would be a central principle of the commemoration programme and that she was keen to look forward and evaluate how far we had come as a nation.

A former Senator, Maurice Manning, said in a recent report in the *Irish Independent* that it was disappointing that the 50-year celebration in 1966 was not inclusive of all the different strands of opinion on the island. He said the commemoration had been a celebration of the mainstream nationalist tradition, with no place for those who did not belong. This time there has been a huge change, and inclusivity has become a major aspect. My experience from meetings all over the country is that, as on so many issues, the people are ahead of the politicians. People whose relatives fought and died in the Great War can now hold their heads high and no longer be embarrassed that those relatives fought on the side of the British. Inclusivity is the core of this issue.

I would like to take this opportunity to spell out what is said in the Proclamation. It states:

The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally...

The vision is of working together to remember, reconcile and imagine our future in the next 100 years and celebrating it all in 2016.

**Senator Feargal Quinn:** I do not know if we have had a debate in recent times on post offices around the country. Post offices are facing serious threats. It is reported that An Post sent a letter to postmasters - I do not think it was published - indicating that the distribution of dole payments through post offices was likely to be discontinued. This would mean a cut in income of between €4,000 and €30,000, depending on the post office involved. On the basis of that danger, I understand that as many as 500 post offices could close. I do not suggest there is an easy answer to this because it just does not make sense. People are not sending as many letters by post as they did in the past and the figures in this regard are unlikely to improve. An Post is also planning to develop 20 depots for parcel deliveries. These changes pose a threat to the traditional post office. If we want to maintain a network of post offices around the country, just as we want to maintain Garda stations and other services, we will probably have to find other work for post offices to do and they will have to find other work for themselves. There are examples in other countries of the work they can do and I believe we can do something to encourage new ideas by having a debate in the House at some point in the near future. It is strange for An Post to state people are not going to send letters or parcels as they did in the past without suggesting other functions for post offices in order to maintain them. It would be worthwhile to have a debate on the subject.

The debate last night on Seanad reform was very useful. We did not get nearly as much done as we thought we might, but at least we covered a range of areas that had not previously been covered. The Taoiseach has announced that he will set up a working group to investigate reform of the Seanad. I hope it is established very soon. I am disappointed to hear that nobody from this House will be on the working group, but we should at least ensure we debate the issue and that we reform the Seanad.

**Senator John Crown:** I echo Senator Feargal Quinn’s hopes that the working group on Seanad reform will be productive. My own sense is that it should comprise people who are committed Seanad reformers and have spoken, acted, written and theorised on the issue. It should not include anybody who advocated for abolition of the Seanad. It would be strangely
counterproductive to have an anti-reformist fifth column within the group. I feel very strongly about this.

**Senator Paul Coghlan:** It seems this House is all encompassing.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Senator John Crown to continue, without interruption.

**Senator Paul Coghlan:** I apologise

**Senator John Crown:** The issue I wish to raise-----

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Senator Paul Coghlan is impeding Senator John Crown’s flow of speech.

**Senator John Crown:** Several articles in the newspapers today refer to the issue of clinical genetics, an issue I have previously highlighted in the House. I ask the Deputy Leader to request the Minister for Health or one of the Ministers of State at the Department of Health to give his or her special attention to the urgent need to develop clinical genetics in this country and brief the House on how these plans are evolving. Historically, genetics was an academic curiosity with limited clinical relevance which mainly dealt with conditions that, sadly, affected foetuses and young children, but it is increasingly being recognised that a number of adult conditions have critical genetic components. These are no longer solely theoretical concerns because meaningful interventions can now be offered to patients with genetic diseases and, often, the screening of asymptomatic healthy family members can prevent them from developing diseases or help to diagnose these diseases at an early stage. For obvious reasons, I have a particular interest in how this issue intersects with the cancer world and come to the conclusion that there is an urgent need to set up an adult genetic service and, probably, a specialist adult cancer genetic service. I will not speak about the details of whether we need separate services for cardiology, genealogy, etc., but I can attest that the very dedicated, under-resourced and over-burdened unit in Our Lady’s hospital in Crumlin under Professor Andrew Green has done a heroic job during the years. Despite not having the funding appropriate to a national centre, Professor Green has effectively been running a national centre. All of us have been sending patients to him with queries about whether their cancers have a genetic basis. I should not need to tell the House about the importance of this work. If a young person has a cancer genetic syndrome, he or she may have two sisters, three first cousins and four nieces who need to be tested because they may also have a cancer susceptibility gene. In case anyone listening is in danger of misunderstanding, I stress that most cancers are sporadic, rather than genetic. However, specific patterns of family history can ring alarm bells and require further investigation. I do not believe sufficient resources are available for this to be done in a timely fashion. The waiting lists to access the service or have a blood test are too long and this runs the risk of causing problems for other family members. I urge the Government to consider the matter seriously. It is good science and medicine and humane. As it would save us money in the long run, it would also be cost effective and good business.

**Senator Rónán Mullen:** In the light of the fact that the talks aimed at resolving the dispute over the planned new junior cycle collapsed after the Teachers Union of Ireland rejected a compromise offer from the Minister for Education and Skills, it is appropriate to reconsider the issue of junior certificate reform. We have already seen a major change in policy on the part of the Minister. Her predecessor wanted to abolish the junior certificate programme in its entirety, but she suggested the State examination at the end of the third year contribute 60% of
the junior cycle marks, with the remaining 40% being awarded for project or portfolio work during second and third years. The 40% element of the course is based on a form of continuous assessment. Most teachers remain opposed to evaluating continuous assessment of project work done by their own students, as envisaged by the Minister. We should bear in mind that teachers already assess their students all the time in preparation for the more objective State examinations. However, teachers with whom I have spoke expressed concern that the plans to have them correct project work were based on cost cutting considerations. I share these concerns and think we cannot risk the integrity of the State examination system out of considerations of cost. The reasonable middle ground which ought to be considered is that project or portfolio work comprising 40% of the junior certificate marks be graded by external examiners rather than classroom teachers in the interests of anonymity and fairness. As far as possible, this should involve an element of oral examination. Although the State examination system has many flaws, its outstanding advantage is the absolute anonymity afforded to students who can rest assured their work will be graded on its merit alone. I agree with Senator Gerard P. Craughwell on the importance of vocational education. That is not in dispute in anything I am proposing. The simple fact is that continuous assessment and anonymity are not mutually exclusive. We can recognise the value of limited continuous assessment in the junior cycle while retaining the anonymity that benefits students. We owe this to teachers because otherwise they will be put under enormous pressure by parents and students. We owe it to students that they can be confident that their work will be marked objectively and on its merits.

**Senator Jim Walsh:** I ask the Deputy Leader to arrange for the Minister for Finance to attend the House at an early opportunity for a debate on NAMA. This matter has been raised on a number of occasions, but recent reports give rise to a great deal of concern. The Minister has been anxious to put pressure on NAMA to complete the sale of its loan book by the end of 2017 or early 2018. There is a view that this pressure is politically motivated rather than motivated by the best interests of taxpayers, who have invested so much in the recovery plan through NAMA. The question must arise as to how wise a policy it is.

In support of my argument for an urgent debate on this matter, I refer to recent reports regarding a property on Sir John Rogerson’s Quay that was acquired by an Australian company for €7.5 million and sold on within months for €17.75 million. That represents a loss not only to the taxpayer but also for the country’s GDP in that the revenues arising from the increases in property values are being expatriated to outside investors. These include private equity funds and so on, including those based in the United States, Australia and Europe. We must be far more sensible in managing these issues by seeking to exercise some type of prudential control over the process. NAMA has indicated that it expects to make some €500 million or so on the €31 billion or €32 billion that was paid for these assets. That is a paltry return. Given the rise in property prices, we should be doing all we can to secure the best possible returns are extracted for taxpayers, but that does not seem to be happening. A debate on this issue is timely and essential.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** Senator Paschal Mooney referred to the talks on junior cycle reform between the teacher unions and the Minister for Education and Skills. It is a matter of regret to us all that those talks have not achieved a resolution of the differences of opinion on this issue. I agree with Senator Gerard Craughwell that this is not the end of the matter; there is an ongoing process on engagement. To be fair to the Minister, she has already made significant moves to accommodate the unions’ concerns. Senator Rónán Mullen fairly described what she has proposed as a “compromise offer”. I do not agree with Senator Mooney that there has been
posturing by the Minister or the unions on this issue. On the contrary, both sides are seeking to move to a resolution and I hope we will see that happen.

As a parent and educator, I believe passionately in the need for junior cycle reform. As such, I take issue very strongly with Senator Mullen’s suggestion that this is all about cost. Anybody who knows anything about the proposed reforms - Senator Craughwell will know all about them - is aware that they are a long time in the making. In fact, junior cycle reform has been discussed for almost 30 years and reforms of the type now being implemented were first proposed in 1999 by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. There is a very obvious rationale for what is being contemplated. First, times have moved on and, fortunately, the majority of pupils no longer leave school after the junior certificate. As a result, the latter is no longer the document people require to get employment. Instead, it now simply marks a passage through the secondary school cycle on the way to the leaving certificate, with the latter now, quite rightly, the much more significant and important document. Second, pedagogical methods have moved on and we now know that exam-based assessment is not the best way of measuring students’ learning and knowledge. It is not the best method of ensuring a quality education system.

Senator Rónán Mullen: We do not know that.

Senator Ivana Bacik: In countries like Scotland, Finland, Australia and New Zealand, where we see high-performing school systems, state examinations at the end of junior cycle have been either abolished or replaced with the type of sensible combination of examinations and course work the Minister is proposing. What is envisaged now is different from what was originally proposed. Introduction of the previous framework would have seen the removal of State certification from the junior cycle and 100% of marking assessed by the class teacher. The Minister has moved significantly on that point-----

Senator Rónán Mullen: The Deputy Leader is missing the point.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Members should allow the Deputy Leader to respond without interruption.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I am setting out the actual nature of the reforms that are being proposed. Under the system proposed by the Minister, 60% of marks in the junior cycle will be allocated on the basis of an examination at the end of third year. In other words, the majority of marks will still be given on the basis of an examination that will continue to be set and marked by the State Examinations Commission, SEC. That is a very significant change from the original proposal. The remaining 40% of marks will be awarded for school-based work. This amounts to a very small change in practice, given that more than 50% of secondary schools already avail of the existing flexibility whereby 40% of marks may be allocated on the basis of an oral assessment in the case of Irish and modern languages or for school-based work such as portfolios and projects in the case of a range of other subjects. In short, teachers in many schools are already engaging in that type of assessment and the Minister is simply proposing that it be moved to a more formal, structured model. The Minister has also confirmed that the State certificate will continue to issue to every student on completion of the junior cycle, with the SEC responsible for monitoring and spot-checking the assessment of class-based work.

The majority of parents and teachers favour these types of sensible reforms. There are differences of view, of course, and we all hope they will be resolved in the interests of pupils.
Children born in 1999, when the reforms I referred to were first proposed, sat their junior certificate this year. We cannot afford to wait any longer. I want to see my children educated within a more modern and fairer system.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** Is this a debate on education?

*( Interruptions.)*

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** The Deputy Leader, without interruption.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** Senators raised a number of straightforward points, but the Deputy Leader has gone into excruciating detail in her reply.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** To be fair, this issue was raised by several colleagues and is a matter of genuine concern.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** I am not suggesting it is not, but the Deputy Leader is taking a platform to speak about developments in education for the past 20 years.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** This House has a strong record on education, with six Senators representing university constituencies.

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** When the Deputy Leader uses Scotland as an example, she should be aware that schools there pulled out of the system.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** We are not opening up a debate on this issue. Members will have other opportunities to discuss the changes that are proposed to the junior cycle.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** The Deputy Leader has invited debate.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** We have had a debate in this House on junior cycle reforms and it would be useful to have another one in view of the level of interest.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** I only asked the Deputy Leader to urge the Minister to work together with the teacher unions to resolve the issue.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Senator Mooney should allow the Deputy Leader to continue.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** I was seeking to respond to all of the points raised by colleagues in this regard, not all of which corresponded with what Senator Mooney said.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** All of the questions were specifically about assessment.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** To respond specifically to Senator Mooney’s question, of course I will appeal to the unions and the Minister to work together. My intention in responding was to avoid repeating myself and ensure I covered all the different points raised by Members.

Senator Mooney also referred to the recent judgment of the European Court of Justice in favour of the German Government. It does seem like a decision that will have significant implications and I agree with the Senator that the Minister for Social Protection will need to review it. I am sure officials in her Department are doing exactly that as we speak. I am confident it will have positive implications in the context of the very sensationalist debate on welfare tourism that is taking place in Britain. A great deal of concern in this regard has been whipped up by a number of media outlets there. Like Senator Mooney, I am not sure how large a problem it
Actually is. Having said that, the decision that was made seems sensible and may help to calm fears, particularly in Britain.

Senator Mooney also welcomed the appointment of Ms Emma Madigan as the new Irish ambassador to the Vatican. We all wish her well in her new post. There have been huge changes since we last had an ambassador resident in the Vatican, not least the election of a new Pope.

Senator Mooney concluded by wishing the national football team well in its game against Scotland tomorrow night and offered similar good wishes to the rugby team in advance of its match on Sunday. We all join Senator Mooney in congratulating Stephanie Roche of the national women’s football team, who has had one of her goals nominated as goal of the year by FIFA.

Senator Paul Coghlan joined Senator Mooney in welcoming the appointment of Ms Emma Madigan as ambassador to the Vatican. He went on to raise what was the second main theme of today’s Order of Business, namely, the Central Bank’s proposals on regulations for mortgage lending. Huge concern has been expressed in this House in recent weeks about the proposal that mortgage applicants will require a 20% deposit. Last week, we heard suggestions at a banking conference that there may be some movement on that. For now, these are just proposals. I certainly will ask the Leader to organise a debate on this issue in the light of Members’ concerns that the rules are too rigid. At the same time, several colleagues noted the need to avoid another housing bubble. There must be a balance between excessive rigidity and an absence of any regulation of the level of deposit required in order to secure a mortgage.

Senator Coghlan also referred to the study that was widely reported today which shows that the proximity of a school can lead to house price rises. This is not news to any parents seeking to purchase a home, but it is useful to have the anecdotal evidence confirmed in the daft.ie report.

Senator Sean Barrett supported Senator Coghlan’s call for a debate on the Central Bank’s proposed rules for mortgage lending. As I said, I will ask the Leader to facilitate that debate. To reiterate, a final decision has not yet made by the Central Bank. I understand that will be done in the new year. As such, it would make sense to seek a debate before Christmas, while the matter is still under discussion.

Senator Barrett also raised an issue of which I was not aware, namely, that Kerry County Council is seeking to declare itself an island. We may hear from our Kerry colleagues on that issue. We have different views.

Senator Michael Comiskey welcomed the launch of the 2016 commemoration programme at the GPO last night. By all accounts, it was an historic event. Other speakers referred to the speech of the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Heather Humphreys, while the Minister of State, Deputy Aodhán Ó Riordáin, also spoke about the nature of the commemorations. He stated they must be inclusive and recognise the need for the reconciliation of different traditions on the island. In particular, he spoke about the centrality of culture and the need to ensure we had a good many cultural commemoration events.

Senator Michael Comiskey also welcomed the resolution at the beef talks last night. All colleagues will welcome the breakthrough. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Simon Coveney, secured the agreement of all stakeholders to a comprehensive list of key actions to address the concerns expressed by beef farmers in recent months. He said he was
satisfied that it represented the best possible outcome. Like many colleagues, I have met Mr. Eddie Downey of the IFA and I am well aware of the concerns of beef farmers and the serious differential in prices between Britain and Ireland. The resolution is welcome. We all hope the beef forum will provide a useful method for reconciling future issues that arise.

Senator Terry Leyden referred to the historic landing by a space mission on a comet for the first time. Some reports this morning suggested there might have been difficulties in the bedding down of the craft and we all hope these will be resolved. The Senator congratulated Laurence O’Rourke from County Westmeath, the Irish scientist involved in this great achievement. We join the Senator in commending his involvement.

Senator Martin Conway welcomed the launch of the commemoration programme and referred to the teaching of history at leaving certificate and secondary cycle level. I will certainly check it out. While I know that it has been raised in the House previously, I do not think the change is as significant as has been suggested.

Senator Marc MacSharry referred to the treatment of patients with diabetes in Sligo and lack of access, which may well be an issue that could be raised as a matter on the Adjournment, if he has not already done so.

The Senator also proposed an amendment to the Order of Business that the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Alan Kelly, come to the House to speak about local authorities. I can ask for a debate on the issue with the Minister as a number of other colleagues have raised the issue of local authority funding as a concern. I have made an inquiry and I am told that the Minister is in Northern Ireland today and cannot attend the Seanad.

Senator Lorraine Higgins referred to the practice of Loan Start and the concerns of a constituent. The Senator has already taken up the matter with the CEO of the Bank of Scotland and the joint committee dealing with finance issues, which is an appropriate place in which to raise the matter. The CEOs of Ulster Bank and AIB are before the joint committee today and I can also seek a debate on financial regulation. As we are already asking the Minister for Finance to attend to discuss more general matters, we might include the issue raised by the Senator.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell referred to junior cycle reforms and Central Bank regulations. I have responded on these matters.

Senator Colm Burke spoke about local authority funding. As I said, I will seek a debate with the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Alan Kelly, on the issue.

The Senator also referred to the Central Bank rules on mortgages. He raised the issue of house purchases from local authorities, which is a matter for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Alan Kelly, and could be included in a debate with him.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh welcomed the report of the Oireachtas committee on voting rights for the Diaspora, as do I. It comes on foot of the recommendation by a significant majority of the Constitutional Convention to extend voting rights in presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the jurisdiction. I support that recommendation fully and was involved in the debate. I hope we will see it move along in the lifetime of the Government.
Senator Rónán Mullen raised the mortgage issue and called for a debate on the Central Bank’s proposals. I support the idea of having a debate.

The Senator sent good wishes to the new ambassador to the Vatican and commended the Office of Emergency Planning for the new document entitled, Winter Ready. Given the weather we are having today, the document is particularly pertinent. I agree with the Senator that it is an excellent document and very timely.

I am glad to hear that Senator Mary White is reinvigorated and that she was involved in the commemorations committee. I note her reference to the official launch of the programme at the GPO last night. The Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Heather Humphreys, will attend the House within the hour for a full debate on commemorations planning which I am very glad we are having this week. It is not only the week in which the programme has been launched, but it is also the week of Remembrance Day. I hope we will have a productive debate.

Senator Feargal Quinn raised the issue of threats to post offices. We had a debate at the joint committee on the future of the post office network and in the House and it is a source of concern for many colleagues. We can ask for a further debate on tit. As the Senator says, the real threat is presented by people simply not sending as many letters or using the postal service as much as they did because of electronic mail. Christmas and the sending of Christmas cards offers a boost to post offices, but there is no doubt that there is an ongoing threat. I am happy to seek to have the matter debated again. The Senator is right to say other work must be sought and the diversification of functions pursued. I understand this is ongoing in the post office network.

The Senator also referred to the debate last night on Seanad reform. I could not be here as I was representing the justice committee at a conference on the abolition of prostitution and changes to prostitution law. The Senator has given me the opportunity to note that conference. While I am sorry I missed the debate, I was doing important work elsewhere. I was seeking to further the justice committee’s recommendation of a change in the law to criminalise the purchase of sex in line with the position in Sweden, Norway, Iceland and, I hope, Canada and France.

I am glad to hear a working group on Seanad reform has been established and note Senator John Crown’s point that it should not include anyone who favoured abolition. Anyone in it will have to be constructive. That is the point. The task is to come up with effective and meaningful Seanad reforms, whatever the different personal positions are in the group. I have not seen the full list of members, but it is important that they be constructive and seek to engage with the others in the group.

Senator John Crown raised the very important issue of the need for the development of an adult cancer genetic service. He referred to the particular issues arising from genetic causes of cancer. The Houses have already engaged in public consultation on lifestyle factors in the incidence of cancer, which are well known. I take the Senator’s point on the need to develop a better service in genetic testing for cancer. In Trinity College Dublin we have an excellent genetics department led by Professor David McConnell, of which colleagues will be well aware. Certainly, it is of real concern if waiting lists are particularly long for genetic testing in the hospital system. I will certainly raise the matter with the Leader and, perhaps, ask him to write to the Minister for Health about it. I know that the Senator will pursue the matter also.
Senator Rónán Mullen also referred to the junior cycle programme, an issue on which I have responded fully. I have huge respect for teachers and note that they can mark students objectively. We must be careful not to sound as if we do not think they can do this.

**Senator Rónán Mullen:** One cannot represent the leaving certificate oral as an internal exam. It was external and objective, which is what we need.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** I am sure the debate will roll on. It is only a proposal.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** I have given a very full response on it.

Senator Jim Walsh called on the Minister for Finance to come to the House in order that we might have a very broad debate with him. The Senator has raised a different issue about NAMA and the moneys to be recouped by the taxpayer from its activities. The finance committee may well have addressed this issue already. If not, we can seek to have the Minister for Finance include the issue among the others Senators are seeking to have him discuss in the coming weeks. I will certainly ask the Leader to facilitate this.

**An Leas-Chathaoirleach:** Senator Marc MacSharry has proposed an amendment to the Order of Business: “That a debate with the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Alan Kelly, on the approach to small local authorities and, in particular, his purported intention to abolish Sligo County Council be taken today.” Is the amendment being pressed?

**Senator Marc MacSharry:** Yes.

Amendment put:

| The Seanad divided: Tá, 12; Nil, 26. |
|----------------|------------------|
| Tá            | Nil              |
| Barrett, Sean D. | Bacik, Ivana.    |
| Craughwell, Gerard P. | Brennan, Terry. |
| Cullinane, David. | Coghlan, Eamonn. |
| Daly, Mark.     | Coghlan, Paul.   |
| Leyden, Terry.  | Comiskey, Michael. |
| MacSharry, Marc.| Conway, Martin.  |
| Mooney, Paschal.| Cummins, Maurice.|
| Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor. | Hayden, Aideen. |
| O’Brien, Darragh. | Healy Eames, Fidelma. |
| Power, Averil.  | Heffernan, James.|
| Walsh, Jim.     | Henry, Imelda.   |
|                | Higgins, Lorraine.|
|                | Keane, Cát.      |
|                | Kelly, John.     |
|                | Moloney, Marie.  |
|                | Mullen, Rónán.   |
|                | Mullins, Michael.|
Tellers: Tá, Senators Marc MacSharry and Paschal Mooney; Níl, Senators Paul Coghlan and Aideen Hayden.

Amendment declared lost.

Sitting suspended at 11.50 a.m. and resumed at 12.30 p.m.

Commemoration Planning: Statements

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, Deputy Heather Humphreys. It is my first time in the Chair for a debate with the Minister since her elevation and I wish her every success, happiness and good luck in her new brief and responsibilities. I call the Minister to speak on commemoration planning.

Senator Marie-Louise O’Donnell: We do not have a quorum.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: If the Senator brings it to my attention, we will have to ring the bells again.

Senator Marie-Louise O’Donnell: I just want to make people aware of it.

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I thank the Leas-Chathaoirleach for his good wishes. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the commemorations with the Members and to inform them of the Government’s plans to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising. When the Taoiseach appointed me to the position of Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in July, he gave me responsibility to lead the 1916 commemorations and I was delighted to be given the challenge. As a member of the Oireachtas all-party consultation group on the commemorations, I have listened to many views over the past three years on the form our commemorations should take, and I am pleased to have an opportunity to listen to the Members’ views today.

Like many commemorations, the events of 1916 are viewed and understood in many different ways across Ireland. I want to build on the understanding of the history of the period and
ensure the Rising is marked in a way that is inclusive, respectful and appropriate. An inclusive approach acknowledges all the identities and traditions that form part of our historical experience. It also facilitates open dialogue, increases our understanding and builds further reconciliation on the island of Ireland.

As part of the decade of centenaries, which runs from 2012 to 2022, the Government has been engaged in a series of major commemorative events. The period from 1912 to 1922 was one of the most eventful in Ireland’s history. From the campaign for Home Rule, the 1913 Lock-out, through the First World War and the Easter Rising of 1916 to the foundation of the Free State, this was a decade of immense upheaval and change. Through the decade of centenaries programme, we have been commemorating and respectfully remembering each event as it happened.

In recent months, I have attended a series of commemorations to mark the outbreak of the First World War and remember the many thousands of Irish men and women who fought and lost their lives. On Tuesday this week, I was joined by the Northern Ireland Minister, Ms Arlene Foster, MLA, and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office, Dr. Andrew Murrison, MP, at St Ann’s Church, Dawson Street, to mark Remembrance Day. It is important that we can come together with our British and Northern counterparts to remember the men and women who fought side by side on a lonely foreign battlefield.

During the summer, I attended an official commemorative event, led by President Michael D. Higgins, to mark the centenary of the Howth gun running, at Howth Harbour, and met many of the craftsmen who worked to restore Erskine Childers’s yacht, the Asgard, which is now on display at Collins Barracks. The tremendous community effort and voluntary work I witnessed in Howth brought home to me the potential that centenary events have as community events. We also marked the tragic events that occurred at Bachelors Walk with a wreath laying ceremony at Glasnevin Cemetery and a mass in St. Mary’s Pro-Cathedral. It is of the utmost importance that the dignity of those who suffered and died is paramount, and that their relatives are given pride of place in remembering their family members.

In early September, I was delighted to attend an excellent and worthwhile event in Ballina to commemorate the women of Cumann na mBan. This follows a series of important commemorative events held in April this year to commemorate the founding of Cumann na mBan. The formation of Cumann na mBan was an absolutely vital step in the empowerment, both politically and socially, of women in Ireland. It is very important that women’s participation in the Rising continues to be fully acknowledged as we lead up to 2016. I also attended the unveiling of a cross of sacrifice at Glasnevin Cemetery to mark the centenary of the Great War and to commemorate the many thousands of soldiers from Ireland who died as a result of either the First World War or Second World War, especially the 207 who are buried in Glasnevin Cemetery.

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has done a substantial amount of work to ensure that these centenaries are marked appropriately. This includes working closely with relevant Departments, agencies and services, as well as with local authorities, colleges and community groups. One of the most powerful ways for us to reflect and respect the events of 100 years ago is through individual stories of human endeavour. Earlier this week, at the Glasnevin Great War exhibition, I was struck by the story of John Kennedy who fought in the First World War for the British Army. When he returned home to Ireland, he fought in the War of Independence and later in the Civil War. On the morning of the first day of the battle for Dublin,
in the Civil War, he married his sweetheart, but later that afternoon he was killed in action. He is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in the national Army plot, only yards away from Michael Collins. Personal stories, stories of families and individuals, give us a powerful insight into what life must have been like for the men and women who made such incredibly brave choices 100 years ago. They give us a sense of the human suffering that was the everyday reality for those caught up in conflict and they illustrate the complexities of our history.

I was pleased to be joined at the GPO last night by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and the Minister of State, Deputy Aodhán Ó Riordáin, for the launch of Ireland 2016, a national initiative which includes a programme of events to mark the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising. Ireland 2016, a national initiative led by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, will develop, co-ordinate and deliver a programme of activity to honour and remember those who fought and those who died in the 1916 Rising. It will also reflect on the legacy of that period and look towards our future. Ireland 2016 is based on five intersecting themes: “remember”, recalling our shared history on the island of Ireland; “reconcile”, honouring all who have built peace and brought people together; “imagine”, releasing the creativity of our people, in particular our young people; “present”, creatively showing our achievements to the world; and “celebrate”, with family, community and friendship and renew our commitment to the Proclamation ideals of liberty and equality. A great deal of planning and work has taken place over the past number of months to ensure that the 2016 commemorations have a lasting legacy. Earlier this year the Government allocated €22 million for 2015 for seven flagship commemorative projects to be finalised in time for Easter 2016.

The capital projects also include: the building of an interpretative centre at the GPO, which is expected to attract up to 300,000 visitors a year; refurbishment works at Richmond Barracks, where the leaders of the Rising were held after their surrender; the upgrade of Kilmainham Courthouse and Gaol, where the trials and executions were held; the restoration of the historic Kevin Barry Room in the National Concert Hall, where the treaty debates took place; the development of new visitor centre at Teach an Phiarsaigh, Rosmuc; the restoration of 14 Henrietta Street as a tenement museum; and the development of Cathal Brugha Barracks to support a new military service pensions archive facility. Each of these projects will deepen our understanding of the history of that period and provide an enduring and permanent tribute to those involved in the Rising. Together they will open up our history.

A number of formal State events will be held over Easter weekend 2016. On Easter Saturday, 26 March 2016, there will be a remembrance ceremony at Arbour Hill followed by a special State reception for the 1916 relatives. On Easter Sunday, March 27, there will be a wreath-laying ceremony at Kilmainham Gaol in the morning, followed by a formal State parade to be led by representatives of the relatives who fought and died in 1916. This event will start with a military ceremonial, which will include the reading of the Proclamation by an Army officer, the laying of a wreath by the President on behalf of the Irish people in honour of all those who fought and those who died during the Rising in 1916, a minute’s silence, the sounding of the Last Post, the raising of the national flag and the national anthem. There will then be a march-past by representatives of the 1916 relatives and representatives of An Garda Síochána and other emergency services. The Defence Forces will be present with a full military parade, including a UN peacekeeping element, and the parade will conclude with an Air Corps fly-past. The President and Taoiseach, along with the 1916 relatives and representatives of State and civil society, will view the parade from viewing stands which will line O’Connell Street, with the maximum amount of seating the street can accommodate. The public will be able to view
the parade all along the parade route and large screens will be erected for maximum visibility.

On the evening of Easter Sunday there will be a State reception in Dublin Castle. On Easter Monday there will be an interfaith service at St. Mary’s Pro-Cathedral. On Sunday April 24, the actual date of the Rising, there will be a commemoration at Arbour Hill hosted by the Minister for Defence, consisting of a requiem mass, and ceremonies will be held at the graves of the 1916 leaders.

As well as the formal State events, the second key element of Ireland 2016 will be widespread community engagement. The €4 million that I secured in the budget will be used to roll out an integrated plan during 2015 to facilitate community events and initiatives. A widespread consultation process will now take place over the coming months. I have set up a new 2016 project office in my Department, which will engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including schools, relatives groups, colleges, businesses, voluntary organisations, arts and cultural institutions, historical societies and local government. A series of meetings will be held in every county across the country to facilitate ground-up initiatives so that local communities can get involved and put their own shape on the commemorations as we move towards 2016. This work is already well under way. Yesterday, I met city and county managers to outline how I believe we can work together to make this a truly national initiative.

Our national cultural institutions will also play a key role in the commemorations. A rich and vibrant culture programme, with an international dimension, will be finalised in cooperation with the national cultural institutions, the Arts Council of Ireland and Culture Ireland. I want children and young people to be at the centre of how we mark 2016. For that reason, I will be working with my colleague, the Minister for Education, Deputy Jan O’Sullivan, to develop arts programmes in our schools. We will build on the links developed during The Gathering to reach out to local communities and the diaspora.

Last week, I travelled to New Orleans for the 2014 International Famine Commemoration. I was completely overwhelmed by the strength of the Irish community there and its deep sense of pride about where it comes from. It was very clear to me from talking to people there that they want to get involved in the commemorations. I am determined to reach out to those in New Orleans and other Irish communities across the globe so they can play their part in Ireland 2016. My Department will work with our embassy network and through Culture Ireland to present Ireland 2016 to the world. Information about Ireland 2016 is available on a dedicated website, www.ireland.ie, and if Senators have not had an opportunity to visit it I would encourage them to do so and to read the comprehensive information pack published last night.

As well as widespread consultations and preparations for 2016, a number of other key milestones will be marked during the course of 2015, including the centenary of the battles at Gallipoli. We will work in partnership with groups based in Cork and Dublin to develop special commemorative arrangements to mark the centenary of the sinking of the Lusitania. The year 1915 also saw the death of Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa and Pádraig Pearse’s famous graveside oration, which spurred the developments that led to the Rising just a few months later. There will also be a project between the National Archives and the National Museum to demonstrate the preparations carried out in Collins Barracks by soldiers as they prepared to leave for war during 1915.

I look forward to working with the expert advisory group, chaired by Maurice Manning, and my colleagues on the Oireachtas all-party consultation group, and am very grateful for their
work, guidance and support to ensure we have commemorations that are inclusive, appropriate and respectful. I would also like to ask Members of the House here today to act as messengers in their communities and to tell people about and encourage them to get involved with the commemorations to help to make Ireland 2016 a success. As I have outlined, community involvement will be key, and we can all work together to make the commemorations a truly inclusive occasion.

At every level of our society, we can make 2016 a wonderful, inspirational time, when we build new friendships, infuse our communities with a renewed spirit of creativity, deepen our understanding of difference and begin to build a better future for our children. I thank Members for their attention and for affording me this opportunity to update the House, and I look forward to hearing their contributions.

Senator Mark Daly: I welcome the Minister to the House. I thank her for organising last night’s excellent event in the GPO and her work so far on this important initiative, which includes the decade of commemorations and the celebration of 1916. Over the next number of months and years, people will ask what it is we are celebrating about 1916. We are celebrating the lives of the ordinary, but extraordinary, men and women who did an extraordinary thing on that ordinary day, Easter Monday 1916. They struggled together to achieve a common aim. The aims set out in the Proclamation were equal rights, equal opportunities and civil and religious liberties. They are aims and objectives which elude us still, and 100 years on we must reflect on how far we have come and how far we have yet to go to achieve them.

The Minister outlined a fantastic programme of events and a very important consultation process. Part of the programme includes concerts in the National Concert Hall, which will be televised and will feature the best of Irish talent from across the entire spectrum of music, song, dance and all elements of Irish culture. The committee discussed gardens of remembrance, something which can engage all communities. Such simple projects would include gardens with three common elements, namely, the Proclamation, a flagpole and seven trees to signify the seven signatories, and would be dedicated to the men and women involved. The committee has dealt with other elements and the Minister has met Reverend Kavanagh in regard to the Thomas Francis Meagher foundation, in particular on the idea of giving a Tricolour that has flown from the building where the first Tricolour was flown to every school in the country by 2016. All the secondary schools in the State would be invited to Waterford to receive this flag and to be given information packs on the history and meaning of the flag. The meaning has been lost or forgotten over time but the symbolism is as relevant today as when Thomas Francis Meagher first spoke about it in 1848 in terms of brotherhood and peace between Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics. That is something every schoolchild should know on Easter Monday 2016.

Engaging with our diaspora is very important and I thank the Minister for ensuring that will be the case. I have discussed this with newly elected US Congressman Brendan Boyle, who said he will put a garden of remembrance in Pennsylvania. Perhaps, on her next visit to America, the Minister might visit him and talk to the members of the Irish-American caucus about what they can do. Gardens are a neutral space and are places where people can reflect on the words in the Proclamation.

There have already been initiatives. It is very important that the county councils and their managers were met yesterday. There is a motion before this House which will hopefully be passed next week. The Minister’s Department had sent out a letter earlier in the year in regard
to Cumman na mBan. Equality eludes us still. I said yesterday that the treatment of Cumman na mBan and the Irish Volunteers, even 100 years on, is different. The Irish Volunteers ceremony was televised, the President was there, there was a full guard of honour and it was on a Sunday. The anniversary of Cumman na mBan, a significant organisation, was not given the same treatment, which I felt was inappropriate considering its contribution.

The letters that went out from the Department and the motion before this House are about naming currently unnamed bridges, roads and public infrastructure after Cumman na mBan or its members. As in the past, when public infrastructure is named, it is generally named after men because the people sitting around the table are generally men and they name it after people who would instantaneously come to their minds. In Kerry, however, the largest relief road in the county, around the town of Tralee, has been named after Cumman na mBan, as is the case for the bridge over the Shannon in Leitrim. In Athlone, Councillors John Keogh and Ernie Keenan, from Roscommon County Council and Westmeath County Council - opposing counties - came together and named the bridge over the Shannon as Droichead Cumman na mBan. In Cork, where Councillor Aindrias Moynihan is working with the Lord Mayor of Cork, Mary Shields, and the Cathaoirleach, Alan Coleman, and they are hoping to name the southern ring road, which goes around the outskirts of the city, Bóthar Cumman na mBán. There are similar proposals for Limerick, Kilkenny and other places. I would hope that every county has at least one significant piece of infrastructure named after that important organisation.

The counties have written to the Minister’s office and want to be part of the programme for events. Cloughjordan, where Thomas MacDonagh came from, wants to be included; it has its summer school and is hoping to put in a garden of remembrance. There is also Kiltyclogher in Leitrim, where Séan Mac Diarmada comes from, and Ballymoe in Galway, which hopes to remember Éamonn Ceannt. Of course, the diaspora will have to become engaged because some of the signatories were not born inside the State. Ashbourne in County Meath saw one of the biggest battles outside of Dublin in Easter Week, as did Enniscorthy in Wexford and Athenry in Galway. All of these councils want to be included in this comprehensive programme because it is a celebration of an entire year of events. Hopefully, the Minister’s Department will be able to cope with the enthusiasm that exists.

I am glad the Minister has taken on board suggestions from myself and others on the committee in regard to the relatives being included in the celebrations, and not only being included but actually being part of the celebrations, which is very important. I am glad the Minister met with the relatives. There is a long way to go in ensuring their concerns are facilitated but I believe the Department is on the right track. It is going to be a challenge to accommodate everybody but it is certainly something that can be done. I thank the Minister for her work so far and I thank all the members of the committee for their commitment to the celebration of 2016. As outlined in the Government document, it is a time of reflection and of looking back, but also of looking forward into the future in the sense of how the Ireland that was imagined in 1916 can be attained.

Senator Eamonn Coghlan: The Minister is welcome. Last night, I had the honour of attending the launch of Ireland 2016 in the GPO. As I looked around the room, I saw in attendance some of our colleagues who are here in the House today. I began to reflect on the Golden Jubilee, although I am not sure if many of us were around then - most of us, perhaps-----

Senator Mark Daly: Speak for yourself.
Seanad Éireann

Senator Eamonn Coghlan: I am beginning to show my age. I vividly recall, as a 13 year old boy, attending the pageantry in Croke Park and also the military parade that took place in O’Connell St. My father, Bill, worked for a company called Breen Electrical in Dame Street and he had the responsibility of installing the sound system in Croke Park not just for the Gaelic football and hurling matches, but also for the pageantry, and along O’Connell Street for that parade. My job was to help to pull the wires while he put up the sound system. My reward was not monetary; it was a front row seat in the Ard Chomhairle for the pageant and a front-row seat outside the GPO for the military parade. I will never forget the President, Eamon de Valera, coming over to me - my proud dad would always talk to everybody about “Young Eamonn, he is a great little runner” - and saying to me, “Eamonn, I hear you are a great little runner. I will be looking for you in the future”. I may have gone on to some success on the athletics track but little did he know I would be nominated to the Seanad by An Taoiseach, which I am very proud of all these many years later.

My father, Bill, lived at 16 South William Street, a mere two or three blocks from here. I always remember the stories from my father and from “gran”, as we called her - my granny - about how her husband, who died at the age of 32, used to allow the basement of their tenement house be used as a hideout for some of the rebels during the 1916 Rising. I will always remember going with my sister Mary to the rat-infested basement looking for ammunition and guns, imagining that we might find them, but to no avail. However, I also remember him talking about the Walker brothers, Michael and John, who participated in the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, representing Ireland in cycling. They were couriers for the rebels around Dublin during the 1916 Rising. I also heard stories from gran about walking from South William Street up to St. Stephen’s Green at particular times during the day when there would be a ceasefire in order for the park ranger to feed the ducks. That was her way out of town. A Senator seems to know the story - I can remember hearing that as a young boy.

We are almost 100 years on. We have seen two world wars come and go and we have seen the Troubles in the North come and go. Nelson’s Pillar was blown up in that year of 1966, and I remember sitting on the stand at the GPO with the ruin of Nelson’s Pillar in front of us. However, the world is still not a safe place and we are now faced with the looming threats of ISIS. We are almost a year and a half away from the centenary commemoration, which will remember and honour those who took part in the 1916 Rising. This is a major event for our country, both at home and abroad, because of its significance in our history. This is not about political parties, but about our community and commemorating the men, women and children of Ireland. Last night in the GPO, we were presented by the Minister, the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste with the theme for Ireland 2016 which is to remember, reconcile, imagine, present and celebrate. Remembering the events of 1916 through the signature events the Minister has outlined is very important. Events planned include the national ceremonies, cultural events, State receptions and many more. The flagship capital projects which will be completed by Easter 2016 will serve as permanent reminders. The Minister has indicated that €22 million has been provided for the completion of the projects at the GPO, Kilmainham Gaol and Courthouse, the tenement museum in Henrietta Street, Richmond Barracks, Teach an Píarsaigh in Rosmuc, the Military Pensions Archive and the National Concert Hall. I have also just been informed of the €30 million being spent on the project at the National Gallery which is adjacent to Leinster House and which will be completed by April 2015.

Family is foremost in remembering. Relatives and descendants are paramount in the commemoration events. The Minister has stated that she wants the events to be all-inclusive and
that the advisory group on the centenary commemorations wants the input of relatives right through the planning process. The Taoiseach said last night that the Government is determined to consult widely and develop a comprehensive programme of dignified acts of remembrance. Reconciliation is important in honouring all those who have built peace. The Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection noted last night that it is vital to appreciate the fact that the 1916 Rising is a highly contested moment in our history and that we must respect differing viewpoints on it. Imagining is about imagining our future - not necessarily recalling the past - over the next 100 years by seeking the views of our young people.

The Taoiseach stated that the commemoration should be remembered for its diversity, inclusiveness, imagination and inspiration. We are known worldwide for our imagination and culture, including our heritage, literature, music, dance, business acumen and, if I might say it, our sport. Presenting Ireland to the world, show-casing our achievements in art, culture, literature and music, is very important and an opportunity to attract visitors from overseas, engage with the diaspora and replicate the success of The Gathering. Approximately 3.6 million tourists come to Ireland for a cultural experience and the centenary commemoration is an ideal opportunity for tourism to engage with the diaspora and many others from overseas.

In celebration, we reflect on the past and celebrate our achievements, hopes and dreams for the future. Last night, the Taoiseach said 2016 presents us with a once-in-a-century opportunity to create events of celebration and remembrance that are of value in themselves and which also contribute to a great sense of who we Irish really are. The vision outlined for Ireland 2016 says it all. It involves working together to remember, reconcile, imagine, present and celebrate in 2016. However, it is my hope that it will not just be a once-off remembrance and celebration. I hope the events planned and, in particular, the capital programme will have a lasting and positive influence on many generations to come. Having lived in the United States of America for many years, I know that 4 July - Independence Day - is the big day of the year. Perhaps, we can celebrate and remember the Easter Rising 1916 every year.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail: It is my first time in the Seanad since the death of Brian Farrell, whose passing I acknowledge. He is someone we grew up with as a nation. Talking about commemoration and solemn occasions, Brian’s voice on radio and television is an important one we remember. I knew him personally as he and my father soldiered together in the early days of “7 Days” many years ago. I extend my condolences to Marie-Thérèse, David, Theo and the rest of the family.

I welcome the Minister to the House. I welcome last night’s announcement and the end of the anxiety and paralysis around the fact that a kind of third secret of Fatima was still to be released. It was released last night in the GPO. I welcome and acknowledge it. It allows us finally to have a more open and trusting conversation and discussion. The Taoiseach’s speech was one of the best he has given. There were many things in it that gave me confidence and will give the Government the self-confidence to realise that there will be diverse views.

We have all spoken in the past about the decade of commemorations, but I refer today only to the 1916 Easter Rising. That is not in any way to disassociate any other centenaries, including that of the Battle of the Somme. I am not ignoring such centenaries, but rather focusing today on the Easter Rising.

I welcome the fact that a self-confidence appears to be emerging from the Government to the effect that it cannot, will not and should not control the agenda of the centenary. In that sense,
the most important document released last night was the initial statement by the advisory group on centenary commemorations. It represents a very useful guiding principle as we approach the commemorations. The document talks about the fact that we should not simply consider the uprising in its national context but rather look at it in a global context. What else was occurring around the world? We know the famous Sykes-Picot line was being drawn in the Middle East which has ended up being the cause of a great deal of concern there today. Among the interesting points in the document was the statement that the State should not be expected to be neutral about its own existence. While we must be inclusive and non-partisan, we should acknowledge the outcome of the revolution and not be neutral about it. We should have the self-confidence to talk about 1916 in a way that is proud without being divisive. There is a fine line there but up to now the Government has been anxious about it.

From what I heard last night and what I hear from the Minister today, clarity and self-confidence are growing. The advisory group document included a lovely phrase to the effect that we should be conscious that on this island we have a common history but not a common memory. All those memories are justified, which is where art is important whether it is “The Plough and the Stars” or “A Long Long Way” by Sebastian Barry. Memory and contested memory are important as is fiction in commemorating and acknowledging history. This is about how we as citizens find an imaginative expression of how we deal with the past to understand the present and look to the future.

It appears there is a sense of release and that the Government understands it cannot control the process and should not worry about other parties claiming authority over 1916 as, in a way, is about all of us in the community. I welcome that and the permission the Government has given itself to continue an exploration not only of the 1916 Rising but what happened in the following 100 years. Of course, there will be a great deal of criticism and self-analysis regarding what we have achieved as a nation over that period. While a great deal of it will be seen as negative, we should be comfortable in acknowledging that. The Minister and the Tánaiste spoke last night about the sudden removal of women from the history of Ireland and 1916 and the whitewashing of women in the 1920s through poverty and censorship. We should accept and acknowledge that while trying to change things and move on. On that basis as well, the fact that the Minister is seeking community and young people’s involvement, along with the national cultural institutions, is paramount. In case there is a perception of a conflict of interest, I run the Abbey Theatre, the national theatre of Ireland. It will be involved in many types of commemoration and we are engaging with the Department in that regard and, indeed, seeking funding from the Department. I should make that clear so there is no sense of a conflict of interest.

We have learned from the Limerick City of Culture 2014 and other events. The Minister has formed a 2016 project team. Mr. John Concannon is in charge of it. That is important. There is a very short lead-in period of 14 months. The €4 million, although important, is quite a small amount of money if it is to be shared across all the national cultural institutions. There is no need to remind the Minister that the National Museum, the National Library and the National Archives are on their knees in terms of current funding. One of the legacies of commemoration should be to try to increase their funding and enhance their standing, self-worth and self-respect and to encourage them to grow over the next couple of years.

I have a number of questions for the Minister. How long will the consultation period last? Are people invited to make submissions to the Department or the project team? When will that decision be made? Will there be more than €4 million and another budget allocation next year?
The €4 million will be used up very quickly. The Minister mentioned that one of her priorities is a national culture policy. How will that fit in? It will be an important legacy for her. She mentioned in the House previously that she would hold a wide consultation on a national culture policy and that she wished to publish it as a part of her legacy in 2016. Will that be part of the overall event?

Finally, we should not be afraid of criticising and reviewing the impact of 1916 in both a positive and a negative way. The best way to do that is through contemporary artists. One of the greatest critiques of 1916 is one of the greatest plays in the Irish canon, *The Plough and the Stars*, which was written ten years after 1916. That play not only acknowledged the negative and positive impacts of 1916 but also celebrated the anti-heroes, the role of women and that of marginalised communities. It is through art and contemporary art that we will understand in a better way how we might live and work. Working with young people, particularly in the way the Minister mentioned yesterday, is a way forward. Let us not be afraid of fiction, art or the unknown in acknowledging the Easter Rising of 1916.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** I welcome the Minister and the opportunity to debate commemoration planning, particularly in the week in which we marked Remembrance Day and the day after the launch of the commemoration programme in the GPO last night. I was sorry I was unable to attend it, but I was representing the justice committee at a conference. However, my party’s Seanad spokesperson, Senator O’Keeffe, attended, as did many other colleagues. I have heard very positive reports of the event last night and of the very moving speeches made by the Minister, the Tánaiste and others.

During this week, as part of our commemoration, we remember the many thousands of Irish men and women who fought and lost their lives during the period we are commemorating, particularly during the First World War, the War of Independence, the Civil War and the Easter Rising. It is important that we commemorate these events in an inclusive way, as the Minister said. That is one of the most important aspects of this commemoration programme. It is hugely important that this period be marked in a way that is inclusive, respectful and appropriate. The Minister is correct to point to the strength of individual stories as a way of commemorating these events.

It is also important, of course, that we do not celebrate wars that led to hideous human suffering and waste of human lives, but that we mark them in an appropriate manner. The Minister told us the poignant story of John Kennedy. There have been many reports in the newspapers and many academic and historical accounts recently of families with terribly poignant stories of loss in the First World War - for example, the loss of multiple sons and brothers in individual families. Trinity College has been commemorating the graduates, students and staff of the college who fought and died in that war. All of us have our individual stories, and many families, including mine, were split between those who fought for the British Army in the First World War and those who stayed in Ireland and fought for independence. We are all aware of the sensitivities surrounding this commemoration period.

The five intersecting themes the Minister outlined - remember, reconcile, imagine, present and celebrate - try to ensure that we are commemorating in an inclusive manner and that we are bringing together past, present and future in the events in the decade of commemoration. Last night, all speakers spoke of the need to embrace differences and different histories to find a new way of sharing and respecting differences as we move into this century. The Minister also spoke very passionately about the individual stories, such as that of John Kennedy.
Senator O’Keeffe asked me to remind the Minister that next year, as part of the decade of commemoration, we will mark Yeats2015. Senator O’Keeffe is chairperson of Yeats2015, and the vision of the year, as agreed by the steering group of which she is chairperson, is that Yeats2015 will celebrate and commemorate the life, work, influence and achievements of W. B. Yeats through an engaging, celebratory and cultural programme to showcase Ireland as a dynamic, inspiring and creative place. There will be a number of events to mark Yeats’s contribution. Of course, his poetry will be used in a great number of the commemorative events. I will speak a little more about that presently.

To turn to the points made by the Minister about the plan for commemoration, with regard to permanent tributes, it is hugely important that permanent work be done, including work of refurbishment and regeneration. I am glad the Minister mentioned specific projects such as Henrietta Street, Richmond Barracks, which has been very neglected, the Kevin Barry Room in the National Concert Hall and Pearse’s Cottage. These are important spaces to be renovated and refurbished. The Minister also mentioned Kilmainham Gaol, a very important place to visit. I always send my students there because it instructs them about Ireland’s past, not just the political past but also the way in which we treated people who were imprisoned on criminal charges. It is already a remarkable place. I pay tribute to those who run Kilmainham Gaol and who have made it such an important repository of work. I also pay tribute to those who run St. Enda’s, the old school of Pádraig Pearse in Rathfarnham, which has been carefully and well restored and renovated. It provides informative accounts of the Easter Rising, the struggle for independence, Pádraig Pearse’s life and his great work as an educator, in addition to his political work.

I should mention the Natural History Museum. That is not to forget the other cultural institutions, but I have been in touch with the Department about refurbishing the upper galleries of the Natural History Museum, which are currently not open and are inaccessible to visitors. That is a shame. It is outside the theme of commemoration, but it is important, given that we have such a strong cultural programme as part of the commemorations, that we do not neglect other cultural institutions that are not directly involved.

The Minister spoke about the State events. I wish to make three points about those events. Clearly, 2016 will be the key year, but there will also be events in 2015. The parade for Easter weekend of 2016 will be a military parade. Can we ensure it is not over-militaristic? I was very struck when I watched the parade in 2006, which was the last time there was a full military parade. I found it troubling.

Senator Mary M. White: I was shocked.

Senator Ivana Bacik: We were commemorating the 1916 Rising in a way that seemed almost to celebrate the military and weapons. It made me uncomfortable.

For many of us who wish to attend the parade with families and children, it would be appropriate if there were some aspect of the parade that recognised, for example, the role of women. Senator Mac Conghail spoke about the role of women, the role of marginalised communities and the inspiration for the Irish Citizen Army and the work of James Connolly. We should not commemorate the republican leaders without remembering that a hugely important social uprising was taking place as well. The origins of the Labour Party lie in the work of Larkin and Connolly, and that was a very important movement at the time, as was the suffragette movement. Let us write those in, not just to other events and cultural events but into parades that would otherwise be military. It is a difficult one to incorporate other aspects but it was an
uncomfortable moment for me watching the tanks cross over O'Connell Bridge. I am not sure I want to see it again without recognition of other aspects. That is a point about being inclusive.

We must be careful about commemorating through the use of religious services. The Minister spoke about an interfaith service and a requiem mass. At the inauguration of President Michael D. Higgins, there was a sense of ensuring those of different faiths and no faith were included. There was a humanist celebrant on the stage for the President’s inauguration. Let us ensure that humanists, atheists and people of minority religions feel included when we use religious service as part of commemorative events.

The third point is about women’s involvement. Senator Daly spoke about the motion before the House, which I and the Labour Party group supported. We call on local authorities to commemorate the women involved in Cumann na mBan in the centenary of the foundation of Cumann na mBan and to remember to use women’s names when naming public places. It has been overlooked for decades. The Rosie Hackett Bridge was named by Dublin City Council as part of a campaign initiated by young women in Labour Youth and other organisations. It marked a real shift in approach and I hope we see more of it.

I am glad we will include an education programme to reach out to schools and the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, will be involved. It is important it reaches down through community events and that we do not commemorate in a top-down way. I am struck by a recent review of a book by Roy Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890 to 1923*. The author takes a phrase from Yeats, “vivid faces”, referring to the rebels in the poem ‘Easter 1916’. He talks about those involved in the rising and uses contemporaneous accounts to try to get as close as possible to the living stream of events. One review points out that the book matters because it avoids the Irish vice of replacing history with commemoration. We must ensure empty commemoration is not the theme and that we are using vivid accounts of the period to get close to what really happened.

**Senator Sean D. Barrett:** I thank the Minister for her presentation and congratulate her on the successful launch last night. Someone from her part of the country is uniquely placed to celebrate this and it was an inspired choice of Minister.

At the Battle of the Boyne site there is a very impressive full-colour photograph of the Taoiseach of the time, Bertie Ahern, and the First Minister of Northern Ireland at the time, the Reverend Ian Paisley. It does not say “loser” under one and “winner” under the other. They are both obviously enjoying the occasion and I hope that will be the theme. I hope we do not celebrate war and that we celebrate the peace. What has been done so far is all going in that direction. The Irish ambassador laid a wreath at the cenotaph, which was the first time it was performed since 1946. The Taoiseach attending at Enniskillen has become an annual event, which is wonderful. The Tánaiste appeared in St. Patrick’s Cathedral and the congregation was larger than for many years. The Minister, Deputy Humphreys, and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, MLA, appeared in St. Ann’s Church. In her famous “A Uachtaráin agus a chairde” speech, the Queen said:

With the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all. But it is also true that no-one who looked to the future over the past centuries could have imagined the strength of the bonds that are now in place between the governments and the people of our two nations, the spirit of partnership that we now enjoy, and the lasting rapport between us. No-one here this evening could doubt that
The themes of remembering to reconcile, imagine, present and celebrate are appropriate in that context. I share the wish of Senators to have Cumann na mBan celebrated. It occurs to me that, in the recent European elections on the island of Ireland, we elected seven men and seven women. Perhaps we might have some events to honour the seven women, which was a magnificent achievement. Previously, we thought it would happen in Scandinavia but it happened on our island and we should celebrate it.

Events that occur to me as a parliamentarian include 25 July 1917. This was the last attempt made in Trinity College to assemble the Irish convention. Before the island split, it was the last attempt to have Unionist and Nationalist politicians agree some framework for keeping us together. It is worth organising a commemoration. We should involve the Ulster Scots as much as we can because we share the island with them. Reference was made to the RMS Lusitania and on 10 October 1918, the RMS Leinster was sunk off Dún Laoghaire by one of the last acts of the German navy in that period. It should also be celebrated.

The theme of reconciliation is important. A long time ago, I heard the then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O’Neill, being asked what 1916 meant and he said it meant the Battle of the Somme. Many of us did not know as much then as we know now and thought it was an insensitive thing to say but now we know the complex world at a time, as Senator Mac Conghail said. We honour all the people who had to take up arms, as they saw it, to free this country and who thought they could free the country by fighting on behalf of Belgium and other countries.

We should include those who are airbrushed out of history, such as regiments like the Dublin Fusiliers and the Connaught Rangers and others that have memorabilia hidden away in church vaults. Some of them are in Windsor and during his successful visit there, President Higgins saw some of the memorabilia. It is part of the history of this country. The police force of the day, the Royal Irish Constabulary, is also part of the history. The vast majority did not join in the expectation that if the Government changed they would be out of a job. In our democracy, if the Government changes, the membership of the Garda Síochána does not change and I am sure people joined the police force to maintain law and order and were esteemed in their communities. There is a small police museum in Dublin Castle and an impressive one in Cahersiveen, County Kerry. It is a part of life.

We could bring in what workers did as Dublin was a major distilling and biscuit making centre. These products were world exports at the time. Distilling has moved to other parts of Ireland, although it may be reviving, and biscuit making is also gone. There is an immense shared heritage in our past and the best thing that is happening to Ireland since the peace process is how much the two traditions are coming to understand each other and work together. In this room last Friday, the joint chairs of the North-South Interparliamentary Association were Mr. Peter Weir, MLA, and Caintiriona Ruane, MLA, along with the Ceann Comhairle. They gave a fine chairing of a meeting that was most valuable to promote better educational links and better tourism links between the two states on the island. The public looks forward positively and it reflects well on what has happened up to now. Ireland will be a better place as we understand our shared history when we get to the end of the celebrations of the centenary period.

Senator Hildegarde Naughton: I welcome the Minister to the House and I think it is important to place the commemoration in context. Not only are we about to commemorate
seminal moments in the country’s history but also in the history of the UK and the entire world. The forthcoming years afford us an opportunity to reflect on the foundation of the State and the creation of Northern Ireland. We should reflect on the fact that events did not just suddenly happen but were a continuation and development of centuries of conflict and misunderstanding. The forthcoming commemoration should also be rooted within the broader canvas of world politics in the early part of the 20th century, a century that brought us war and death on an unimaginable scale. Many of these conflicts had their roots in earlier happenings. The century also brought to an end a vast complex of European colonial rule, which utterly changed politics internationally. There is no simple historical picture that can be painted of these times. They are complex historical events that defy a trite and sometimes calculated effort to mould them to suit a particular political narrative. Some people’s efforts to speak to a wider understanding of events are roundly derided as they seem not to conform to a strictly nationalist “little Irelander” version of history. My sincere wish is that everyone’s opinion, no matter how contrary it might seem, would be listened to with respect.

This country’s history is common to all shades of belief. However, the remembrance and views on the significance of events at the time are not universally shared. The purpose of this decade of commemoration should be to imbue all our citizens with knowledge of the facts and a recognition that not all of those facts are viewed in the same manner by everyone. There are different and divergent traditions on this island - a hugely forgotten or hidden history. How many colleagues know that on Armistice Day, 11 November, in 1924, an crowd estimated at 50,000 people attended an unveiling in College Green of a Celtic cross commissioned in memory of those men of the 16th (Irish) Division - a cross that was later transported to Guillemont in France and erected in their honour? Contemporary newspaper accounts report that approximately 50,000 poppies were sold in Dublin and the surrounding area at the time. That should be to the forefront of everyone’s mind in planning these events. If we are honest, our Republic was a very cold house for differing traditions post-Independence. We have a history replete with constitutional and legal provisions coupled with repressive social norms which acted as sometimes benign silencers of other people’s views and beliefs. Listening to and sympathising with alternative viewpoints should be a hallmark of these forthcoming events. That is not the same thing as apologising for the creation of the State. We should never do that. In that regard, we should also celebrate the huge achievements of those times - the creation of the State, a vote for all and land transfer. These were hugely important happenings of which we should be justifiably proud. As the expert group advising Government put it, the aim should be to broaden sympathies without having to abandon loyalties, and, in particular, to recognise the value of ideals and sacrifices, including their cost.

**Senator Darragh O’Brien:** The Minister is very welcome to the House, and I welcome this opportunity to put a few points to her. I will address the 1916 commemorations, which are the most significant ones. It was a watershed moment in the history of this independent State. While other areas deserve to be commemorated, I will not be able to cover all of them in a short five minutes, so I will deal only with the 1916 commemorations, an area in which I am particularly interested. I welcome the Minister’s speech, which I saw on the monitor. I know it is not easy when there are many different groups representing many different people. I have had a number of meetings with the 1916 Relatives’ Association. The Minister has a role in trying to bring these groups together and get agreement about how we move forward together. People will always have different views and it is not that anyone is trying to be difficult. They just have different views. It is not helpful that certain events might be boycotted. That is not the way to do it. The Minister can bring them together. It will not be a one-hour meeting, because

---

13 November 2014

545
the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising will be the most significant commemoration in the
history of this State. While people talk about the Home Rule Bill and the passing of various
different measures, in the scheme of all the commemorations, the 1916 commemorations are
the most important and significant. We talk about different traditions, and I fully respect that,
as members of my family come from different traditions. Two of my direct relatives fought in
the 1916 Rising in the 4th Battalion Dublin Brigade of the IRA, while other family members
served in the British Army. Let us deal with the commemoration that is approaching, which is
that of the 1916 Rising.

I want to put it very clearly on the record that while this Government talks about inclusivity,
with which I agree, I find it wholly inappropriate for any invitation to be issued to any member
of the British royal family to attend the 100th anniversary commemorations of the 1916 Rising.
If we were to do that, it would debase the commemorations. If we were to invite a member
of the British royal family to attend, we might as well invite the relatives of General Sir John
Maxwell along as well and apologise for the distress we put their great-grandfather through
when he decided to execute the leaders of the 1916 Rising. We have changed our relationship
with Great Britain, and I very much welcome that. I welcomed the visit of Queen Elizabeth to
Dublin and the reciprocal visit by our President to Great Britain, but let us be straight about it:
the 1916 commemorations relate to the fact that people in Ireland stood up to the might of the
British Empire. The people who went out over Easter week knew they would not be successful,
and they sacrificed themselves for the greater good of the Irish people. As the Minister knows,
many of its leaders were brutally executed afterwards, so on that basis it would be inappropri-
ate.

I welcome the educational initiative through our schools. Not enough about 1916 and the
struggle for independence is taught in our schools. There is not enough focus on these events. I
concur completely with Senators Bacik and Daly about the role of Cumann na mBan, the role
of women and the role of smaller groups in our society. I think of people such as Francis Sheehy-
Skeffington and the pacifist movement. These people need to be recognised as well.

In respect of how to commemorate the last site of the Rising, Moore Street, where the lead-
ers went after leaving the GPO, I welcome the decision by Dublin City Council to reject the
proposals that were made. We are better off getting it right than just having something ready
for 1916. The main commemorations will happen at the GPO, and rightly so. However, the
Minister could call for a fully independent battlefield site survey. This needs to be carried out.
In fairness, nobody in the council can tell me why this has not been done. It is being done on
behalf of the owners, Chartered Land, and NAMA. It is being done by their own people, but a
full battlefield site survey needs to be carried out.

I would say to those who would warn against any militaristic or overly militaristic com-
memorations that it gives us an opportunity to celebrate the role of the Irish Defence Forces and
our gardaí. It is wholly appropriate that the parade would be led by what is now Óglaigh na
hÉireann - our Irish Army - whose predecessors took part in the 1916 Rising.

I know we will have an opportunity to discuss this further, and I welcome some of the an-
ouncements. I hope the Minister reaches out to the 1916 Relatives’ Association. She needs
to mend those fences. I am not putting that down to her, but those fences need to be mended.
We need those groups on board. From my perspective and that of my party, I do not believe it
is appropriate for members of the British royal family to be given an invitation to the parade on
Easter Sunday in Dublin, and I strongly reject any proposal to do that.
Senator Martin Conway: I welcome the Minister to the House and commend her on the launch of the commemorations in a fitting location, namely, the GPO. It is a pity that a very small group of people could not see the bigger picture, but what is new in that? I come from a county that is steeped in history. Famous speeches were made in the square in Ennis. Daniel O’Connell is probably one of the most famous of these speakers, and others have included Éamon de Valera and Dr. Moosajee Bhamjee. We have heard from people who have made remarkable contributions. There is a street in Ennis named after Daniel O’Connell. I am glad that the Minister has recognised that this is a national commemoration and that there will be national events and engagement and consultation in every county, because every county has its own history. People from every county were involved in revolutions. I think back to the 1798 rebellion. I visited the National 1798 Rebellion Centre in County Wexford, which is a credit to the people of Wexford in terms of how it has brought the events of Vinegar Hill, the lead-up to those events and the story of Fr. Murphy to life. Indeed, the rebellion that followed a few years later has been recognised. 2016 will be a great year for Ireland. It will put The Gathering to shame, it will be so successful.

Senator Mary M. White: That is not possible.

Senator Martin Conway: It will. The Gathering was enormously successful, but we must always aim bigger and better, and this will be. It will engage with every Irish person all over the world. We were talking here last night about the diaspora. This will bring the diaspora together. It should be a celebration of what we are, who we are, how far we have come and what we have achieved, as opposed to any kind of squabbling by any political figure, party, or activists. This should be a coming-together in the true sense of meitheal, which makes us a unique country and, in my view, the best country in the world.

I also acknowledge and welcome the Minister’s collaboration with the Minister for Education and Skills to bring our schools into it, because I worry deeply about the future of history among the young people of this country. There was a time - only 20 years ago, when I was in secondary school - when the vast majority of people studied history up to leaving certificate. Now, many schools do not even offer history as an option at leaving certificate level because there is not enough demand. I am also worried that it might not be compulsory at junior certificate level. The commemoration of 1916 provides us with a wonderful opportunity to re-engage with our young people and the teaching of history, because one cannot move forward unless one understands the past. We have had some amazing events in the last century: the 1916 Rising and two bloody world wars, the First World War and the Second World War, in which we saw the proliferation of Nazism and its effects, with millions of people losing their lives. Is it possible that the vast majority of our children in 20 years’ time will not have any understanding of these important events? We have a responsibility to ensure that does not happen, and I hope this opportunity, which the Minister has kindly included in the programme of events, will be used. We must bring the Minister to the House to find out exactly what she is going to do to reignite the teaching of history in this country, because it is worrying. I spoke at length to Diarmaid Ferriter before I did a television programme on this issue. I have also spoken to other historians and have been contacted by the History Teachers’ Association, which is deeply concerned about the diminution in the teaching of history. We can have a long-lasting impact with the commemoration. Obviously it will give us great meitheal and it will bring everyone together, but it will also have an effect in reigniting young people and getting the message across to the powers that be that education is not simply about maths, science and languages. They are important, but education is also about who we are, where we came from, how we got here and the people
who created the country we have by making sacrifices. The commemoration programme that
the Minister launched yesterday and that she has outlined here is tremendously welcome. We
should keep this dialogue going in the Seanad in the run-up to 2016. The Minister is becoming
a very welcome visitor to the House, and she should use this Chamber as a forum for discussing
and possibly floating various ideas for the commemoration, because this is work in progress.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire. Ba mhaith liom ar dtús
fáilte a chur roimh an bhfógra a tháinig inné, mar támid ag fanacht leis le fada, ach tá domá
orainn chomh maith leis an ábhar atá ins an gcáipéis ar fad. I welcome the Minister and the fact
that at long last we have received some indication from the Government of how it intends to
commemorate 1916. However, we should not get carried away with ourselves over last night’s
event in the GPO. I am sorry that my friend Senator Conway does not see the irony of the fact
that at the launch we had people outside - citizens of Ireland - protesting at the imposition of
water charges. I wonder what the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation would have had to say
about that.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail: Sinn Féin was not at the GPO.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: This plan, which has been a long time coming, it is very
short on substance. Why has it taken the Government three years to come up with a plan for
the various events and why has the planned three-month consultative process not happened?
Why has the input of the Oireachtas consultation group on centenary commemorations been
virtually ignored? My colleague Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh and others in the group discussed
numerous ideas and offered well thought-out proposals for the commemoration, all of which,
it would appear, have gone unheeded. The glossy brochures presented last evening, with their
smart artist’s impressions and colourful formats, are devoid of any real substance or specifics.
One can only conclude the whole thing was literally thrown together a day or two ago.

This slapdash approach to 1916 is not only disrespectful to the valiant men and women of
the Irish Citizen Army, the Irish Volunteers and the IRB; it also betrays a callous and cynical
indifference to the ideals, hopes and vision of a free Ireland that those people held. Therein lies
the rub. This is the very thing that scares the living daylights out of all of the establishment par-
ties, particularly the current Government. The fact is that Ireland’s key cultural institutions are
in a state of neglect and disarray owing to a shocking lack of public funding. Year after year,
budget after budget, the Government has cut funding to the key cultural institutions. Indeed,
when it comes to funding and supports, the Government’s record is abysmal. As is so often
noted, there is madness in starving these institutions to the point of unsustainability at the very
same time as public interest in what they are doing is booming.

I acknowledge that the Government has supported the restoration of Richmond Barracks
and Kilmainham Courthouse. However, in Kilmainham Gaol, the second most visited tourist
site in the country, we see yet another lost opportunity owing to a lack of vision and funding. It
is now almost impossible for members of the public to gain access to the gaol during the sum-
mer because almost all of the tours are pre-booked by touring companies. While I welcome the
fact that Richmond Barracks, Kilmainham Courthouse and Pearse’s Cottage in Ros Muc are all
either undergoing or about to undergo a process of restoration, I am baffled by the inclusion of
the National Concert Hall and the tenement project in Henrietta Street in the commemoration
plans.

Cuirim fáilte faoi leith roimh an togra i Ros Muc. Ach maidir leis an Ghaeilge, atá luaite
To return to the issue of Henrietta Street, is the government so far removed from the reality of daily life for thousands of ordinary people in Ireland that it thinks we need or want a tenement project so we can see and learn about bad housing? We have thousands of families made up of women and young children, and thousands more single men and women who are on public housing lists the length and breadth of this country. We also have a chronic homelessness issue that official Ireland disgracefully turns its back on and ignores. We have a state and a political elite that have consciously and deliberately not invested in any substantial public housing projects in recent years. In this context, the Henrietta Street project can only be classed as an abject display of official ignorance and indifference to the meaning and values of 1916 for contemporary Irish society.

The elephant in the room is the Government’s failure, or refusal - however one wants to describe it - to save and preserve Moore Street and the historic quarter - or the lanes of history, as Enda Kenny referred to them - for this and future generations of Irish people. We should not forget that it was as a result of corruption and wheeling and dealing among Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Labour Party that the country’s most significant historical site in the context of the 1916 Rising and the foundation of the State will shortly be turned into a parking lot and shopping arcade.

Senator Ivana Bacik: There is no corruption in the Labour Party.

Senator Martin Conway: In fairness, there is not.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: When in government, Fianna Fáil could have issued a compulsory purchase order and acquired Moore Street and the surrounding historic lanes from NAMA. The current Government could, if it wanted, do exactly the same. However this is not happening. Instead, a bankrupt private developer was allowed to let this priceless historic quarter descend into a state of abject disrepair and decay. One would have to wonder what it is the owner of Chartered Land has on all of these politicians, that they defer and succumb to his every wish and are prepared to commit cultural genocide in the process.

I call again on the Government to save Moore Street and develop it for and in the interest of all the people of Ireland. If we are genuine about remembering the Easter Rising, the women and men of 1916 deserve no less.

Senator Cáit Keane: I welcome the Minister to the House. Many Members have spoken about the importance of including relatives of those involved in the commemoration. Much
history would be lost but for the folklore and the handing down of the tales through the direct descendants of the 1916 Rising. I wish to express my appreciation to those descendants for their attendance at the Joint Committee on the Environment, Community and Local Government for a meeting on the Easter Rising and for presenting to us. I heard the Minister say on radio this morning that it is a priority for her to ensure relatives get the recognition they deserve. Without the relatives, we would not have a commemoration.

My grandchildren, Helena and Seán, are a great great grand-niece and great great grand-nephew of Michael Collins, as my son married a first cousin of Nora Owen and Mary Banotti, two fine politicians who served in the Houses previously. The father of Michael Collins died when Michael was only six, but he said that his sister Helena, after whom my granddaughter is called, would be a nun and she was. He said of Michael, who was six at the time, that one day he would be a great man and would do great work for Ireland. He did.

We plan to commemorate all the great leaders of the 1916 Rising, but I want to speak in particular about Pádraig Pearse agus an tsuim a bhí aige sa teanga Gaeilge agus faoin scoil a bhunaigh sé i Rath Fearnán, i dtéach a seasann mar an Pearse Museum. Bunaíodh an scoil sin sa bhliain 1910 agus ba scoil bilingual é ar dtús. Dúirt Seanadóir éigin níos luaithe nár ceart do comóradh 1916 a bheith over militaristic agus gur ceart oideachas a chur chun cinn. Education should be put to the fore in the 1916 commemorations. No better place to do that than in the school set up by Pádraig Pearse in Rathfarnham. He moved to Rathfarnham from Ranelagh in 1910 and set up a bilingual school there, which operated as a bilingual school until 1935, when due to financial circumstances it had to close.

I commend the management, staff and the OPW on the work they have done in expanding the Pearse Museum in Rathfarnham. Much work has been done. The museum was handed over to the State and it has put significant work into the house over the years and into developing the museum devoted to Pearse. The museum contains many of the original rooms, including Pearse’s study, the family sitting room, the school art gallery and one of the dormitories. It was a bilingual Irish-English school and we are all aware of the emphasis Pádraig Pearse placed on the Irish language. His former cottage in Rosmuc is also receiving significant attention now.

I urge the Minister to consider the great work being done by the staff and management in Rathfarnham. Perhaps the museum could be used for a cruinniú of Gaelscoileanna to put some emphasis on the educational aspect of the commemoration. This should be done to acknowledge the emphasis Pádraig Pearse put on education. As Members have said, there are many different views on 1916. The use of the Pearse Museum would provide an ideal opportunity to ensure the educational aspect of the 1916 Rising would be transmitted.

The Mná na hÉireann project involves a sculpture project. I made a representation to the former Minister, Deputy Deenihan, regarding a Stuart Dunne sculpture of an Irish woman involved in the 1916 Rising. I do not suggest the sculpture should be of a woman from my area. While Anne Devlin, faithful servant of Robert Emmet, lived long before the time of the Easter Rising, one of the reasons Pádraig Pearse came to Rathfarnham was because of his admiration for Robert Emmet. Many women could be put forward as subject for the sculpture, such as Julia Grennan, Elizabeth O’Farrell, Winifred Carney and any member of Cumann na mBan. I have made a representation on behalf of Stuart Dunne for the Mná na hÉireann project for 1916.

**Senator Thomas Byrne:** Cuírím fáilte roimh an Aire go dtí an Seanad. Ar deireadh thiar thall, tá diospóireacht ar síúl sa Teach agus tá ráiteas déanta ag an Rialtas mairid le comóradh
13 November 2014

1916. Gan aon amhras, seo é an comóradh is tábhachtaí sa deich mbliana de comórtha atá le ceiliúradh againn.

There is no doubt that the 1916 Rising is the most important commemoration for this country in this decade of commemorations. I would like to see the 1916 commemoration as the primary focus of what the State and the people celebrate over the next ten years. I agree we must be inclusive and must look at all traditions, but in doing that we must not dilute any tradition. We must respect the tradition of everybody. My tradition is connected to 1916 and I and many historians believe it is the most important and focal point. However, that does not stop me from attending remembrance day events, which are not directly part of my tradition. As far as I know, some people are only finding out about relatives involved in the First World War and I will attend a number of celebrations of that kind over the weekend.

When we talk about inclusivity and about respecting all traditions, we must not dilute any of these traditions. This is the one concern I have about the commemoration of 1916. I was disappointed with the presentation made last night and expressed my disappointment on social media. Although it was well designed graphically, it looks as though it was cobbled together at the last minute and as though little thought went into it. My colleague Senator Daly is a member of the committee, but its role is unclear currently and it seems to have been sidelined by the parties in the Government. I hope the cross-party committee is given a key role in the plans. Some changes have been made.

It was disappointing to watch a video about commemorating 1916 in which we saw more of the Queen and of David Cameron. Notwithstanding the importance of the events in which they participated, the men who signed the Proclamation deserve to be recognised. I think I picked up what Senator Mac Conghail said correctly and agree we must be proud of what we did. The United States commemorates its war of independence and its independence, without affecting its excellent relationship with the United Kingdom. Without dragging the United Kingdom back into the fray at all times, it has a close relationship with it, while recognising there was a war and they fought and stood for their ideals. We must look at the issues here in the same light. When we are commemorating other significant events, we must look at them individually and consider their importance. While they happened at the same time as events here, the people involved in those events may have had different objectives.

I wish the Minister well with her planning. I believe the Government has belatedly looked at the issues. I have confidence in former Senator, Maurice Manning, as chairman of the committee. I note former Senator and Minister of State, Martin Mansergh, is also on the committee. I suggest he would be a suitable vice chairman of the committee and that he would reflect our traditions. On the national events planned, I see the list of capital projects being planned and funded in a positive light and welcome them. While the public consultation period is welcome, as I stated last night, members of the public appear to have been asked for their views at the last minute. A committee has been meeting on this issue. Let us hope these issues are resolved. All sorts of rows took place before the millennium, with accusations that not enough was being done. This tends to occur in the political sphere. It is important that the Government do all it can in this matter.

I draw the Minister’s attention to the Battle of Ashbourne, which took place towards the end of Easter week 1916. A non-party community group in Ashbourne is planning a commemoration of what was the most important battle to take place outside Dublin during Easter week. This battle deserves to be commemorated as part of the national celebrations. It would not
Seanad Éireann

interfere with any of the other celebrations that are planned. I emphasise the community aspect of the proposed commemoration in Ashbourne, in which I do not have any direct involvement, although, like many other politicians in the area, I have provided it with assistance. I hope the Minister will respond. I wish her well in performing this extremely important task.

Let us be proud of and recognise what our forefathers achieved. Let us also recognise the progress we have made and the future ahead, while never forgetting the supreme sacrifice that was made at the time. That is what we commemorate about 1916: the ideals and sacrifice, the words of the Proclamation and the actions of those who signed it, as well as those who fought in the Rising. I remember my own relative, Michael Hilliard, who subsequently became a Minister. He was too young to be sent to Frongoch camp, as he was only about 13 years old, and I understand he escaped. The leaders of the Rising were also exceptionally young. Éamon de Valera was one of the oldest among them. The sacrifice made by these young people at the time must be reflected in the commemoration. The Government spoke of the importance of youth. It is important to remember how young the leaders were.

Senator Michael Comiskey: I welcome the Minister. I was pleased to be present in the General Post Office last evening for the launch of the 2016 celebrations. As I stated on the Order of Business, I look forward to the inclusion of Seán Mac Diarmada’s house in Kiltyclogher as part of the celebrations or commemorations that will take place in 2016. I thank the Office of Public Works for the investment it has made in the house, which was visited by the former Minister of State with responsibility for the OPW and former Minister for the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Brian Hayes, MEP, and Deputy Jimmy Deenihan, respectively. I extend an invitation to the Minister to visit the house when the opportunity presents. It is in exactly the same condition as it was when Seán Mac Diarmada left it in 1914 or 1915, other than that the Office of Public Works has replaced the roof. I look forward to a visit from the Minister and to showing her around County Leitrim. An interpretative centre will open in Kiltyclogher at the end of this month. It would be great if she could visit north County Leitrim around that time.

Senator Eamonn Coghlan referred to the golden jubilee year in 1966. I am revealing my age when I recall that I recited the Proclamation in our local hall at the time. This brings me to the importance of getting schools involved in the commemorations. Every time I see the Proclamation, I am reminded of the night in the local hall when I and others recited it, as well as the many other events held in 1966 to commemorate the Rising.

Senator Daly referred to Cumann na mBán. It is important that we celebrate the women who gave their time in the period from 1916 through the Civil War when Cumann na mBán members were still active. Two of my aunts were involved in Cumann na mBan and later emigrated to America. I look forward to their families returning to County Leitrim in 2016 to celebrate the occasion with us. I will contact the Minister about the possibility of arranging a visit to County Leitrim. I hope she will be able to visit at some stage.

Senator Mary M. White: I congratulate the Minister and look forward to working with her in my capacity as a member of the 2016 commemoration committee, which was appointed by the Taoiseach. Last night’s event in the GPO, the main site of the Rising, was a very moving experience and it was a great privilege to participate in it. I was born in Dundalk and we Border people are acutely sensitive to this issue. I am not arguing that people born elsewhere are not similarly sensitive. My grandmother was from west Belfast, and as a child I used to travel by train from Dundalk to Belfast. I was reared on stories of Pádraig Pearse. It was a great feeling to be present at last night’s event. I thought of my father who used to bring us to the GPO to
view the beautiful statue of Cú Chulainn with an eagle on his shoulder. It was fantastic to attend last night in an official capacity.

I agree with the comments made on raising awareness of women’s participation in the Rising. A book entitled *Women of the Irish Revolution* will be launched tonight in Richmond Barracks, which is an extraordinary place to visit. Visiting the barracks, where the trials of those who took part in the Rising were held, sent a shiver down my spine. Members of the commemoration committee visited in an official capacity and it was very moving to think that the leaders were placed on trial there.

I was also privileged to attend an event to mark the 94th anniversary of Kevin Barry’s execution on 1 November last. I found the event very emotional because, as a child, I used to play the song “Kevin Barry” on the piano.

Like Senator Bacik, I remember watching tanks roll along O’Connell Street and asking why we were flaunting weapons of war. While I was aware that our troops were participating in peacekeeping operations, I could not understand the point of the tanks and found it upsetting that they should be used.

Members of the Oireachtas and local authorities must ensure that more women are involved in the commemorations. Women and men have different opinions, and we need diversity and a woman’s voice. The Minister spoke about commemorating the women of Cumann na mBán in Ballina and the events planned to commemorate that organisation. Countess Markievicz trained members of Cumann na mBán in a small wood in Sandyford near where I live in Dundrum.

When I attended Bolton Street college of technology in the early 1960s after completing the leaving certificate, I did not want to be an actor as I hated acting. However, I worked on the sets of plays, and at one time the theatre group was desperate to find someone to play a minor role in “The Plough and the Stars”. I obliged and found it a great experience to play a part in that play in Bolton Street, which was so close to where the events depicted in it took place.

The 1916 commemorations must inspire people to be idealistic about their country. We lived through a bad period of excessive materialism, with everyone wanting bigger houses and so on. While I am fully in favour of people having a good standard of living, we should also acknowledge that public service is a beautiful way to live. We should be inspired by Pádraig Pearse and Kevin Barry, who was only 18 when he was executed. We should become familiar with the songs, poetry and so on. We must get more women involved with politics and have more diverse institutions. Senator Mooney knows it is very hard for me sometimes, as I may be the only woman attending a political party meeting.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** The Senator can more than hold her own.

**Senator Mary M. White:** I cannot. Sometimes I get very hurt. Perhaps I can hold my own on the surface. We need to get more women in here, as they represent half the population. We must lift the spirits of young people so they can be idealistic about their country. When I started Lir Chocolates, I had never heard of profit; I did it to create employment. When I was elected to the Seanad, I did not know I was to be paid. People may not believe that.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** The Senator found out quickly enough.

**Senator Mary M. White:** I am not saying I did not. It is not all about accumulating
money; the first priority is the development of potential. One must be passionate about what one is doing.

Senator Terry Brennan: Ní bheidh mé ró-fhada. Cuirim failte roimh an Aire. The Minister’s proposal to engage with the diaspora is a wonderful idea, as we all know members of the diaspora in various parts of the world. They will play a significant part in the commemoration.

As the Minister indicated, the period from 1912 to 1922 was one of the most eventful in our country’s history. From the campaign for home rule, the 1913 Lock-out, the First World War and the Easter Rising of 1916 to the foundation of the Free State, this was a decade of immense upheaval and change in our country. I agree it is of the utmost importance that the dignity of those who suffered and died be paramount and that relatives be given pride of place in remembering family members. The formation of Cumann na mBan, which cannot be overemphasised, was absolutely vital in the empowerment, both politically and socially, of women in this country. It is very important that women’s participation in the Easter Rising continues to be fully acknowledged as we reach this very important year in our history.

A national initiative led by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht will develop, co-ordinate and deliver a programme of activity to honour and remember those who fought and died in the Easter Rising. I commend the Minister and her Department on this programme. The emphasis is on the participation of youth and communities, and there is no doubt that each parish and community in the country has a contribution to make. I spoke with two young girls from the grammar school in Dundalk ten days ago and asked them what was their favourite subject at school. A previous contributor mentioned how history is taught in our schools. I was delighted that both of these girls told me history was their favourite subject. They had been here two years ago and received a tour of the Parliament. That was part of the reason. One of the girls asked me if I had a history book that she could read at the weekend. The girls and the rest of their class love history because their teacher made it fun to learn and they looked forward to the class. It was great to see two young girls with such an interest.

History teachers in our schools for the next year or year and a half have a part to play in emphasising the history of 1916 and getting school pupils involved. I cannot overemphasise how pleased I was to hear that two young, attractive girls who were 13 or 14 are interested in history and following through on it. Ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a dhéanamh leis an Aire.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I compliment the Minister on the document produced today. It is not too late; in fact, it is rather timely. Sometimes, if the lead-in is too long, we can miss some of the important issues. Last year we saw commemorations of the 1913 Lock-out. When I attended the events at the GPO, the general public were incensed at being left standing outside for over 45 minutes while a few dignitaries were treated to something or other inside the building. I sincerely hope that any planned reception will take place either before or after the event. The general public should not be left standing outside like goms waiting for Caesar to arrive.

The relatives of those involved with 1916 have been mentioned. There are associations, but families all over the country had relatives involved with the 1916 Rising, and I ask that the Department make every effort to advertise in local and national media to ask relatives of those who fought in 1916 to come forward and be recognised. Not everybody is linked to an association or group.
We have entered the most complex period in Irish history and there is a multiplicity of memory in our nation State. It would be wrong of us to try to feed all of those memories. The year 1916 is Ireland’s and it is not owned by the Somme or anything else. I have worn uniforms on all sides and been a proud soldier in the Irish Defence Forces. I regret that I differ with my colleagues, Senators White and Bacik, on this issue. It is a day for the military and the Defence Forces, which have a proud tradition of peacekeeping throughout the world, to parade themselves. I regret to advise Senators that we do not have any tanks, but we have a couple of miserable armoured cars that will not leave anybody shaking in their boots. It is important that the military comes out on the day and celebrates its upholding of our democracy. The public in general would love to see them. I ask that those who most recently returned from United Nations peacekeeping be allowed to parade in their United Nations uniforms to celebrate the peace they have brought to certain parts of the world. Many of our soldiers and young men lost their lives while defending peace in the Lebanon, Chad and various other places around the world. We must recognise that.

I appreciate that the anniversaries of the battles at the Somme and Gallipoli are approaching. We should commemorate Gallipoli, particularly as it involved the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, who were trapped on the beaches there for a time. We can celebrate that event because it took place in 1915. However, 1916 is Ireland’s year. It is the year those brave men and women stood up for our democracy and stepped forward as the founding fathers of this State. We must recognise their achievement. Moreover, I agree with colleagues that it would be anathema to invite any member of the British royal family to Ireland for our 1916 celebrations. There is no reason that a British royal should not be invited to participate in our remembrance of 1922, for example, but it would be wrong to do so in 2016.

I am delighted to hear about the Minister’s plans for an education programme. I hope it works its way from national schools through to the third level institutions. On the issue of the teaching of history in schools, I agree with Senator Martin Conway that it is a vital part of our memory and our culture. Those who forget the past are most likely to revisit it. I urge that there be an extensive engagement with schools.

The programme of commemorations the Minister has outlined is ambitious and I wish her well in implementing it.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I join speakers on all sides of the House in wishing the Minister, Deputy Heather Humphreys, well in progressing her plans for a programme of commemorative events to mark the centenary of 1916. Without wishing to be divisive - I recognise that we all have our individual views on these issues - I note the emergence of a common theme among speakers on this side of the Chamber in our emphasis on the 1916 Rising as a seminal event in Irish history. Of course, it is not just about the event itself but also its legacy. What was done in 1916 led to the achievement of partial independence for the island of Ireland.

It is a question of celebrating and commemorating. We commemorate the event itself, which was a blood sacrifice by a group of very brave and courageous people - they must be considered such by any stretch of the imagination - who went into battle knowing defeat was inevitable and their own lives would be forfeited. They acted from the very highest of motives, namely, to secure for the people of this country a free and independent existence detached from the then all-powerful British Empire. I support Senator Comiskey’s comments regarding Seán Mac Diarmada’s cottage in Kiltyclogher, County Leitrim. I have visited it on many occasions over the years for various events. Just as the events in Dublin at Easter 1916 were not univer-
sally accepted by people in this city, there were mixed views about Mac Diarmada in County Leitrim. I remember hearing that a memorial service that was held in the church in Kiltyclogher some time after his execution was very poorly attended. This gives an indication of the mood of people at that time. Ireland was involved in a world war and its people were, in the main, supportive of the war effort on the basis that it was genuinely in the interests of Irish freedom. In that climate, the actions of the revolutionaries were not universally accepted. The stories are plentiful about prisoners being spat on by ordinary people as they were brought through the streets of Dublin. Many of these people had sons, brothers and other family members fighting for Irish freedom, as they saw it, on the Continent.

This leads me to the element of revisionism that has crept into this debate in recent months. I was particularly taken by the view articulated by the former Taoiseach, John Bruton, that the Rising should not have happened at all. After all, he argues, we already had secured Home Rule. In fact, we had not secured Home Rule but only a diluted form of it. A 32 county arrangement was not on offer. The original achievement of the Irish Parliamentary Party from 1910 to 1912 in securing a commitment to Home Rule for the 32 counties of Ireland was remarkable and should be applauded. However, this was not what emerged following the obfuscation and conspiracies that were going on within the British Cabinet at that time. Many members of that Cabinet were anti-Irish and anti-Nationalist and they pulled the wool over the eyes of John Redmond.

The Home Rule proposal that was presented to the Irish people in the middle of the war was a diluted, partitionist arrangement from which the North was to be allowed to secede. We were not even talking about the Six Counties at this point but the whole nine counties of Ulster. When that was no longer on the cards, the Unionists fought tooth and nail to ensure Fermanagh and Tyrone were included, even though they should, in the normal course of events, have been incorporated into an independent Ireland.

I say all of this in order to present a counter view to all that we have been hearing about the futility of what was done in 1916. The Rising was not a futile act but a brave act on behalf of people who believed in their cause. It is sometimes forgotten that the reason the rebels in the GPO surrendered, the reason Pádraig Pearse went out, accompanied by a woman, to hand over the terms of surrender, was that neither he nor his colleagues wished to inflict any more loss of innocent life on Dublin. They stepped down not because they realised they would not be able to defeat the British forces - the gunboat Helga was on the quays at this stage, shelling half of Dublin into smithereens - but because they wanted to protect innocent life. That does not sound like the actions of people who had a casual approach to the value of life. That is the vision we are commemorating.

Like Senator Craughwell, I have tremendous pride in our Defence Forces. I had an uncle who served in the forces and I have always defended their record. As a colleague of mine said earlier when we were chatting about this issue, it is useful to overlap contemporary events with the events of 1916. We cannot deny the military dimension. The Rising was, after all, a military act and an act of rebellion against the British Empire. In commemorating what happened, we must acknowledge that reality. In my home county of Leitrim we have a particular interest in events commemorating 1916. As well as Seán Mac Diarmada, there is another Leitrim connection in the person of Thomas MacDonagh, whose people were from Carrigallen on the Cavan-Leitrim border. I am sure they and their colleagues, including Pádraig Pearse, would have relished the delicious irony that today the Irish Defence Forces have an international reputation for bringing peace to the world. That to me is the ultimate legacy of 1916.
Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I thank Senators for their thoughtful, considered and constructive contributions. I appreciate their openness and sincerity in the course of what has been a very informative debate. It is somewhat apt that 16 Senators have contributed.

I thank Senator Daly for his kind comments. He and Senator White are members of the all-party Oireachtas working group on commemorations. Senator Daly’s proposal regarding the Garden of Remembrance is a good one, as is his suggestion on the distribution of information packs. Engagement with schools will be central to our preparations and consultations.

Senators Keane, Bacik, White and others referred to the role of women in the events of the decade we are commemorating. I am mindful of the role of women in the movement during the decade of centenaries, and I will ensure that women are accorded their due recognition. I am committed to remembering the important role that women played socially and politically.

The President laid a wreath in Glasnevin Cemetery to commemorate Cumann na mBan. A plaque was also unveiled in Wynn’s Hotel to commemorate that organisation and there was a conference in Collins Barracks. As Senator White noted, “Women of the Irish Revolution: A Photographic History” will be launched this evening at Richmond Barracks.

The tenement museum project, which evolved from the 1913 Lock-out events, will take on board the social and economic impacts of the decade, which were mostly felt by women. It is also important to take account of the human dimension and the human sacrifice. Reference has been made to the parades. They need to be inclusive, and we also need to include our new communities. I want all of these suggestions to feed into this plan and the consultation.

I want to engage with the relatives. I have said very clearly that my door is open. I want to engage with them to get their views and ideas on the commemorations. I met a number of relatives’ groups. Last Tuesday I met one such group and its PR consultant. It was a very positive meeting and we all agreed to work together. For some reason, this group decided not to attend the event yesterday evening. I was disappointed that it made such a decision but I remain open to working with it.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Will the Minister remember the groups that do not have PR consultants? Some poor unfortunates cannot afford them.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I have met a number of groups. I join Senator Mac Conghail in remembering Dr. Brian Farrell. I concur with the Senator on the importance of the expert group, which is making a great contribution and provides a fair and balanced analysis.

These commemorations do not belong to the Government or the Opposition; they belong to the Irish people. I want to engage communities throughout the country. I spoke to the county and city managers last night. They are a great way to tap into local communities. They have a great framework and I look forward to working closely with them. The consultation will last for three months. I want to include everyone, and contact can be made through my Department or the website, ireland.ie.

The budget allocation is €4 million for 2015 and further consideration will be given in the budget negotiations for 2016. That is a strong indication of this Government’s commitment to the commemorations. The culture 2025 target is 2016. I agree that we can interpret and understand 1916 through the arts. We need to push out the boundaries, and there is nobody better at
doing that than the artists. I look forward to Yeats 2015 and recognising his motives in promoting the cultural revival of the period. The capital projects are a bequest to future generations in memory of the men and women of 1916. The tenement museum and Richmond Barracks projects will reside in the social sphere. We are commemorating from the ground up and I want everybody to be involved.

We are currently supporting a poignant exhibition in the Hugh Lane Gallery on the lithographs of World War One, which have been beautifully restored. Senator Naughten referred to the Land Acts. It is important that we recognise the major role played by the Land League and the Irish Parliamentary Party in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Senator Conway emphasised the ground-up approach and involving the local authorities. I agree with him.

I am disappointed with the negative approach taken by Senator Ó Clochartaigh.

**Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh:** I am equally disappointed.

**Deputy Heather Humphreys:** In the spirit of inclusiveness, I want to work with everybody to have an appropriate and respectful commemoration in 2016. It is a very important event in our history and it was in that spirit of inclusiveness that we set out the overarching plan to which people can contribute. It is important that people get involved because it is not about any particular individuals, groups or parties; it is about all of the people of Ireland. There were technical problems with the website but they have been sorted. They were mainly due to the large volume of traffic visiting it, even though it was only launched yesterday evening.

The vice chairman of the all-party commemorations committee is the Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Ó Riordáin, and Martin Mansergh is the vice chairman of the expert committee. In regard to Senator Comiskey’s comments, I hope to visit County Leitrim shortly. I agree with Senator Craughwell that people should not be left waiting past the starting time. I thank Senators for their contributions and I look forward to working with them on what I hope will be a very successful commemoration.

**Acting Chairman (Senator Michael Mullins):** When it is proposed to sit again.

**Senator Ivana Bacik:** At 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 18 November 2014.

---

**Adjournment Matters**

**Autism Support Services**

**Senator Rónán Mullen:** According to the definition of the American Psychiatric Association, autism is a neuro-developmental disorder characterised by impaired social interaction, impaired verbal and non-verbal communication and restricted and repetitive behaviour. The rapid prompting method, which is the subject of this Adjournment matter, is a method for teaching a child to respond to his or her teacher by making 50-50 choices on paper. Gradually, a child with autism is taught how to point to letters on a letter board to spell out answers. This leads to the child expressing his or her own thoughts by spelling sentences on the letter board and, eventu-
ally, the child is taught to spell on a keyboard or ipad that speaks what he or she has written. This gives a child a new way to communicate with others. It is very successful for people with autism who have no or limited speech. With the incidence of autism in Ireland high - according to a 2003 study, approximately one child in every 100 is somewhere on the autism spectrum - this is a very important matter.

The rapid prompting method, RPM, has been used in the United States for over ten years with extraordinary results. Thousands have been helped to realise their potential to communicate through means other than speech. The context is that applied behaviour analysis, ABA, is the predominant treatment used in Ireland for children with autism. It focuses on the principles that explain how learning takes place, using positive reinforcement, that is, where behaviour is followed by some reward, it is more likely to be repeated. The field of behaviour analysis has developed many techniques for increasing useful behaviours and reducing those that may cause harm or interfere with learning. However, there are approximately 25 families in Ireland who have discovered the rapid prompting method and I have spoken in detail to one about their experience. We often overuse words such as “amazing”, “transformative” and “extraordinary”. However, these words do help to describe the experiences of the families who have used this method to help their children.

I know the O’Láimhín family from Swinford, County Mayo. Nuala O’Láimhín is a teacher and the mother of Seosamh, a 16 year old boy with severe autism. Nuala and her husband, Padraig, have been using the rapid prompting method with their son in their home since May 2013. Nuala tells me that life for Seosamh and their family has been transformed since they started using the method. She has said - these are her words - that they have been blown away by the results, in particular, by how their son is communicating with them for the first time about his illness and personality. She says he has been liberated from the prison of his illness and can now express his thoughts, hopes and desires for the future. She has eloquently and emotionally told me that the rapid prompting method has allowed them to meet their son for the first time in 15 years. The barrier erected by his illness has come crashing down. She says the amazing thing about the rapid prompting method is that they have discovered Seosamh appears to be of normal intelligence on the inside, but he was never able to express it before or show them that he could understand them. They were always told that he had a mental age of two years, but now they realise he can understand everything they say. They have also discovered that he can spell, even though he was never taught to do so.

Caroline Galvin’s ten year old son, Adam, has autism. He was in the special class in his primary school until his family used the rapid prompting method system and the results were extraordinary. He has moved from the special class to mainstream fourth class with his peers. What is even more remarkable is that the teacher told Adam’s mother that the other children in the class were copying his work during a spelling test. Caroline Galvin is working with Nuala O’Láimhín to introduce the rapid prompting method system into Ireland. They have organised workshops in Swinford - fair play to them - for parents from around the country. Parents who have started to use the rapid prompting method with their children have discovered its extraordinary results. Another amazing benefit is that it has allowed children with autism to access age-appropriate academic subjects. It allows a child to develop the skill of spelling on the letter board and thereby interact with the teacher and other students during lessons generally.

Another child, Fiachra Ryan from Claremorris, has moved from an autism unit to mainstream secondary school and taking first year academic subjects with his peers.
Owing to their inability to communicate, children such as those whom I have mentioned were written off as unable to learn with their peers. The rapid prompting method, has transformed their lives for the better and the word is beginning to spread about it. Many professionals, teachers, speech therapists, special education lecturers and so on are attending workshops organised by the volunteers in Swinford. It is not within the brief of the Minister present, but I hope the Minister for Education and Skills will meet the group of parents in County Mayo to show an interest and support, with a view to raising the issue of the future use of the rapid prompting method in schools. It is such a powerful method that I expect its use will be requested by other parents of children with autism in the near future. Already the volunteers in County Mayo are being inundated with inquiries from parents who want their children to attend the next workshop in March 2015. These parents are active and going to keep going, with the support of teachers and other professionals. Last Wednesday the group of parents met a lady from an independent film company, who is making a three part programme about people with autism. She will be including an item on the rapid prompting method and the children from County Mayo, which is great news.

I am disappointed that the Minister for Education and Skills is not present, but I hope the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht will take this message to her and that we will receive an early response that the Government is not going to lag behind but be out front in encouraging these brave and innovative families not only with words but also with support from the State. I hope that as we hear more about the transformative power of the rapid prompting method the Department will take an active interest in working with parents who are spending so much of their time and money on introducing this system to Ireland, not just for their own benefit but also that of the whole community.

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I thank the Senator for raising this matter which I am taking on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Jan O’Sullivan. I advise him that the Department’s policy is to promote a child-centred approach to the education of all children with special educational needs, including those with autism.

Autism is a spectrum disorder and each child will have individual needs. Accordingly, they should have access to a range of approaches to meet their individual needs. The preferred approach is to provide for the education of children with autism through the primary and post-primary school network which facilitates access to individualised education programmes and fully qualified professional teachers who may draw on a range of autism specific interventions, including applied behaviour analysis, ABA, the treatment and education of autistic communication handicapped children programme and the picture exchange communications system. In school settings children with autism may have access to individualised education plans, fully qualified professional teachers, special needs assistants and the appropriate school curriculum with the option, where possible and appropriate, of full or partial integration and interaction with other pupils.

The child centred policy is based on advice received from the National Educational Psychological Service, the Department’s inspectorate and the report of the Irish task force on autism and takes full account of advice from a range of experts on autism. The Department recognises that specialised training and continued professional development is important for staff working with children with special educational needs. The Department supports the provision of continued professional development through the Special Education Support Service which was specifically established for this purpose.
The Special Education Support Service co-ordinates and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs, including autism. The Department remains willing to review and consider any further research as and when it becomes available and is conscious of the need to adapt existing policies and develop new ones as new research or learning becomes available. In this regard, I advise the House that the National Council for Special Education, NCSE, is preparing policy advice on the education of children with autism. The Minister specifically asked the NCSE for this advice and to review, with particular reference to educational and social outcomes, the effectiveness of the range of evidence based practices and interventions for the education of children with autism. She also asked it to identify the nature and extent of educational interventions, teaching practices and other supports which should be provided to enable children with autism to achieve educational outcomes appropriate to their needs and abilities. I expect that it will consider all evidence based interventions and that this will include the intervention to which the Senator has referred.

In this context, the Minister does not want to prejudge the outcome of the work of the NCSE, the policy advice of which will be delivered in the spring of 2015 and draw on findings gathered from an extensive consultation process with parents, schools, professional service providers and other stakeholders which is nearing completion. The advice will also draw on new research commissioned by the NCSE for this purpose, as well as any other research which may be available and which it considers merits consideration. The Minister expects that its final report will reflect the broadest possible range of views and provide recommendations which will assist the development of policy and educational interventions for children with autism for future years.

I thank the House, on behalf of the Minister, for the opportunity to discuss this very important matter and inform it of the important work being undertaken by the NCSE. I have every confidence that the policy advice will provide a strong basis for future educational provision for children with autism in Ireland.

Veteran Senator Rónán Mullen: I thank the Minister for being present, but I am very disappointed by the response she has been given. It is full of Civil Service speak and passes the ball completely to the NCSE and presumes that it will look at the issue. I do not know from the speech the Minister has delivered whether the Department or the NCSE has one iota of knowledge of the existence of the rapid prompting method. I would have thought that, at the very least, the Department would undertake to examine the issue and ask the NCSE to give some kind of response on whether it considers investment and promotion of the rapid prompting method, or RPM, to be suitable. This answer could have been given in relation to a myriad of different issues. It is complete civil servants’ speak and I am disappointed because it tells me nothing about whether the Department knows or cares anything about this.

Since the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Jan O’Sullivan, is not here, I ask the Minister present, Deputy Heather Humphreys, to raise this matter with her at my request and on behalf of the families who care so much about the rapid prompting method and who are encouraged by it. Will she draw this to the Minister for Education and Skills’ attention and ask her to bring this forward in her Department? The Department of Education and Skills should examine the RPM, find out more and tell us what they think of it, given the current state of knowledge about it.

Deputy Heather Humphreys: I will ensure that the Senator’s contribution outlining the benefits of RPM is brought to the attention of the Minister, Deputy Jan O’Sullivan. I will raise
it with her.

Senator Rónán Mullen: Thank you very much.

Housing Regeneration

Acting Chairman (Senator Michael Mullins): I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Deenihan, to the House.

Senator Colm Burke: I welcome the Minister of State to the House. My question concerns the housing regeneration programme in Knocknaheeny. There are over 1,150 local authority houses in the Knocknaheeny area. A number of years ago, the local authority decided on a regeneration of the whole area and a detailed planning process was put in place to deal with it. I understand that we are still on phases 1A and 1B, so there is a question mark over 2015.

In 2014, some €10 million was to be provided, but the Department has kept raising issues about the programme. As of today, only about €3 million of that €10 million has been made available. There is concern in the area that phases 2A, 2B and 3 will not be moved ahead in 2015 because funding seems to be becoming available at a slow rate.

There is a need for clarification on what the Department’s intention is for 2015. Knocknaheeny has a very big, young population so it is important to have proper housing structures in place. The regeneration programme is about making it a better and more environmentally-friendly place for people to live in. I am therefore raising the matter in that context.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I thank the Senator for raising this issue. I have been asked by my colleague the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Alan Kelly, to speak on this matter.

Significant funding has been made available to Cork City Council by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government for the past number of years to support the Cork city north west regeneration project. In 2013, the allocation was €12 million and in 2014 a further €10 million has been made available.

The specific allocations to be provided in 2015 across all the Department’s various funding schemes and programmes will be published in the 2015 Revised Estimates volume in December. That will include the breakdown of the social housing investment programme. At that point, the Department will be working with all local authorities to agree individual allocations across all the social housing activities, including regeneration programmes such as that at Cork city north west.

The ongoing implementation of the Cork city north west regeneration project remains a matter for Cork City Council. However, the Department liaises with the council in respect of its advancement of the project and its prioritisation of individual schemes for inclusion in annual work programmes, and in respect of the capital funding allocations which are made by the Department.

As each of the proposed project elements of the masterplan are progressed, they are subject to the standard appraisal for capital projects. I understand that work commenced on phase 1A of the Cork city north west regeneration project in 2014, somewhat later than originally
anticipated. However, this is now progressing and delivery of 23 new social housing units is scheduled for 2015. As regards phase 1B, I understand this is due to go to planning later this year and that demolition on this site has already taken place.

I also understand that an updated implementation plan for the overall project is due to be completed by Cork City Council in February next. I expect this will clarify the position regarding phases 2 and 3, in particular such matters as the number of social housing units, their timelines for development and the approach to tenure mix. It will allow the council and the Department to identify capital funding requirements for the next stages of the project.

Nationally, the Department supports an ambitious programme of regeneration in a number of areas across the country. The regeneration approach seeks to address many of the causes of disadvantage in communities based in large social housing estates and flat complexes, through holistic programmes of physical, social and economic regeneration.

The value placed on the national regeneration programme is explicitly recognised in the programme for Government. It is the objective of the Minister, Deputy Kelly, and his Department to ensure that this important programme continues to be supported, including for the people of Knocknaheeny in Cork.

**Senator Colm Burke:** I thank the Minister of State for his reply. I know that money was allocated in 2014, but my understanding is that the drawdown and availability of money has been extremely slow. The whole project has slowed up quite considerably. In fairness, it is a project that needs to be given priority. If there are obstacles to be overcome then it is important that they be dealt with. It appears, however, that the whole project has been slowed up, especially when one considers that while €10 million has been set aside, only €3 million has been made available so far.

**Deputy Jimmy Deenihan:** That seems to be a matter for the local authorities, more so than for the Department. The Department has made the money available. It would seem that if there are problems with the project, they exist locally. That may not be the case, but I suggest that the Senator should take the matter up with Cork City Council. I will certainly convey the Senator’s message - that he is unhappy with progress where there is an obvious need for it - to the Minister, Deputy Kelly.

The Seanad adjourned at 3 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 18 November 2014.