



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

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

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 29 Aibreán 2015

Wednesday, 29 April 2015

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

*Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.*

Business of Seanad

An Cathaoirleach: I have notice from Senator Cáit Keane that, on the motion for the Commencement of the House today, she proposes to raise the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Skills to set out details of the proposals, plans and timeframe for the provision of a permanent building for Gaelscoil Chnoc Liamhna, Knocklyon, Dublin.

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

The need for the Minister for Education and Skills to review the funding policy for post-primary schools where DEIS and non-DEIS schools have amalgamated.

I have also received notice from Senator Mary White of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Skills to clarify whether children in the Glencullen, County Dublin, catchment area will be in the school feeder area for the proposed new Educate Together post-primary school in Stepside, County Dublin.

I have also received notice from Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh of the following matter:

An gá go dtabharfaidh an tAire Coimirce Sóisialaí tuairisc ar cé mhéad uair a ndeachaigh oifigigh leasa shóisialaigh ar cuairt chuig tithe cliant i gConamara le bliain anuas de bharr nach raibh na daoine sin ábalta taisteal chuig oifig chathair na Gaillimhe nó oifig An Chlocháin mar gheall ar chúinsí airgeadais nó iompair nó ar chúiseanna bailí eile.

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

The need for the Minister for Health to furnish details of all repayments received under the fair deal scheme from the estates of deceased fair deal recipients.

I have also received notice from Senator Jim Walsh of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Justice and Equality to outline any substantive differences that will accrue to same-sex couples from redefining marriage which are not already al-

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lowed for under civil partnership legislation.

I regard the matters raised by Senators Keane, Higgins, White, Ó Clochartaigh and Burke as suitable for discussion. I have selected the matters raised by Senators Keane, Higgins, White and Ó Clochartaigh and they will be taken now. Senator Colm Burke may give notice on another day of the matter he wishes to raise. I regret that I have had to rule out of order the matter raised by Senator Walsh on the grounds that it involves a repeat of the debate on Committee Stage of the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill 2015.

Commencement Matters

Schools Building Projects Status

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy English.

Senator Cáit Keane: I welcome the Minister of State. I would like to read his reply before I start because for the past 15 years, I have been getting the same reply on this issue. The school has been in a prefab accommodation for 19 years and from the day that went on site, it was supposed to get a new school building. The prefab accommodation was supposed to be a temporary building but it is still in use. It is a large school in Knocklyon and it is bursting at the seams. The prefab accommodation has been in use for 19 years and it is totally unsuitable.

There is a problem with the title deeds in regard to the site. It was a road reservation and South Dublin County Council purchased a bit of the land. This has been an issue since about five years after the school was established. I was told about ten years ago that South Dublin County Council had requested that the site be vested in the Department of Finance, as that would be the only way to sort this out, but after that, nothing was done. It has been going from Billy to Jack. Three years ago, I thought the Department of Education would do something but nothing happened.

I am blue in the face asking about this. I was told it was within the remit of the Property Registration Authority, the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Education and Skills. Nobody wants the site; it is a road reservation. South Dublin County Council does not have title to it. Everybody is in agreement in the Department of Education and Skills that a new school is needed. Less than a year ago, I was informed by the Minister that other site options are being considered but no specific details were given in that reply.

Can the Minister of State comment on this? What is the actual position? After 20 years of waiting for a new school building, the teachers and pupils - some former pupils are now sending their children to the school - deserve to know what is happening. The issue has been going on much too long and I am dying to hear what the Minister of State has to say.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): I am taking this matter on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan and I thank the Senator for raising it. As she is aware, officials from my Department have been working closely with South Dublin County Council officials in relation to securing a suitable site to facilitate the delivery of permanent school accommodation for Gaelscoil Chnoc Liamhna. The site on which the school's temporary accommodation is cur-

rently located is in the ownership of South Dublin County Council. This site was assessed by members of the Department's technical and professional staff and deemed suitable for development of permanent accommodation for the school, as the Senator rightly said. Subsequently, agreement in principle was reached between the Department and South Dublin County Council in relation to the acquisition of the site. However, in the course of the conveyancing process, title issues relating to a portion of the site were identified. As the Senator will appreciate, due diligence must be applied with respect to all land transfers. Resolution of the title issues is not straightforward and South Dublin County Council has been working with the Department and the Property Registration Authority to obtain a satisfactory outcome for some time. Despite the best efforts of all involved, this issue has significantly delayed the site acquisition.

Subsequent to the most recent discussions between officials from my Department and from South Dublin County Council, the matter has been reappraised. The council has now submitted to my Department a proposal which might serve to provide a satisfactory resolution to the title issues and thereby facilitate the land transfer. This proposal is under review by officials in my Department. A response will issue to the council shortly in relation to this proposal and it is envisaged that this will enable the conveyancing process to progress. Officials in my Department will keep the school authorities informed of any developments. Once the acquisition of the site is finalised, it is my Department's intention to initiate the architectural planning process for the provision of a new school building.

I assure the Senator that officials from my Department are aware of the situation with regard to the school's current accommodation and the pressing need to acquire the site. In that regard, every effort is being made to advance the process to facilitate progression of the project. I thank the Senator again for giving me the opportunity to clarify the situation in this regard. I hope it has been of some use.

Senator Cáit Keane: The Minister of State has tried his best to make it sound plausible. He said: "The council has now submitted to my Department a proposal which might serve to provide a satisfactory resolution to the title issues and thereby facilitate the land transfer." Over seven years ago, South Dublin County Council submitted a proposal to the Department of Education and Skills to have the land vested in the Department of Finance. Is that the same proposal that has now been resubmitted? Perhaps the Minister of State does not know as he is answering for the Minister, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan. I would like to have the actual proposal "which might serve to provide a satisfactory resolution" in writing, including the timescale.

Land transfers happen every day of the week. Some builders no longer have the money to buy sites, but transfers of land are carried out every day. I am waiting 15 years for this land title transfer. The Minister said the land was in the ownership of South Dublin County Council. We know the road reservation was there, but the title deeds are the problem. The ownership is no good without the title deeds because the Department of Education and Skills will not put a school on the ground without having title to the site. We do not want a situation as in Merriem Park, where someone comes along later and claims the whole lot. It is important that it is sorted. I want a timescale. This is not worth the paper it is written on, because the same proposal came in years ago. Could the Minister of State respond to me in writing, stating what the proposal is, the timescale and giving more detail?

Deputy Damien English: I do not have a timeframe for the Senator, but at this stage everyone recognises that it is urgent. The Senator spoke of 15 years, but South Dublin County Council approved the disposal of the site in 2007, which is now seven or eight years ago. Sub-

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sequently, issues arose regarding the title and ownership. From the perspective of the Department of Education and Skills, it is not possible to commence a building project in advance of a formal transfer of land. The Department must ensure the Minister owns the land. It cannot build a school on someone else's land. That is the difficulty. I do not know why it has taken seven or eight years and I am not privy to details as to whether it is a new proposal. I understand it is acceptable to all involved, so it should progress. I will certainly provide the Senator with any details we are allowed to release. There is no problem with that. I understand from all involved that this solution should work. I hope it does and will pass on the sense of urgency expressed by the Senator.

Schools Amalgamation

Senator Lorraine Higgins: I wish to raise an issue regarding the funding policy pursued by the Department when it comes to the amalgamation of DEIS schools with non-DEIS schools. I recently visited a secondary school in my constituency in County Galway, which was originally a regular school but which amalgamated with a DEIS school. As soon as this new entity was established, and despite the fact that all these new students were assimilated into the school, the special status funding stream was withdrawn.

The pupils and staff find themselves in a situation where 59% of the school population are medical card holders and despite the presence of a large number of students from an ethnic minority - about 30 students - the school does not qualify for a Traveller liaison officer because 33 students from this background are required for this. The school does not have a school liaison officer, which also presents problems, given some issues in families and possible suspicion of teachers and people from the school. All this has an impact on the students and the quality of their learning if teachers and the school principal have to invest resources and time and money to assist in whatever way they can. The school is already looking at possibly having to withdraw the free books scheme in the school, which it did not qualify for under the departmental guidelines because it already had one in place prior to the Department putting forward funding. It may also have to revise its ability to give breakfast free to its students.

All this means that the already stretched funding streams will be further impacted. It will have a knock-on effect on the quality of services being provided to many students from disadvantaged backgrounds in this area. The cohort of students has not changed. If anything, it has become more challenging for teachers and students alike in the absence of specific funding to assist, which would have been available to the DEIS school. Discretion must be used now. If this is not done, children who would traditionally have done their junior certificate as a result of having all these supports in place in a DEIS school and who no longer have these supports under the new amalgamated structure will fall through the cracks. I am eager to avoid this if at all possible. I urge the Minister of State and the Department to review the policy of withdrawing funding for those DEIS schools that have amalgamated with non-DEIS schools, in the interests of fairness and equality of opportunity in education.

Deputy Damien English: Again, I will answer on behalf of my colleague, the Minister, who could not make it to the House today and who sends her apologies. I thank the Senator for raising this matter. It is an important issue and one that many of us have seen in our own areas. The current policy of my Department in relation to school amalgamations involving DEIS and non-DEIS schools is that where such an amalgamation occurs, DEIS status is not retained by

the newly established school. However, as a transitional measure, these schools continue to be supported by way of additional financial and non-teaching resources in respect of the number of eligible pupils from the former DEIS school.

This transitional measure remains in place for a specific period of time. Once the new school has been operating for six school years, it is deemed that the cohort of disadvantaged students from the former DEIS school will have passed through the second level system or be in their final year of schooling. Accordingly, any additional resources and funding, which would have been based on the final enrolment of the now closed DEIS school, would cease. This arrangement supports the pupil cohort of the former DEIS school for the duration of their second level education and represents a continuation of support for this targeted group.

As the Senator will be aware, the programme for Government commits to addressing educational disadvantage and delivering better outcomes for students in disadvantaged areas. The recently published ESRI report, *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS*, which was commissioned by my Department, provides an opportunity to review the scheme. The report assesses the main findings of research to date on the DEIS programme and provides advice to inform future policy direction in respect of educational disadvantage.

As the Senator may also be aware, the Minister, Deputy O'Sullivan, has commenced consultation with the education partners to inform the development of appropriate measures to continue to support those at risk of poor educational outcomes. She is also establishing an inter-departmental working group, which will ensure a joined-up approach to the delivery of DEIS services. A technical group has already commenced work to develop a revised identification process for schools. This work will continue over the course of the next school year. The consultation process will encapsulate all aspects of the DEIS programme, including the arrangements for school amalgamations involving DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Hopefully the issue the Senator has raised will also be addressed through that.

The outcome of this process will form part of an overall proposal for the delivery of future interventions to tackle educational disadvantage. In the meantime, the Minister does not propose to make any changes to current policy as regards the status of new schools involving the amalgamation of DEIS and non-DEIS schools. I thank the Senator once again for raising this matter.

Senator Lorraine Higgins: I thank the Minister for his response. I welcome it and think that something proactive is being undertaken by the Department. It is important that special consideration is given to what I see as unfair situations with regard to DEIS and non-DEIS schools that have amalgamated and the withdrawal of particular funding streams that would have a significant impact on the lives of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. I will give the Minister of State the details of the school I have spoken about and ask that consideration be given to its circumstances. I know it cannot be given consideration beyond that given to other schools, but I ask that he take into consideration its particular circumstances and act in a proactive and positive manner in that respect.

Deputy Damien English: If the Senator gives me the details, I will pass them on to the Minister. I know there are specific issues relating to one school and we can get them looked at. The policy must be used equally throughout the country. If any area is missing out on anything, we can get it looked at.

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School Enrolments

Senator Mary M. White: The Minister of State is very welcome. I am speaking on behalf of the families of Glencullen, Kiltarnan, Stepside, Sandyford and Ballyogan who have no secondary school in their area. There are a number of families comprising two and three generations but there is also a burgeoning population in the area. The fact that there is no secondary school in the area is a very serious deficit. The map outlined for the area excludes Glencullen from participating in the new Educate Together school in Stepside. It means that the residents of Glencullen will have to travel over the mountains and attend the proposed new school in north Wicklow. Excluding children from Glencullen makes no sense. There are two issues in question. The first is that there is no secondary school there and the second is that, ridiculously, the existing map prevents children from Glencullen from attending the Educate Together school in Stepside. It is a matter of urgency because it is very nerve-wracking for the families. They are very agitated about it.

Deputy Damien English: I thank the Senator for raising this matter as I welcome the opportunity to explain the position with regard to how new schools are planned and to address the issue of the Glencullen catchment area which the Senator wants to be part of the school feeder area for the proposed new Educate Together post-primary school in Stepside.

First, the school to which the Senator refers is not being provided for the children of Glencullen. The school is being specifically provided for the children of the Ballinteer-Stepaside school feeder area. Glencullen is in a different school feeder area known as the Kiltarnan school feeder area. I am pleased to be able to tell the Senator that a separate new post-primary school is starting up in September 2016 under the patronage of Educate Together to cater for the children of the Kiltarnan, Ballybrack-Shankill and Bray school feeder areas. As Glencullen is in the Kiltarnan school feeder area, this second school will cater for children from that area from September 2016.

I will explain in more depth. For school planning purposes, the country is divided into school feeder areas. A school feeder area has one or more post-primary schools into which designated primary schools feed. School feeder areas do not change as this would defeat the orderly planning of school provision. Due to the unprecedented demographic growth in this country over the past decade or more, 24 new primary schools and 26 new post-primary schools have been or are in the process of being established. The purpose of each of these schools is to meet a specific demographic need within a defined geographic area known as a school feeder area. In other words, the establishment of these schools is to ensure every child living in a particular school feeder area can have access to a physical school place within that area.

As part of the patronage determination processes to establish who will operate the new schools, prospective patrons must commit to enrolling, as a priority, pupils from the area for whom the school is intended. The Department would expect to see this in the enrolment policies for new schools to ensure the children for whom the school is being provided are not displaced by pupils living in another school feeder area who would have their own post-primary provision.

The new post-primary school for the Ballinteer-Stepaside school feeder area is opening in part in response to a need to provide 1,500 extra post-primary school places for children resident in the geographical area in question. The remainder of the places are being provided by a new all-Irish Gaelcholáiste. Separately, a new post-primary school with 1,000 pupil places is

required to meet the demographic needs of the Kiltarnan, Ballybrack-Shankill and Bray school feeder areas. As indicated, the Kiltarnan school feeder area contains Glencullen.

Again and as I said, consistent with the criteria for establishing all new schools, the patron of this school, which is Educate Together, will be expected to give priority access to children from these feeder areas in its enrolment policy for this school, including children from Glencullen. The Department is working on start-up accommodation for both of these new schools and permanent accommodation will be made available for them as soon as a site has been secured to allow this development. I hope my explanation provides clarity relating to new school provision in the Senator's area. The criteria for the establishment of new schools and all documentation relating to the award of patronage for individual schools are published on the Department's website. I think people will find that quite useful so the Senator might be able to advise some of her constituents to have a look at it because it also includes the maps of the areas to be served by the new schools. I hope the information is helpful to the Senator and clarifies her concerns. The fact that two new schools are on the way is good news for both areas.

Senator Mary M. White: In his reply, the Minister of State said that: "consistent with the criteria for establishing all new schools, the patron of this school, which is Educate Together, will be expected to give priority access to children from these feeder areas in its enrolment policy for this school, including children from Glencullen." Does this clarify that children from Glencullen can go to this new school?

Deputy Damien English: Yes. A school is planned to open in September 2016. People can apply to go to any school but our duty is to make sure there is a school of choice in their area. When patrons apply to build and run that school, they must then agree to certain criteria. Under those criteria, patrons must commit to enrolling pupils from the geographical areas for whom the school is intended. There are two schools here. The Glencullen area will be served by the 1,000-pupil school that will open in September 2016. Naturally, if there is space available, people are allowed to apply to the other school but the school being provided for them is the one in their school feeder area.

Senator Mary M. White: The reply said that "the new post-primary school for the Ballinteer-Stepaside school feeder area is opening in part in response to a need to provide 1,500 extra post-primary school places for children resident in the geographical area in question". That is the problem. I do not think that includes Glencullen.

Deputy Damien English: They are included in a different feeder area but a school is also being provided for them so two new schools are being provided. Glencullen is in a different school feeder area from the one highlighted by the Senator today. These feeder areas are geographical areas worked out by the Department's forward planning unit. Our aim is to respond to demographic need. Both feeder areas require a new school to cater for demand.

Senator Mary M. White: I worked in the school section of the OPW and understand the issue about schools but the map does not make sense so we must address that for families concerned.

Deputy Damien English: We can look at the maps and if there are any specific concerns about them and geography, the Senator might contact the forward planning unit or go through the Minister and me. The feeder areas have been analysed and are based on planning requirements and demographic need. A lot of science goes into them.

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Senator Mary M. White: They are not perfect.

Deputy Damien English: We all have issues locally with historical catchment areas but these are trying to-----

Senator Mary M. White: If it is a bad decision, it should be-----

An Cathaoirleach: Sorry-----

Senator Mary M. White: If it was a business, it would be changed because it does not make sense.

Deputy Damien English: I am sure-----

Senator Mary M. White: It should not be carved in stone.

Deputy Damien English: It might not make sense to the Senator but I am sure the science-----

Senator Mary M. White: It does not make sense to the families in the area. It must be changed.

An Cathaoirleach: We must move on.

Deputy Damien English: It is important to say that the officials put a lot of effort and work into working out these areas. It is not like what happened in the past. Schools are planned in a very logical and scientific way and data from the census, population figures today and projected figures are used to plan those schools and arrange school feeder areas. A lot of work goes into that. It is not a case of-----

Senator Mary M. White: It is a bad decision. It is the wrong decision.

Deputy Damien English: We are speaking here without having the details of the decision. It is possibly a local opinion.

Senator Mary M. White: I can follow it up.

Deputy Damien English: There is no problem doing that but it is important to recognise that a lot of work goes into making these decisions. They are not willy-nilly decisions.

Senator Mary M. White: It does not make sense to the residents.

Social Welfare Offices

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Cuirim céad fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit agus táim thar a bheith buíoch de as ucht teacht isteach. The Minister of State knows that there was a movement of community welfare officers, CWOs, from the HSE to the Department of Social Protection in 2011 and 2012 with the Department taking over more than 900 clinics that CWOs would previously have undertaken. In 2012, more than 100 clinics were closed. The Minister maintained that the service had been enhanced with phone lines being preferable to clinics and CWOs visiting people's homes to meet them where that was needed.

We agree in principle with the transfer of CWOs to the Department and said so at the time. The restructuring of services where possible into one-stop-shops and the making of savings on rent costs was to be done in a way that would not compromise the accessibility of the CWO and the person who succeeded them in that scenario.

This is the subject of my question. We had a particular concern in Connemara with the closure of a service in Carraroe and also the services in Oughterard and Spiddal being rationalised and moved to Galway city. The Minister at the time told us it was to provide for a streamlined and consistent service to the customer. The language used is interesting in that it is a customer as opposed to a client, and that anyone using the services of a CWO or a social welfare office is regarded as a customer. She also said the Department was intensifying its level of engagement with the unemployed, in particular those who are or had become long-term unemployed, and that the new Intreo service offers practical tailored employment services and supports for jobseekers, a model which is currently being rolled out throughout the country. It is acknowledged that there is an increased engagement with the unemployed so therefore one would imagine that more interaction would be needed with these former community welfare officers. We were informed that where the community welfare service had been restructured, alternative arrangements had been put in place to ensure customers - that word used again - are provided with ongoing access to the supports provided by the service and that in general this would mean that the frequency of available public clinics had been increased.

I note that Deputy Ó Snodaigh and other Deputies and ourselves at the time had raised issues around this because in rural areas where a service was being removed or moved to an urban centre, transport connections such as bus services were not available. For example, there is no bus service to Clifden, the nearest centre for people living in Carna, County Galway. Anyone wishing to go to the city would have to get a bus first thing in the morning and stay in the city all day until the return at night. I know from dealing with people through my office that people have been asked to attend at the centre in Galway on a number of occasions, for three or four days in the same week, to finalise their claims for supports from the Department of Social Protection. It has been said that in cases where people are not in a position to travel due to lack of resources or lack of transport, the Department would call out to those people and ensure they were provided with a service. The Department would initially endeavour to deal with those people by telephone or by post.

How many times in the past year have these former community welfare officers or officers of the Department of Social Protection gone out to Connemara to visit people in their homes? It is my understanding that the travel is the other way around, that people are being asked to travel to Galway or to Clifden to process their claims. This is sometimes not practical. For example, a person applying for a special needs payment may be in dire straits or may be finding it very difficult to make ends meet. It is an extra burden on such individuals if they are asked to incur travel costs and it is unfair. I am interested to know how many call-outs have been undertaken by officers on behalf of the Department of Social Protection to help people to process their claims, as was the practice previously with the community welfare officers.

Deputy Damien English: On behalf of the Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection, I thank Senator Ó Clochartaigh for raising this issue of house calls to social welfare customers in Connemara. The Minister of State is unable to attend today, for which he apologises. He was looking forward to the opportunity to reply to Senator Ó Clochartaigh in Irish.

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Before I reply to the Senator, with the permission of the Acting Chairman I wish to welcome students from my local school in Trim, Boyne community school, who are taking the Dáil tour. I think there are a few future politicians among them, either Senators or Deputies. They are all very welcome. It is important that schools have an opportunity to see what goes on in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

My colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Kevin Humphreys, is very conscious of the need to provide efficient and effective customer-facing services at a local level for all customers of the Department. I note that Senator Ó Clochartaigh does not like the use of the term “customer”, but I think it is a very appropriate term because these are public services and these people are customers. It is better than some of the titles that would have been used in the past. It reminds the departmental staff involved that we are dealing with customers and that they should be treated as customers the same as in any service being offered. In my view it is a good way to look at it but we can have a discussion about it at another time.

Since late 2013, community welfare services in the Connemara area are provided from both the Galway and Clifden offices. Staff based in An Spidéal and An Ceathrú Rua were relocated to Galway city, while services based in Cill Chiaráin were relocated to Clifden. In addition, the frequency of available public clinics was increased to five days per week in Galway city and to three days per week in Clifden. In both locations, anyone wishing to avail of the services of the Department are dealt with in person at the office, by phone, e-mail, postal application or by house call, where necessary. Customers are encouraged to contact the service by phone, e-mail or post in the first instance and in most cases their queries can be addressed without them having to attend a public clinic. If a meeting is necessary, they are usually offered an appointment to come in and meet the officer at a suitable time and date. If the customer cannot come into the office for any valid reason, the officer will call to the customer’s home by prior arrangement.

The information required by the Senator on the number of such house calls is currently not available. Officers regularly make calls to customers’ homes in the Connemara area for initial applications or for follow-up visits and reviews. I am assured there has been no change in this situation. Anyone who has a requirement for a house call for whatever valid reason is catered for when it is brought to the attention of the relevant officer. If the Senator has knowledge of any specific cases that require a house call, the details can be brought to the attention of the departmental officials.

We all know that some situations will require a house call. When I was a young fellow growing up, my father was a community welfare officer and at that time it was the norm to do house calls. The Senator will appreciate that the provision of services has changed in the past 20 or 30 years, the number of people engaging with those services has increased and, therefore, house calls are no longer the norm. They are common in our job as politicians. However, the reduction in the numbers of departmental staff means it is not possible but, where appropriate, house calls should be undertaken. I ask the Senator to contact the Department if he is aware that house calls were not undertaken and it will be investigated.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: On the point about the use of the term, “customer”, I think “client” might be a better term. We can have a discussion on that. The Minister of State referred to the time when he was a young fellow but there are many of us in this House who would still categorise him as a young fellow because he is looking a lot fresher than some of us, and fair play to him.

I am quite surprised that the Department of Social Protection has no statistics on the number of house calls. I find it strange that this information is not available. Even from an employment perspective there must be some record if an officer is being asked to make house calls. For example, travel expenses need to be reimbursed. This statistical information needs to be collected because if there is a high number of house calls, it might raise the need for a satellite office or a reconsideration of the closure of the office in Carraroe. If the number of house calls is small, the opposite would apply and it would have been the right decision. I find it very strange that the Department of Social Protection, which is very good at collecting statistics, does not have any statistics whatsoever on the number of house calls being made by its officers in a place as big and as rural as Connemara. A high number of house calls will mean a high level of expense. One imagines that travel expenses are payable to the officers. The reply is not satisfactory and I would appreciate more information. I ask the Department to revert to me with those statistics when they are to hand.

Deputy Damien English: I will convey that message to the Minister of State. To be clear, the statistics are currently not available. It is not a case that they do not exist but I think they could not compile the information within the timeframe. I will pass on the message to the Minister of State, Deputy Humphreys. The Senator has a very good reason for using the information which is to identify future service needs. The Department values the service it provides. I refer to the changes proposed for the delivery of customer services through the Intreo offices. It is hoped to see a decrease in the caseload for case officers through working with private industry to address the needs of all our constituents and clients. It is hoped there will be a significant improvement in the time available to each client because this will help them on their journey to re-employment. I will provide the information to the Senator when it is compiled.

Sitting suspended at 11.10 a.m. and resumed at 11.30 a.m.

Order of Business

Senator Maurice Cummins: The Order of Business is No. 1, statements on ash dieback disease, to be taken at 12.45 p.m. and to conclude not later than 2.15 p.m., if not previously concluded, with the contributions from group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes, those of all other Senators not to exceed five minutes, and the Minister to be called on to reply ten minutes from the end of the debate; No. 2, Sport Ireland Bill 2014 - Committee and Remaining Stages, to be taken at 2.30 p.m. and to conclude not later than 4 p.m., if not previously concluded; No. 3, statements on children's mental health services, to be taken at 4 p.m. and to conclude not later than 5.30 p.m., if not previously concluded, with the contributions from group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes, those of all other Senators not to exceed five minutes, and the Minister to be called on to reply ten minutes from the end of the debate; and No. 65, motion 15, to be taken at 5.30 p.m., with the time allocated for this debate not to exceed two hours.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Will the Leader inquire of the Minister for Health, Deputy Varadkar, on the position of the home help gratuity payment? I have raised the matter with the Minister. In fairness, he came back to me and said these are payments to which thousands of home help workers have been deemed entitled in lieu of a pension benefit. This is a gratuity payment that they are due and that has been upheld by two Labour Court recommendations. The Minister said he would set up a working group - which I welcome - involving the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and his Department. The group indicated it would

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report back by the end of March. I wrote again to the Minister at the end of March and sought information on the matter but I have not heard anything back. The Seanad has played a leading role in highlighting this issue. Will the Leader inquire as to when that report will be concluded and when these workers, many of whom are low-paid, will get the money they are due?

Second, has the Leader received any update from the Minister of State, Deputy Coffey, on the debate I sought in respect of the progress, or lack thereof, of the pyrite remediation scheme? In the two years since its establishment the scheme has managed to fix five houses in the entire country. That is not a criticism of the staff who work in the Pyrite Remediation Board and who do a very good job. However, the legislation is far too restrictive and the scheme far too cumbersome. It is simply not working.

To be fair to the then Minister, Mr. Hogan, when he announced the scheme I debated it with him and tabled amendments. We said that we would review it. I do not think it is any harm to say that it is not working in the way we intended, that we need to change it and that we need to see how more people can access the scheme. Instead, the Minister of State, Deputy Coffey, sees fit to throw muck across the floor at me and blame me for the problem rather than trying to resolve the difficulty whereby thousands of people's homes are valueless and they want their homes fixed. In the interests of co-operation the Leader could put it to the Minister of State, Deputy Coffey, that I am trying to help him and then ask him to come to the House in order that we could have a reasoned debate with him. I am sure, or nearly sure, he would be able to manage that. During the debate, we could determine how to improve this scheme for the good of the people we all represent.

I object to the Order of Business on the basis that Committee and Remaining Stages of the Sport Ireland Bill are being taken together. This Bill was introduced in the House only last week, on 22 April. We should split up the Stages. The Bill was introduced on Wednesday and we got an e-mail on Thursday stating amendments had to be submitted by Friday. This did not really give us sufficient time. I would prefer the splitting up of Committee and Remaining Stages, even if only some time were allowed between them today to enable an amendment to be tabled.

The Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, stated in 2014 that the appointment of the new chief executive of Sport Ireland would be done through public advertisement and interview. When the Minister of State introduced the Bill, he said he would not do this but instead appoint an interim chief executive and make that appointment himself. Therefore, the appointment is not by public advertisement or public interview. I refer to section 9 of the Bill, which needs to be changed. The Minister of State did not address those points last week and I will be putting them to him again today. If he cannot split up Committee and Remaining Stages, I will oppose the Bill in its entirety.

Senator Ivana Bacik: Yesterday many of us offered condolences to the families of the many thousands of people killed in the Nepali earthquake and to the injured. There are reports in today's newspapers that there are still a number of Irish citizens unaccounted for. Everyone will join me in supporting the efforts of the Irish consular service abroad in seeking to ensure the citizens' safety.

There is good news on the international front owing to the rescue by the Nigerian military of nearly 300 girls and women who have been held by Boko Haram. We have talked many times in this House about this situation in Nigeria and the terrible threat of Boko Haram. That is very

welcome news.

I ask the Leader for a debate on euthanasia and assisted suicide in light of the verdict yesterday in the Gail O'Rourke trial. She was acquitted. This is an issue we need to examine as legislators. It is clear that a review of the 1993 legislation, under which the prosecution was taken, is timely. There have been some very public statements on this, in light of the trial and previously, by the husband of the later Marie Fleming who took the landmark Supreme Court case on this. In that case, the Supreme Court ruled that there was nothing to prevent the Oireachtas legislating on this. It is a difficult and sensitive area and many ethical concerns arise, but it is clearly an issue the Legislature should tackle. The Seanad would be a good forum in which to have the sort of debate Mr. Tom Curran, the later Marie Fleming's husband, has spoken, and is speaking, about today in light of the verdict.

I ask the Leader for a debate on education and planning for demographic changes. The Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, was in the House last night to take the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill but I am thinking of a more wide-ranging debate that examines, in particular, the sorts of challenges facing the higher education system owing to the demographic changes outlined in yesterday's spring statement, about which I spoke briefly in the House yesterday. We see the need for thousands more teachers. Projected figures point to significant increases at third, second and primary levels over the coming years. It is really a good time for us to debate how the education system should be reformed in order to cope with this. It would be particularly good to have that debate soon because this week the Minister announced the reform of the CAO points system to make it more student-friendly and student-centred and particularly to simplify and clarify the grading structure for leaving certificate points. That is welcome. I ask the Leader to organise the debate in the coming weeks.

Senator David Norris: I would like to raise the issue of Fitzgibbon Street police station. I have raised this on a number of occasions and was told it was being closed for refurbishment and would be reopened. This is not true. It is closed for refurbishment in order to become a hostel for the homeless. The police station will be closed. The gardaí in the area are quite upset about this. In Dublin 1, there is a serious drugs problem and a problem with break-ins. To reduce the effect of policing in the area is completely insane. I already said when there were prospects of opening a place for drug addicts in Parnell Street, which already has one such facility, that our backyard in Dublin 1 was full up. We have done our duty. I am very sensitive to the plight of homeless people and have spoken on this subject on many occasions in the House but I am not sure that what is proposed represents an appropriate use of the facilities. I am concerned, in particular, about the reduction in policing. If what I describe is going ahead, can we have a clear, honest statement about it? Can we know what supervision and follow-up care will be in place for these people? They should not just be dumped there. Is the hostel to be wet or dry?

I wish to follow up on what Senator Darragh O'Brien said about pyrite. The Senator has very adequately represented the people with regard to this very difficult problem. I understand the builder responsible for a development in Lusk has denied responsibility and said it a problem for the quarry people. He has not done refurbishment work on many of the houses and has now applied for planning permission for another development. It is insane to let somebody who walks away from responsibilities to get planning permission for another development before looking after his duties towards the residents in the first development.

I support what my colleague Senator Bacik said on the subject of euthanasia. It was quite

ridiculous that a woman should be prosecuted for making travel arrangements. This all looks back to the X case where a young girl was imprisoned. What are we at? The woman involved in this case paid tribute in a very dignified and balanced statement to the sympathetic way in which the Garda dealt with it. The Garda is not to blame. We, as legislators, are to blame. There should be provision for euthanasia. As a citizen, it is my right. If I am in intolerable pain or have absolutely no quality of life, I see no reason I should not be allowed to make the decision, which, as an able-bodied person, one is able to make. One can take one's own life in these circumstances. Just because somebody is disabled seems to be no reason to discriminate against him or her in allowing him or her to make this choice.

Senator Michael Comiskey: I welcome the decision by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Simon Coveney, to clarify the position on land eligible for payment. This posed a great problem. We have all been representing farmers who were disqualified or who lost a substantial part of their payment in the past year because their land was deemed ineligible. The problem was that the decision was up to the inspector, but two inspectors could have taken a different view. One might have said land was eligible while the other might have deemed it ineligible.

The booklet that is to be sent to all farmers will at least give a guideline and show exactly where farmers stand. If after looking at the book a farmer finds parcels of land are not eligible, he can red-line them and take them out. It is a move in the right direction. We had a great discussion on this yesterday at the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine. I hope this will clear up the matter for people in the future.

Senator Terry Leyden: An Post wants to dump letters that do not have enough stamps. This was stated in a story by Aideen Sheehan in Monday's *Irish Independent*. Under new terms and conditions, An Post wishes to impose this practice on customers. This was certainly never done when I was in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. At that time, it was sacred that a letter should be delivered to a person and that if there was an inadequate number of postage stamps on it, the recipient had the option of paying what was owed. An Post is proposing change. ComReg is now considering this and has expressed deep concern about it. Its consultation is to conclude by 20 May. Could the Seanad have a say on the proposals An Post has laid before ComReg and have an input into the regulations before 20 May? It would be very influential and, in a sense, assist ComReg in deciding on such major issues, including the delivery of cash and the insuring of cash sent through the post, and other issues affecting the delivery of postal services. It would be a useful exercise. A consultation process of the type proposed does not provide Members of this House with an opportunity to put forward their ideas. It would be worthwhile for the Seanad to express its views on issues such as this and for those views then to be conveyed to ComReg. It would be appalling if a letter sent without sufficient stamps was to be dumped without the person to whom the letter was addressed being given an opportunity to pay the additional cost required. I have always been of the view that there are too many stamps going through the system without proper checking. An Post, in not having in place an adequate system to ensure all envelopes are properly stamped, is losing a great deal of revenue. The company needs to undertake a review of its equipment, with a view to ensuring usage of the correct number of postage stamp to ensure it is being paid for its delivery service.

Senator Colm Burke: An earlier speaker called for the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Coffey, to come to the House. It is important that we have a debate on the moneys allocated to local authorities for the house building programme. For example, more than €204 million has been allocated for Cork, money

which is to be spent over a three year timeframe. I would like to know if the rules around delivery of that programme provide for a review at the end of that three year timeframe or if reviews will be undertaken at six, 12, 18 and 24 month intervals to determine what action local authorities have taken and how far advanced they are in terms of delivery of the programme. I am deeply concerned about this issue. I have sought a meeting on it with the housing department of Cork City Council. Six weeks on, no meeting has yet been arranged. It concerns me that money is being allocated but we are not acting fast enough to respond to people's needs. The Minister and the Department need to clarify this issue.

I would like also to touch on the point made by Senator Norris in regard to developers being allowed to commence new developments without having completed previous developments. It is a valid issue, one of which we need to be mindful to ensure that the mistakes made five, six, seven or eight years ago are not repeated. Linked to this is the issue of whether local authorities are calling in bonds on time. I have come across a number of cases where the bonds had expired before the local authority called them in, resulting in taxpayers' money having to be used to complete estates. That is unsatisfactory. It is in that context that I believe the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government should come to the House to debate the allocation of moneys and the mechanisms put in place by the local authorities to ensure full delivery on the programme of residential accommodation.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Molaim an dream atá ag eagrú an Hands Up for Children campaign, feachtas atá á sheoladh maidin inniu. It would be useful if we could have a debate at some stage on the call by the Hands Up for Children campaign to realign child and family services so that the focus is on prevention rather than address of crises as they arise.

I note that the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan, has stated that his taxation measures will encourage emigrants to return home. This is very questionable given the number of new graduates emigrating is higher now than it was at any time in the previous six years. It is also worth noting that emigrants have identified four key barriers to their return, including poor infrastructure, precarious working conditions and low pay, lack of career opportunities and progression and a lack of affordable housing. I did not hear anything in yesterday's statement that addresses any of these barriers in a meaningful way. The Government's employment targets do not include any provision for returning emigrants and seem to assume that Ireland's labour force will not increase. Fine Gael and the Labour Party have since coming into government deepened economic and income inequality in Ireland and they are now creating a division in Irish society that will take decades to overcome.

In the context of the Government's spring statement, the Seanad should have a debate around encouraging emigrants to return home and what practical, economic, social and other measures and policies that need to be adopted by Government to make that a reality. I know from my recent engagement in Britain with organisations that work with people who want to return in their later years that those people are experiencing difficulty in their engagement with the Department of Social Protection in terms of having their years abroad recognised by the system here. A debate on issues such as employment, employability and emigrants wanting to return home and the real barriers in this regard is an important debate that we need to have. There is no point in setting out targets when there are barriers in place that prevent people from returning in the first instance.

Senator Denis O'Donovan: I repeat the call made yesterday for an urgent debate on the Garda Síochána in Ireland in light, in particular, of issues raised yesterday during the annual

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Garda conference. Such a debate should not be about apportioning blame in this regard to the current Minister for Justice and Equality and Garda Commissioner or the former Minister for Justice and Equality. There is a societal problem with regard to respect for An Garda Síochána, something in which we all have a role to play. It is important we have a full debate on this issue. While it is important to discuss issues such as resources, the effectiveness of the PULSE system and so on, there is an obligation on us to address the lack of societal respect for law, order and authority in this country, which hits rank and file gardaí more than anybody else.

I support the Garda Síochána, 99% of whom are great people. It is a pity that gardaí trying to defend our communities and people are being spat at, bitten, kicked, knocked, abused and assaulted. Rather than an anti-Minister or anti-Government debate, we need a full debate on the future of An Garda Síochána. If current practice in this area continues, people will not look to join the Garda Síochána in the future. We have some excellent exponents of justice, who support our society and work with communities. If this rot is not addressed in the near future, the result will result be further erosion of confidence in An Garda Síochána. Morale among front-line members of An Garda Síochána is very low. However, I do not blame Government for this. We all have a role to play in it.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I welcome the spring statement as set out yesterday by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, and the Minister for Finance, Deputy Noonan. Despite the comments of the Opposition, which seek to down play that statement, as is the right of the Opposition, it sets out a path as regards strengthening of the recovery which is under way and the manner in which our public finances are being brought under control. It also restores our sense of national pride, improves our competitiveness and points the way to stability for the future. Despite what has been said about it, with Members on this side playing it up and Members opposite playing it down, it is a requirement. It ensures that come rainy days, which we hope never to see again, there will be something in the kitty, as is done by prudent households in terms of managing their own finances.

I believe it is a very good programme and I look forward to hearing more on it. I understand the Taoiseach will contribute to the debate on it today.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I can hardly contain my excitement.

Senator Paul Coghlan: As I often do in counselling caution to my respectful friends on the other side I say, "Hold your whisht another while".

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: They will get another day out of it.

Senator Paul Coghlan: As the Senator knows, it is very important for all of us-----

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

Senator Paul Coghlan: I am sure the Leader agrees with me.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I am sure he does agree with the Senator.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I will not go on about it. We will hear more about it.

Senator Michael Mullins: All those in this House who respect human rights will be appalled at the execution of seven foreigners in Indonesia this morning. The Indonesian President

said the state was merely applying the rule of law against narcotics traffickers. An Irish priest, whom I heard interviewed this morning on “Morning Ireland”, said he spent some time yesterday with the people who were executed and that one had a mental illness. It is appalling that, while we would all support a war on drugs, people’s lives would be taken rather than commit them to long terms of imprisonment for their crimes.

I am not soft on drugs and that is why I repeat my call to the Leader this morning for a debate as a matter of urgency with the Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality, Deputy Ó Ríordáin, who was recently given responsibility for this area, to see how we can start our war on drugs. I will not be advocating executing anybody but we need to review our sentences for serious drug trafficking crimes, which destroy the lives of so many young people throughout the country and decimate communities. We need to examine the resources available to the gardaí for the detection of drug trafficking and sale. I would also like to discuss how we can make further resources available for the rehabilitation of those unfortunate people whose lives are destroyed by the use of drugs and make more resources available so that many of those people can in the future make a meaningful contribution to our society. I strongly condemn what happened this morning in Indonesia.

Senator Paul Coughlan: Hear, hear.

Senator Michael Mullins: It is barbaric.

Senator Paul Coughlan: Absolutely.

Senator Michael Mullins: Every country should protest against this and make its unease known to the authorities and the President of Indonesia.

Senator Paul Coughlan: Well said.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I cannot contain my excitement as a result of the declaration by the Government Chief Whip that the Taoiseach is going to add to the Laurel and Hardy-esque performance by the Ministers for Finance and for Public Expenditure and Reform that we were all subjected to yesterday in the Lower House.

Senator Paul Coughlan: This is in the national interest.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: The Government may feel it is appropriate to spend a valuable week’s time regurgitating old news over and over again.

Senator Paul Coughlan: We had to get away from the fantasy economics on the other side of the House.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: Even the most loyal commentators in some of the news and media outlets that support this Government-----

Senator Darragh O’Brien: There are some loyal commentators.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: -----said it was a farce and that both Ministers could have summed up all they had to say in four minutes, instead of the 57 minutes they spent delivering this so-called spring statement. I look forward to hearing what the Taoiseach has to add to this particular farce this afternoon.

Senator Paul Coughlan: They did not expect it to put a spring in Senator Wilson’s step but

he does not have to hang on their every word.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I commend the Government Chief Whip here in the Seanad on his loyalty and dedication in repeating exactly what he said here yesterday in defence of that farce.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I thought I was speaking on a different subject yesterday.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I agree with what Senator O'Donovan said about An Garda Síochána. While I would like the Leader to invite the Minister for Justice and Equality to debate the resources available and reforms, etc., the most important thing to debate is that morale is at an all-time low within An Garda Síochána and that gardaí are being subjected not only to physical violence and intimidation, but also to daily intimidation on social media. That is not acceptable. While we should debate resources, it is more important to debate health and safety issues in the force and its low morale.

Senator Paul Bradford: I apologise for missing the earlier part of this debate and yesterday's Order of Business. Perhaps there has already been a request for a follow-up in this House to the spring statement in the Dáil. We could have a useful debate. The spring statement is a European concept and an obligation imposed on the Government by the EU. It is helpful.

Senator Paul Coghlan: Correct.

Senator Paul Bradford: It will allow Members from all parties and none to present their economic views and vision for the next few years. We can only ask that we have a full debate on the matter here with the Minister for Finance, as soon as possible.

I support what Senator Mullins said about the executions in Indonesia. Most if not all right-minded people would be deeply upset and outraged at them. We must also ask ourselves why Members of this House and the public are suddenly excited about executions in Indonesia. Every day around the globe, particularly in China and in our ally, the United States, executions take place. China and the US are the capital countries, excuse the pun, of the death penalty. We must revisit the concept from an international perspective and demand an end to the death penalty. We will soon see the American political circus in full swing as candidates seek nominations from the two main parties. These candidates will have to demonstrate how tough they are on law and order and how committed they are to retaining the death penalty across the US. I recall with horror the performance and behaviour of Bill Clinton, who is always lionised not only in this House, but throughout the country, when he was a presidential candidate in 1992 and Governor of Arkansas and he signed the papers to allow the execution of a person who was at the least mentally deficient. That was our great hero Bill Clinton being tough on crime. This does not happen just in Indonesia, but in China and particularly in the US. I concur with what has been said about those executed in Indonesia but we must consider other countries. The United Nations has led a campaign to bring about some degree of civilisation in the world and an end to the death penalty. We have a role to play in that. We can start much closer to home.

Senator Jim Walsh: Will the Leader arrange for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to come to the House soon to deal with the cutbacks in funding for non-national and secondary roads in my county and I am sure in other counties? In Wexford, the allocation has been reduced by €279,000 which will have a detrimental effect on a county which has one of the highest levels of non-national roads in the country. Our secondary road allocation has, in effect, been cut by €300,000. It is a false economy because while it may

look good as a saving for this year, if the roads are not maintained far greater resources will be spent on them in the future to bring them back to a safe condition. I would like that debate to take place soon.

I concur with all of those Senators who condemned the executions this morning in Indonesia. Capital punishment should be outlawed internationally as a crime. I agree fully with what Senator Bradford has said. This does not relate only to Indonesia; it is practised in many countries. Two of the largest countries who are members of the UN Security Council, the USA and China, systematically use it as part of their punishment regime for crimes. It should be unacceptable and I join with those who condemn it. On a more positive note, I am a board member of the Parliamentarians for Global Action, an international body based in New York, and we are running a campaign to get countries to eradicate capital punishment from their statute books. Each month countries are removing capital punishment from their statute books and Ireland should lend its support this.

The right to life is a fundamental human right and that is why I am appalled to hear Senators talk about euthanasia as being a right. It is no such thing. It is a falsehood to put that forward. Unfortunately, there have been far too many suicides which have caused tremendous grief and trauma to relatives. We all know people to whom it has happened. We need to improve our mental health services and reach out to these distressed people to reduce the number of suicides. This should be the approach we take, rather than to legalise people assisting others to commit suicide.

Senator David Norris: Is the Senator suggesting we criminalise suicide?

Senator Jim Walsh: When people are in a distressed state, they are in no position to make any major decision, let alone the decision to take their own lives, and it is irresponsible of Senators to propose it. This is the brave new world they are trying to usher in, and in many other ways also.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Senator Darragh O'Brien raised the home help gratuity payments and the review. I will ask the Minister about it. I have invited the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Coffey, to come to the House to discuss the pyrite issue. I hope we can schedule a debate in the coming weeks. Given that we had ample time for people to table amendments to the Sport Ireland Bill and no amendments were tabled, I do not propose to amend the Order of Business.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: We had one day.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Although I normally would do so, there seems to be very little appetite for amendments to the Bill and that is why I ordered Committee and Remaining Stages for today. It is the Senator's prerogative to object to the Order of Business and to vote against the section in the Bill he mentioned. Senators Bacik, Walsh and Norris referred to euthanasia and the possibility of having a debate on it in the House. I will consider this and discuss it with the Minister to see if there are any plans in that regard. We may be able to debate it. Senator Bacik called for a debate on education and planning for the demographic changes. I am sure the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, would be willing to come to the House to discuss the matter.

Senator Norris raised the issue of a proposed hostel for homeless people, which he has previously raised. He suggested that Dublin 1 has more than its fair share of such facilities and that

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Dublin City Council and everybody involved should have a very transparent process, which he suggested is not the case. I agree with the Senator that if such a hostel is being planned, it should be open for everybody to see what the situation is. It is probably a matter for Dublin City Council. There should be transparency in such issues.

Senator Comiskey asked for clarification from the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Coveney, on land matters and the new booklet which has been issued. I am sure it will be welcomed by the farming community. Senator Leyden raised proposed changes by An Post. I agree with him that it is totally unacceptable that letters which have insufficient stamps could be dumped. It is a matter for the Oireachtas joint committee at which, I am sure, it will be debated at length. Senator Colm Burke raised the house building programme and mentioned that it has taken up to six weeks for him to get an appointment to meet a Cork City Council housing officer. It is appalling that local representatives, irrespective of their party, would be treated in such an unacceptable manner. The Senator should take it up with the Minister, if he has not already done so.

Senator Ó Clochartaigh raised the Hands Up for the Children campaign and I agree we should support it in every way possible. Regarding the barriers to emigrants returning home, for many people, the main problem is our high rate of tax.

Senator Jim Walsh: And the universal social charge.

Senator John Gilroy: That is right.

Senator Maurice Cummins: The Government hopes to address this in the coming budgets. People returning from the UK should have no problems regarding social protection and the transfer of benefits. The Department of Social Protection is very helpful to people who wish to return home from the UK and transfer their benefits. There should not be a problem, and if there is, it should be taken up with the Department.

Senators O'Donovan and Wilson raised the difficulties facing gardaí, which was raised yesterday. I agree that everything possible should be done in order to address the concerns of gardaí. The violence and intimidation which Senator Wilson mentioned regarding social media, in particular, is despicable for people who put their lives on the line every time they go on duty to protect the public. I have invited the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Fitzgerald, to the House and I hope that she will accede to my request that we have a debate on law and order and the Garda in early course.

Senator Paul Coghlan raised the spring statement, which we addressed yesterday. Senator Wilson mentioned Laurel and Hardy. Much Laurel and Hardy economics were discussed over the weekend on the television.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I am glad the Leader was watching.

Senator Maurice Cummins: The greatest risk to job creation and a brighter future is the risk from political parties, such as Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin, which are proposing populist and fanciful economics.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: The Leader is beginning to sound like the Tories.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: He is attacking republican parties.

Senator Maurice Cummins: However, we will address that matter. Senator Bradford mentioned he was not here yesterday but-----

Senator Darragh O'Brien: That is because he set up a new party.

Senator Maurice Cummins: ----next week, we will debate the spring statement. Senators Mullins, Bradford and Walsh addressed the execution of seven people in Indonesia and the question of the death penalty and capital punishment. Our country very strongly condemns capital punishment and the death penalty. People rightly pointed out that the major powers, China and the US, practise this very frequently. We should do everything possible to try to end the death penalty and support the campaign to eliminate it. Senator Walsh also raised funding for non-national and secondary roads. Whether it is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government or the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, we will try to arrange for the Minister to come to the House to address that issue and several other issues relating to local government and the environment during the coming weeks.

Question put: "That the Order of Business be agreed to."

| The Seanad divided: Tá, 25; Níl, 10. | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Tá | Níl |
| Bacik, Ivana. | Cullinane, David. |
| Bradford, Paul. | Daly, Mark. |
| Brennan, Terry. | Leyden, Terry. |
| Burke, Colm. | Mooney, Paschal. |
| Coghlan, Eamonn. | Norris, David. |
| Coghlan, Paul. | Ó Domhnaill, Brian. |
| Comiskey, Michael. | O'Brien, Darragh. |
| Conway, Martin. | O'Donovan, Denis. |
| Craughwell, Gerard P. | Walsh, Jim. |
| Cummins, Maurice. | Wilson, Diarmuid. |
| Gilroy, John. | |
| Henry, Imelda. | |
| Higgins, Lorraine. | |
| Keane, Cáit. | |
| Kelly, John. | |
| Landy, Denis. | |
| Moran, Mary. | |
| Mulcahy, Tony. | |
| Mullins, Michael. | |
| Naughton, Hildegard. | |
| Noone, Catherine. | |
| O'Neill, Pat. | |
| Sheahan, Tom. | |
| Whelan, John. | |
| Zappone, Katherine. | |

Tellers: Tá, Senators Ivana Bacik and Paul Coghlan; Níl, Senators Paschal Mooney and Diarmuid Wilson.

Question declared carried.

Sitting suspended at 12.31 p.m. and resumed at 12.45 p.m.

Ash Dieback Disease: Statements

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Tom Hayes): I thank Senators for the invitation to the House to discuss this very important issue for the forestry industry in Ireland and to give them an update. It is now two and a half years since chalara, ash dieback, was first confirmed in Ireland. These statements give us all the opportunity to take stock of where we stand in terms of our current approach, the latest developments and, more importantly, our future policy in dealing with the disease. I will begin by informing the House of the current situation with regard to the number of occurrences of chalara. I will then describe the actions taken by the Department since October 2012 to control the spread of the disease, including work that has taken place with our colleagues in Northern Ireland. It is important also that we look at our plans for the future in terms of our ongoing strategy for tackling this disease.

The situation, as it stands, is as follows: there have been a total of 149 confirmed findings of the disease, 59 in plantation forests and the remaining 90 in non-forest locations, such as horticultural nurseries, roadside plantings, garden centres, private gardens and rural environment protection scheme, REPS, and agri-environment options scheme, AEOS, plantings. A total of 113 cases were identified in 2012 and 2013, 30 cases were identified during 2014 and to date in 2015, there have been six new findings. The vast majority of these sites have now been cleared of infected material. It is important to note that in four areas the spread of the disease from sites with infected imported plants into the associated hedgerows has been observed.

It is vital that we have accurate and up to date information on the true extent of the problem. Surveying information is critical not only for establishing the scale of the problem but also for informing debate on how resources can best be used to contain the disease. Systematic and targeted surveys of ash were undertaken in 2012 and 2013 in accordance with internationally recognised survey methodology. The targeted surveys focused on plantations which were planted with imported ash between 2000 and 2012 and hedgerows where previously infected ash plantations had been identified. In addition, a systematic survey following a 2 km by 2 km grid was undertaken in forest plantations and hedgerows throughout the entire country. In 2014 systematic and targeted surveys for the disease were again carried out in forest plantations and hedgerows throughout the country.

The non-forest locations focused on sampling ash species in all horticultural nurseries and adjacent hedgerows, especially nurseries where positive samples were previously found; motorways and roadways that were planted within the last 15 years, especially motorways or roadways that had previous positives; all other areas where positive samples were found during previous chalara surveys; plantings under farm agri-environment planting schemes, including REPS and AEOS; and other areas identified by the general public, particularly in respect of

parks, golf courses and larger planting areas.

The Department has also taken measures to reduce the risk of the disease spreading, which includes dealing effectively with sites where chalara has been confirmed. As a first step national legislative measures were introduced in November 2012 under the Destructive Insects and Pest Acts 1958 and 1991 which listed chalara as a pest and which also regulated the import of ash seed, plants and wood. Similar legislation was introduced at the same time by the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. In December 2012, ash was delisted from the list of tree species approved under the afforestation grant schemes. In recent years, ash made up 10% of the forest planting programme.

During 2013, the European Commission approved the Department's application to allow farmers participating in current agri-environment schemes, who had concerns regarding ash plants planted under these schemes showing symptoms of ash dieback, to apply to remove the ash plants under *force majeure*. Ash was subsequently delisted from the list of tree species approved under the agri-environment options scheme. The National Roads Authority also agreed in 2013 to suspend the use of ash in any roadside plantings and is using alternative species.

A total of 22 public information meetings were organised nationally by the Department and Teagasc in May 2013. More than 800 people attended and information was provided on what to look out for and the implications in terms of clearance of a forest plantation. There was a large media pick-up on these events, including print, radio and television. Those who attended found them extremely useful. Guidance on the symptoms of chalara was also provided on the Department's website. The GAA featured a full page awareness advertisement in their All-Ireland hurling final programmes in 2013 and in 2014. Training was provided by the forest service of the Department to foresters in the public and private sectors on the biology of the disease and recognition of symptoms. The Department continues to provide information and assistance to concerned stakeholders through e-mail and telephone support and via its website.

As with plant health generally on the island of Ireland, an all-Ireland approach has been maintained under the North-South Ministerial Council between authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland with ongoing close co-operation in all areas. This included the publication in July 2013 of an all-Ireland chalara control strategy. In May 2014 an all-Ireland conference on the disease was jointly organised by the Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland in conjunction with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Northern Ireland and the Society of Irish Plant Pathologists. This very well attended and publicised event brought together presentations and discussions on the latest scientific knowledge on the disease and input from stakeholders and other interested parties. This event underlined the commitment from both Administrations to share the latest information available and to find a long-term solution which can deliver the best possible outcome.

Earlier this month I jointly launched a smartphone app called TreeCheck with my colleague, the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms Michelle O'Neill, MLA. This allows members of the public to send in photos of suspected cases of disease infection or insect attack of any tree species. Using any GPS-enabled smartphone the location of the suspect tree may also be recorded by the app to allow inspection if required. This will help with regard to the early detection of diseases and insect outbreaks. This is a very good and useful development for many people with forestry who are concerned about disease.

The forest service of the Department, in consultation with industry stakeholders, introduced

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a scheme to restore forests affected by chalara, ash dieback, by supporting the removal and destruction of trees and leaf litter affected by the disease and the replanting of the forest with an alternative species. To date a total of approximately 693 ha of infected and associated ash plantations have been cleared and replanted with alternative species. This has involved the uprooting and deep burial of approximately 2 million ash trees since October 2012, which is a significant figure. The cost of clearing and replanting forestry sites affected by the disease is €2.3 million to date.

In taking action to control plant diseases, Ireland and other member states must comply with EU plant health legislation even when the organism is not specifically regulated. Over the past three and a half years, Ireland has kept the EU Commission and other member states informed of our actions. In January 2015, Ireland and the UK gave a detailed presentation on actions taken to date and future plans relating to ash dieback. Ireland will be invited to provide an update at the end of the year. The key issue that will be of consideration is whether our actions on the island have been sufficiently successful to justify applying for protected zone status within the EU. Protected zone is an area within the EU where a pest or disease is not deemed to be established and where special protective measures can be legally applied. If this protected zone status was granted to us, it would allow us to retain control measures regarding imports of ash.

As further survey results come in during 2015, the situation will be kept under review and my Department will continue to carry out the following actions. As the disease remains unregulated under the EU plant health directive, my Department will continue to implement national measures to reduce the risk of the disease becoming established. My Department will continue targeted and systematic surveys for the disease. The policy of eradication will continue where infected trees are identified. The reconstitution grant scheme to facilitate the clearance and replanting of infected forest plantations will remain in place. Ash will continue to be de-listed from the afforestation scheme and will not be an approved species in the new GLAS. A spore trapping project to detect, quantify and establish dispersal patterns around known positive locations is planned for summer 2015. My Department will continue close collaboration with Northern Ireland under the all-Ireland chalara control strategy to ensure a common approach across the island. The Department will continue to participate in the FRAXBACK COST action and support research projects into the control and management of the disease.

I am aware of the particular difficulties facing horticultural nurseries and my staff will continue to meet with representatives of the industry to discuss with them how we can continue to co-operate in the control and eradication of the disease whilst minimising the effect of our controls on the nurseries themselves. With regard to scientific research on the disease, a key long-term research focus is to develop an ash tree breeding programme to develop trees showing strong tolerance to the disease. In this regard, a four-year project began in 2013, the aim of which has been to produce individual trees of ash which show resistance or tolerance to chalara and use them to bulk up stocks of resistant trees as well as to establish seed-producing orchards with resistant parent trees. The research, which is part funded by the Department, is being carried out by Forest Research, an agency of the Forestry Commission in the UK. As part of this project, Irish ash plants have been planted out over a range of sites in the south east of England to test for resistance. In Denmark, I understand this work is further advanced and approximately 100 ash trees have already been selected which are tolerant to chalara and whose progeny also display high levels of tolerance. Teagasc is also carrying out work in this area. The GAA has been extremely positive and supportive in respect of trying to identify that type

of plant for which I commend it. Obviously, it has a very good reason, particularly many of the clubs across the country. The GAA is particularly supportive of Teagasc and the Department in respect of this issue.

My Department is also providing research funding to a UCD-led team to model the air-borne spread of the ash dieback disease. Together with the University of Cambridge and the Department's forest service, this applied project will assess the risk of ash dieback spread into and across Ireland. Airborne dispersal of fungal spores is an important mechanism for the spread of this disease. This modelling research will predict the extent and spread of fungal spore plumes from known infected sites by combining climate data from Met Éireann and the latest information on the disease. This information will be fed into the UK Met Office's atmospheric dispersion model, a model originally developed in response to the Chernobyl accident in 1986. Today, the model has been developed into a sophisticated tool for simulating atmospheric dispersion events.

I will finish by reassuring the House that my Department will continue to apply all necessary measures to control the spread of this disease. We remain vigilant in terms of monitoring future occurrences and we will not delay in taking effective action to deal with infected sites. My Department will continue to scrutinise the latest survey results and research that becomes available on this disease. The situation will of course be kept under constant review. I thank Senators for giving me the opportunity to come to the House as this is a very useful way for me to explain to people exactly what is happening. I look forward to hearing the contributions and questions of Senators, so that we can provide more information to people because there is much concern about this.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: I welcome the Minister of State and thank him for his comprehensive analysis of the ash dieback situation. His predecessor, the late Shane McEntee, initiated most of the Department's work in this regard. I remember him talking in this House about ash dieback in 2012 when it first hit the headlines. He had huge conviction in tackling it and I am glad to see the current Minister of State is following that good work by working in close collaboration with counterparts in Northern Ireland and the British authorities and at a European level and by looking at the research. It is obviously having a huge impact, not only in Ireland but right across Europe. We are not isolated and I understand that it is affecting many European countries.

In respect of our connection to ash, we might not have the skills of people in Tipperary. I read that about 350,000 hurleys are produced every year, predominantly from ash, so the issue is significantly linked to the GAA, particularly hurling. The ash tree population is not only important to the country today but it has been important down through generations and will be important in the future. It is, therefore, important to protect our traditional ash forestry.

I commend the Minister of State on the way he is dealing with this. He is going about it the right way. It is important for Opposition Senators and Deputies to commend a Minister when they think he or she is going about things in the right way. It is easy for us to come in and criticise, but at the end of the day this problem is not of the Government's making. It is affecting many European countries, including our neighbours in England and up the road in the North.

The Minister of State outlined the cost. That was one of my questions today. He mentioned a figure of €2.3 million, which was the cost, I presume, to the Department and the taxpayer of replenishing and burying the 2 million trees. That is a lot of trees, and it is having a significant

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effect across the country. The counties most affected were Leitrim, Monaghan and Meath and some trees in Galway were also affected. The figures suggest that the Minister of State's Department is getting to grips with this situation. The figures he mentioned have fallen drastically, from 113 to the end of 2013 to 30 last year. He mentioned a figure of six this year. There were 21 cases of the disease on farm and agri-environmental sites in 2013 and only two last year, while there were four cases in garden centres and nurseries in 2013 and none last year. It is probably having an impact on the private sector in terms of business opportunities, etc., and on farmers as well. Farmers want to plant ash trees, but because of the risk they are prohibited from doing so.

Ideally a solution would be found, either in treatment, or, as the Minister of State has outlined, finding an ash tree that would be strong enough to resist the disease. UCD has an excellent department of agriculture. It works with the University of Cambridge in other areas, as the Minister of State mentioned. That is positive. This is also a European issue and it has affected other countries. Where has the European Union been on this problem? Why has it not regulated ash dieback as a disease? I know it has legislated for it generically - the Minister of State mentioned the European directive - but it has not specifically regulated for it. Would that be of benefit? He also mentioned control areas, for example, a control area of the island of Ireland. How far are we from that? Is the European Union receptive to that idea? On one side, the Government has done excellent work in getting the disease under control, but the other side, unfortunately, is that there are now many restrictions on the planting of ash. What impact will that have on the demand for ash - for hurling, for example - in five, ten or 15 years time? Has the Department analysed that in any way? Are there any projected implications into the future if these restrictions were to continue?

The Minister of State has answered many of the questions I may have had in the address he has given. I wish him well with his work. It is not an easy task, I am sure. I also commend his officials in the Department and the Forest Service on the work they are doing.

Senator Michael Comiskey: I welcome the Minister of State to the Seanad this afternoon and thank him for coming to discuss this most important issue. Ash dieback disease is a relatively recently described fungal disease of ash, which was first named back as far as 2006, although ash dieback symptoms had been noticed in Poland back as far as the early 1990s. The harmful reproductive stage of the fungus, a new species, was later discovered in 2010. The disease has spread rapidly across much of Europe, with the majority of European countries where ash is present now reporting the disease.

Ireland's first case of ash dieback infection was confirmed in 2012, as the Minister of State has said, in a young forestry plantation in my own county, Leitrim, which had been planted with imported trees. The trees on this site, and on ten other sites planted with the same batch of trees, were subsequently destroyed under the Department's supervision. Following this first finding, the Department carried out a major survey of ash and continues to survey for this disease in forestry plantations, nurseries, roadsides and on farms. Common ash is susceptible to *Chalara*, ash dieback disease, as are several other species of ash. The disease can affect ash trees of any age and in any setting. Death of trees can occur, with younger trees less than ten years old succumbing more rapidly. It is likely that plants imported from other European countries are the highest risk pathway to spread the disease in Ireland. Wood, including firewood, is also likely to be a pathway. The wide range of symptoms associated with ash dieback disease includes necrotic lesions and cankers along the bark of branches or main stem; foliage wilt; foliage discolorations, namely, brown or black discoloration at the base and midrib of the leaves; dieback

of shoots, twigs or main stem, resulting in crown dieback; epicormic branching or excessive side shoots along the main stem; and a brown-orange discoloration of the bark.

To date, approximately 693 ha of ash forestry plantations have been cleared and replanted with alternative species, according to figures released by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. A high proportion of the areas cleared are plantations which were associated with infected imported batches but which were not necessarily infected. These associated plantations were destroyed on a precautionary basis. This work involved the uprooting and deep burial of about 2 million ash trees since 2012, which is a huge number of trees to be destroyed. It is important that the Government takes action on this serious problem and some measures have already been put in place. The forestry planting programme 2014-2020 provides new opportunities for landowners, including attractive forestry establishment and support grants. One of the measures currently open to applications is the reconstitution scheme. This measure provides support for those affected by ash dieback. A site clearance grant of up to €1,500 per hectare and replanting grants of up to €5,000 per hectare are available.

The recent launch of the TreeCheck app by the Minister of State, Deputy Hayes, and the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms Michelle O'Neill, is also to be welcomed. This web-based smartphone app enables the public to help safeguard tree and forest health across the island of Ireland. It is essential that we all play our part in protecting the economy and the environment. The positive contribution that engagement by the public can make towards safeguarding plant health is increasingly recognised. TreeCheck will enable members of the public throughout Ireland to use their smartphone to report details and send a photograph of suspected trees or evidence of insect damage to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, or to the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, for investigation. Using any GPS-enabled smartphone, the location of the suspected tree may also be captured by the app to allow inspection if required. Once received, the ill-health reports will be assessed by plant health officials and will be followed up if serious pest or disease is suspected. The app will also help with the early detection of new and existing harmful pests and diseases.

Research being carried out in UCD on modelling the airborne spread of ash dieback disease will assess the risk of ash dieback across Ireland. I also recommend that further research be carried out in Ballinamore in County Leitrim, because there were several cases around that area and there is a facility there that is run by Teagasc. It would be a great opportunity for it to do more research if more ash dieback were found.

All these measures are to be welcomed. It is extremely important that we all do what we can to control the spread of ash dieback and to eliminate the disease. I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House today to discuss this important issue and look forward to hearing more of the views from Senators.

Senator Feargal Quinn: The Minister of State is very welcome. He played a very active role in this House over some years a number of years ago. I am delighted to see he is now responsible for this area. He has given us some interesting information today. He mentioned that approximately “693 ha of infected and associated ash plantations have been cleared and replanted with alternative species”. He told us that this work “has involved the uprooting and deep burial of approximately 2 million ash trees since October 2012”. I think it is an amazing body of work. The Minister of State and the entire team behind him are to be congratulated on that work.

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In the UK, a website, *www.ashtag.org*, and a smartphone app were introduced some years ago to encourage the public to report trees showing any of the symptoms about which we should worry. I am glad to see that a new app, TreeCheck, which will cover North and South of the Border, has been introduced this month. It has been suggested that we could also use satellite imagery to better tackle this issue. Could we give grants to community groups to plant alternative trees?

Senator Denis Landy: On a point of order, I am finding it difficult to hear Senator Quinn. Perhaps the volume could be increased.

Senator Feargal Quinn: I am sorry.

Senator Denis Landy: It is not the Senator's fault.

Senator Feargal Quinn: Is there a noise somewhere? Perhaps I am not speaking loudly enough.

Acting Chairman (Senator Diarmuid Wilson): I can hear the Senator clearly. There must be some difficulty with the microphone.

Senator Feargal Quinn: I will get closer to the microphone. Could we give grants to community groups to plant alternative trees? I realise that Coillte is overseeing this area. If grant assistance were available, it might get local communities more interested in the problem and raise awareness of the issue even further.

This is an opportunity to consider an environmental issue. I mentioned the Brent goose when we debated another environmental issue in this House some years ago. I have mentioned the Brent goose on a few occasions since then because I have taken a real interest in it. The Brent goose arrives on 23 October and leaves on 23 April, which was just last week. After I mentioned the Brent goose during a debate in the Seanad some years ago, I was contacted by RTE as I was considered to be an expert on it. I would love to become an expert on the ash tree and on the problems in this area.

As we are having a debate on the environment and on what can happen here, I would like the Minister of State to comment on biodiversity. I could not get over it when I learned that 955 species, including the wood mouse, the squirrel, the bullfinch, the wren, the bat and the beetle, reportedly rely on ash trees. It seems that 45 of these species - certain beetles, moths and flies - rely solely on ash trees. Is it likely that such species will decline or even become extinct in Ireland due to the cutting of ash trees? What sort of measures are we taking to address this issue? We probably feel we could do without beetles, moths and flies, but we should remember what happened in China under Mao when he decided to get rid of the sparrow. It created havoc because it is all part of the environment, of nature and of what is needed.

I was interested to hear that scientists based in the UK are sequencing the genome of a resistant tree, known as tree 35, which was found in Denmark. Perhaps there is a future for ash trees. It will be interesting to see how this develops.

It is worth drawing attention appropriately to a book, *The Ash Tree*, by Mr. Oliver Rackham, that was published recently. I am sure the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has considered the book, which argues that forestry services should:

Plant fewer trees, more expensive trees, wider apart, and take proper care of them. Stop

making tree-planting a default option. Revive the science [or study] of tree pathology [or disease].

While I have not read the entire book - I have seen a few quotes from it - I am sure it is a very interesting book to have a look at. The point made by Mr. Rackham is that we should move beyond forestry as a commercially planned and executed commodity and towards a consideration of the ecological constraints and risks that apply to it. One of the more interesting arguments in his book is that we should forget about thinking about winning the ash dieback disease fight as it is futile. According to Mr. Rackham, it would be much better to concentrate on the next wave of invader coming behind ash dieback, the emerald ash borer beetle, about which I had not heard before but which he calls “one of the most feared beetles on earth”. Are we considering this potential new threat? What, if anything, can we do to protect ourselves from such threats? I would be interested to hear the Minister of State’s views on this. Do we have any plan for this particular threat or similar threats?

I know that when the question of ash dieback first cropped up in 2012 - at least that was when we first heard of it - people immediately thought about hurling. It was interesting to hear Senator Ó Domhnaill speaking about the effect of this problem on hurling. In 2012, people were concerned that we would have to import ash from elsewhere in order to be able to play our national game. It seemed out of the question that timber from some other country would have to be used. It looks like that is something we are going to have to live with unless we manage to overcome this problem. I am delighted this debate is taking place today in the presence of the Minister of State and his team. I believe this matter is worthy of debate and of the action the Minister of State has promised to take.

Acting Chairman (Senator Diarmuid Wilson): I welcome Councillor John Paul Feeley, who is a member of the board of governors of UCD, to the Visitors Gallery.

Senator Denis Landy: I welcome my constituency colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Hayes, to the House. Perhaps he might tell us whether something wrong with John O’Dwyer’s hurley caused the ball to go right of the post by two inches last year. Was it affected by ash dieback? The Minister of State might comment on that when he is bringing the debate to a conclusion.

On a more serious note, I commend the Minister of State and all his staff on all the work that is being done. In July of last year, when I raised this matter on the Adjournment, there was a great deal of panic about this issue because ash dieback was springing up all over the country and we did not know whether we could control it. There were fears for the future of the game of hurling. I accept that ash is used to make many other items, including furniture. A massive number of people - approximately 350 - are directly employed in the hurley-making industry. As others have said, more than 350,000 hurleys are made in this country each year. Strangely enough, we did not take much notice of where this timber came from until ash dieback appeared. We import 80% of the timber. Just 20% of it is produced in this country.

I am very pleased with the work of the Minister of State and with the approach the Department has taken. As a Tipperary man, I am proud that the Minister of State has led the way since he came into the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. We need to tackle this head-on. I want to raise a couple of issues that need to be addressed. Perhaps the Minister of State can debate and discuss them. There are concerns about the policy of burying the trees rather than disposing of them by burning them. I would like the Minister of State to comment on the

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suggestion that it is possible for the spores to regenerate themselves and spread as a result of that.

Concern has been expressed about the decision to take ash out of all grant assistance supports, including the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme and the schemes involving the replanting of land and the planting of land for the first time. Such planting is being encouraged by the Minister of State. I commend him on the most recent initiative he introduced in recent months, which involves the planting of land. There are now some very good financial incentives for farmers to get involved. Ash would be ideal for land that would not be suitable for other agricultural purposes. However, we are not replanting ash and not providing grant assistance. Incidentally, the replenishment scheme does not allow for ash to go back in. A different species has to go in. While I welcome the provision of money and grant assistance to take out ash and deal with this issue, I note that ash cannot be put back in. I am concerned about the stocks for the future. The Minister of State might comment on how we are going to deal with that.

While I welcome the research that is going on, I wonder whether we should be doing much more of it on home soil. We are giving financial and other support to projects in England and elsewhere in the UK that are trying to deal with this problem. Perhaps we should consider dealing with it by building up resistance in plants in Ireland as opposed to supporting the concept in England. Will the Minister of State comment on that? Perhaps there is more expertise available in the UK - I do not know. I would like an answer in this regard.

The excellent co-operation with Northern Ireland has been alluded to. The smartphone app launched recently by the Minister of State and the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development in the North, Ms Michelle O'Neill, is a fantastic idea. Senator Whelan and I were talking about it yesterday because ash trees planted in our areas have not come into leaf yet. I was able to show the Senator a photograph of a diseased tree depicting exactly what is involved. Everybody is interested in this matter not only because of the hurley, but also because we do not want to see the disease spreading across the country. As Senator Comiskey said, it is brilliant that one can take a photograph and send it off so any problem can be dealt with immediately.

Perhaps the Minister of State will comment on the company in Cork, Treemetrics, that claims it can identify the disease by way of satellite imagery and thus help to eliminate it. This was raised in the national media recently by a colleague of the Minister of State, Mr. Seán Kelly, MEP and former president of the GAA. He felt the company has a lot to offer. Has the Department taken up its offer? What are the Minister of State's views on the company's concept? Everything we can do to reduce the incidence of the disease should be done. If this technology can be employed, we should use it.

I am very much encouraged by the figures the Minister of State has outlined. If the current trend continues, there will have been in the order of only 25 cases in 2015, based on six in the first four months, as opposed to 120 in 2012, when the disease was first identified. This is an excellent outcome. I have no doubt it is as a result of the work done by the Department, led by the Minister of State. It is important that we keep on top of this and ensure that when we develop a resistant species, we provide grant incentives to address the issue of the 2 million trees that have been taken out. That is a massive number of hurleys. A mature tree provides in the order of six to eight hurleys, as the Minister of State knows. If 2 million trees are taken out, we must make provision to replant them when we have the disease under control. As a fellow Tipperaryman, I say well done to the Minister of State and ask him to get us a few good hurleys

for Tipperary this year if he can.

Acting Chairman (Senator Diarmuid Wilson): As a Cavan man and half a Tipperary man, I am not going to comment on that. Maybe the Senator should take a look at the players.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Cuirim céad fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit. Aon uair a chloisim faoi ash dieback, ní féidir liom ach smaoinreamh ar an iar-Aire Stáit, Shane McEntee, nach maireann, go ndéana Dia trócaire air, mar gurb é a thógadh na díospóireachtaí ar an ábhar sin sa Teach seo. Smaoinimid go háirithe inniu air.

Any time I hear of ash dieback, I recall the former Minister of State, the late Shane McEntee, taking the debates here in the House. It was a lovely gesture that we actually planted a tree in his honour in the back garden in Leinster House. It is important that we remember him during this debate.

I, too, welcome the comments on the co-operation with the North. It is very positive that there is such great co-operation. It is quite amusing that, at times, certain Senators try to intimate Sinn Féin is not fit to be in government anywhere at all, but it is quite obvious from the co-operation between the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, in particular, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in the North that we are certainly well up for the game. Minister O'Neill is doing a very good job and works very well with all the Ministers here. We intend to do this across all Departments if we are in government.

I liked Senator Quinn's thoughts on community grants to help with the replanting of the trees. Certainly, we need to increase our biodiversity. I recommend a model used in Galway by Terryland Forest Park. We have seen that a tract of unused land that people regarded as unfit for anything could be turned into a wonderful education facility and city forest park.

As we have seen, ash dieback has been found at 120 locations nationwide and resulted in the felling of 1,300 acres of forest, according to media sources. The Minister might comment on that because his figures indicate 694 acres have been felled and replanted. Has the acreage mentioned by the media been felled but not replanted? Despite concerted official attempts to eradicate ash dieback, the number of cases has doubled in the past year. The disease has now been found in every county except Roscommon, Westmeath, Louth and Laois. The Native Woodland Trust warned that the disease has spread so widely for so long that it is now "unstoppable". According to the trust's chairman, Jim Lawlor, the first case of the disease was discovered in ash plants that had been imported three years earlier. This meant the disease had a long time to spread before its discovery prompted action to try and eradicate it.

Ash dieback disease spreads very rapidly and can infect trees within a 25-mile radius every year, which means the 149 cases the Minister of State mentioned could spread very quickly if we do not continue to be vigilant. The only hope for Irish ash trees is that some native varieties will have sufficient genetic resistance and not succumb to it. As the Minister of State knows, Teagasc's forestry expert has noted the only hopeful sign is that nearly all cases of ash dieback have been in young trees rather than more established ones. One of the negative consequences of the spread of ash dieback is that official restrictions on ash imports related to the disease have led to prices for ash wood rising from around €9.50 or €10 per plank to €12. This has the potential to have serious consequences for indigenous SMEs, especially those involved in the hurley-making business.

Ash has a very strong cultural place in Irish society as the wood for hurleys. The disease

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highlights the need for a scientific approach to tree breeding and genetics to make sure we are planting the right varieties in the future.

The extensive areas that have been cleared of trees comprise an obvious source of concern. The figures include areas cleared on a preventative basis where trees were found to be from the same batch as infected trees. Has there been an investigation into how the trees were brought to the country initially? We know it came from imported ash. Are there consequences for those who might have been involved in the importation? Were they even aware they were importing affected trees? The Minister of State might share information on this if he has any.

As the Minister of State said, there have been 59 confirmed cases in ash plantations, with 19 in horticultural nurseries. There have been cases concerning farm and roadside planting, with others in hedgerows, garden centres and private gardens.

Meanwhile, another tree-killer, Japanese larch disease, has now been detected in 30 locations. Gougane Barra forest park in County Cork has been laid to waste by the disease, as a major outbreak there has led to 16,000 trees being felled, with the park to remain closed until summer. It is now very clear that ash dieback has spread the length and breadth of the island. Across the water in Britain, in 2012, the disease was found in 291 sites. By January of this year, officials found the disease in 949 sites. Most experts now accept there is little chance of killing the disease, with all activity focused on simply slowing its spread. Scientific research and official reports from both Britain and Ireland suggest that Government efforts so far have had little impact. In the United Kingdom, more than £16.5 million has been spent tackling ash dieback and other tree diseases, including on trying to find a strain of ash resistant to the *Chalara* fungus. That search has so far been fruitless and scientists believe the ash problem will eventually spread into every woodland in the country. The problem is the biggest threat to Irish woodlands since Dutch elm disease killed off millions of mature trees in the 1970s and 1980s.

Ash dieback has considerable environmental implications and could have a devastating impact on other species. A total of 955 species rely on ash trees, including wood mice, squirrels, bullfinches, wrens, bats and beetles. Of these, 45 species rely solely on ash, including the large ash bark beetle, centre-barred sawfly moth and scarce yellow pintail crane fly, which are all likely to become extinct in Ireland. The disease, which causes rapid leaf loss, works particularly quickly on young plants, killing them within a year. We are all in agreement that this is very serious. We support the Departments, North and South, in the eradication of this disease. We certainly cannot let our guard down.

Senator John Whelan: I, too, welcome to the House and commend the Minister of State, Deputy Hayes. There is no better man on this issue. He not only has the capacity to deal with it but also has a personal interest in and grá for the topic. That is the kind of focus we require when it comes to a challenge of this nature. It would be wrong not to have regard to the work of his predecessor, our much-beloved late colleague and former Minister of State, Shane McEntee. We are grateful for the prompt intervention on the part of the late Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Shane McEntee, and of the Department officials, which the current Minister of State, Deputy Tom Hayes, and the officials have continued in an attempt to meet this challenge head on.

As others have said, the ash plant has an iconic position in Irish history, folklore, heritage, sport and culture. It always struck me as bizarre that even prior to the problem of ash dieback we imported such a volume of ash because it is so central to national games. It underscores and

reminds us that, where possible, we should at all times endeavour to establish import substitution, a phrase that was popular in the 1980s, especially in the area of forestry and food. That has an economic, ecological and environmental advantage because it cuts down on air miles and the carbon footprint. We should have been more alert to this as a policy through the decades. I am not laying responsibility for this at the Minister of State's door.

The Minister of State's report and statement are as comprehensive and thorough an account as we have had on any topic over the past four years. I commend him and the officials on that. I am often first into the charge to wear an ash plant off a few lads if I think it necessary here but fair play is good sport. We are on top of it and are not operating in isolation. It is good to hear about the measures taken abroad and I hope there will be a breakthrough in developing a disease resistant strain to re-establish our ash plantations with vigour. Perhaps we could get in behind that in a robust way to support it through a policy platform and grant aid to restore the ash plantations and forests across the country.

As an aside, I defer to a man who is an expert in these matters, Senator Comiskey, who tells me that if one can see out through the branches of an ash tree whose leaves are not fully filled in, it is time enough to sow the potatoes. I was heartened by that at the weekend and I checked and managed to get a few spuds in and did not feel too bad that the ash tree had not come into full bloom.

I am glad that Senator Quinn broadened the debate to deal with biodiversity, habitat and the other connections within our forestry, and the delicate balance of nature. That is an important issue. This is not just a question of ash trees; it has implications for many other species of flora and fauna. In the spirit of that point, I take the opportunity to ask a question now rather than put it down for a Commencement debate. If I had raised it with the Leader of the House, he would have said the Minister of State with responsibility for forestry will be in the House in an hour and to take it up with him. I do not expect a comprehensive answer to the question today, which deals with access to our forests as amenity.

There is alarm and nothing short of consternation in my community in Portarlinton that Coillte has put Rathleash-Tierhogar wood, near Killenard, up for sale. The consultation amounted to someone going around to people's doors with a leaflet to state Coillte was putting the forest up for sale. That is not meaningful consultation. This is an ancient wood, with many of its trees aged between 50 and 80 years. The thought that these beech and sycamore trees would go up in smoke as firewood is abhorrent, particularly in the context of this debate about salvaging our forestry, our ash plantations and their value. I accept we must manage our forests and that many of them are commercial plantations sown for harvesting. This is a natural amenity, a nature reserve which is home to the red squirrel and to over 30 species of birds, not to mention the wild garlic and bluebells that carpet the forest floor at this time of year.

It is not correct procedure that Coillte, on behalf of the State or on the Minister of State's behalf, who represents the citizen, can unilaterally put a piece of forestry up for sale by private treaty when we do not know who will buy it or for what purpose. Surely that is not the kind of accountable or transparent process we require. Where possible, we should always seek to work in tandem and co-operation with communities to vest such a reserve by a long-term lease in the community which could work to become its custodian, to preserve it, to ensure public access and to ensure it is retained as a community amenity.

There is a broader policy issue at stake that someone can buy State forestry without our

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knowing who the buyer is, or his or her intention, and the only consultation is a leaflet dropped through the letter box stating it is for sale. I do not expect the Minister of State to give an immediate response but there is a policy issue and protocol to be addressed not just in respect of the Portarlington woodland, but around the country.

Senator James Heffernan: I welcome the Minister of State. I thank the Leader for bringing this debate to the House today because I called for it some weeks ago, following the retirement of Henry Shefflin, when I said he was a mighty man on the field but left many broken bits of ash behind him. I know it is an issue close to the Minister of State's heart because he comes from County Tipperary. There are as many hurley makers and ash growers in his county as in mine. I still play a bit of junior B hurling with my local club. Playing at that level there is quite a large turnover of ash, dishing it out and taking it.

Ash dieback has gone under the radar. We have seen how the Department has tackled livestock diseases such as foot and mouth. This has major implications not only for the ash growers, but for hurley makers, clubs and families. The hurley is often the first thing put into a child's cradle, especially in the hurling counties, and is often the last thing left on a coffin when a good man is being put down. The symbol of the hurley is of great importance to Ireland. Hurley making is a craft that needs to be given special recognition and protection either by the European Union or the Government here because it is entering a period of crisis, especially with ash dieback. Coillte has maintained a supply of the native ash to the hurley makers. It has maintained the price at approximately €8.50 a plank, whereas private suppliers importing ash from all over Europe, from Holland to Slovakia, charge hurley makers €10.50 a plank. If ash dieback disease takes hold in our native plant, having shown itself in a couple of plantations, it will have diabolical consequences. Only one tree out of 1,000 ash trees in a plantation shows a form of immunity to ash dieback. It is phenomenal that a whole plantation could be wiped out by the disease. Research by the scientist whose name escapes me shows that ash dieback does not proliferate through bark on the tree. Has the Department looked into a relaxation of the regulation that any imported ash must be barkless? It is not an issue that will be on the front pages but it has major implications for the GAA and the sustainability of our native ash suppliers and craftsmen. This has the potential to push the cost of ash sky high. I do not know if the Minister of State has thought about a subsidy for hurley makers so that they can offset the costs. The Minister of State is from Tipperary and my crowd are familiar with the Golden-Kilfeacle and we know about "The Combo" and Annacarty. We probably taught them how to use the ash over there. However, this is a serious issue.

Is there some recognition for the unique craft of hurley making, which is unique to Ireland? The hurley is a symbol pushed into the hands of every visiting dignitary after a pint of Guinness. Barack Obama was given one as was Prince Philip, when he visited Croke Park. In "Charlie", the television series about Mr. Haughey, he gave a camán to the Iraqi delegation to bring back to Saddam. It is a major symbol for our country. From speaking to hurley makers, the imported ash is not of the same quality and many of them will not go near it. Can we introduce a quality standard to separate native ash from imported ash? Maybe the Department should look at the issue. I thank the Minister of State for taking the debate, which has implications for ash growers, hurley makers and families the length and breadth of the country.

Acting Chairman (Senator Michael Mullins): I invite the Minister of State to respond and I am sure there will be some hard pulling.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy

Tom Hayes): No, there will not be any hard pulling.

I sincerely thank Senators for their constructive contributions. Senator Ó Domhnaill referred to the shortage of ash, which was also raised by Senator Heffernan and almost all speakers. Everyone is concerned about the shortage of ash and the concern of the forestry service and the Department is to try to deal with this in the best way possible, with the best back-up and scientific knowledge available. At all times, the Department co-operated with the GAA, which we met on several occasions after it requested meetings. I thank the GAA for its input. It agreed to provide funding for research.

With regard to the question of hurley makers, it is an unusual and brilliant craft. Senator Denis Landy referred to the numbers in Limerick and Tipperary in Munster and beyond. We must try to protect the craft. We have had roundtable discussions with hurley makers on many occasions and we try to resolve the points they raise on an ongoing basis.

However, we face a crisis involving a disease with which we are trying to deal. It is an airborne disease and Senator Denis Landy questioned whether it should be burned or whether burying under clay was enough. That is enough because once it is covered with clay, it cannot be airborne.

One can import timber but it would be far better to have timber here and to cut down the trees. Last Saturday, I was in a plantation in Dundrum, a few miles from where I live. It is a fabulous young plantation which will be fit for harvesting. There is no disease in it and it will come on stream. The soil in Tipperary is suitable for growing ash, which is why there is so much of it there. Many trees are being thinned so that they will be ready for harvesting in a few years' time. They will be sawn up and used in hurley production.

Clubs, including the ones mentioned by Senator Heffernan in Tipperary, have asked me where the timber will come from. This is why the GAA, at central council level, has become involved with the Department. Without giving definite guarantees, which I cannot do, I assure Senators everything is being done to ensure there will be a supply of hurleys through what is available in Ireland. If not, we will be allowed to import. That great skill will keep going and I would encourage the production of hurleys here. Given the cost of hurleys for young players, they are moving to plastic hurleys. They are not as good and we should not encourage them because of the tradition and craft that goes with hurley making.

With regard to making available subsidies, this matter was raised but at this time, a subsidy is not the right way to do it. Maybe through Leader companies, something could be put in place in the future. It is a matter that can be discussed. If young people want to set up a business and make hurleys, the Government should not stand in their way.

Many Senators referred to the new forestry scheme introduced earlier this year, which is having a huge impact. We must encourage forestry and a change in attitude among farmers who traditionally had a few animals on the land. They should see forestry as a crop that can be harvested and sent to the mill. It can create rural employment. Over 10,000 people are employed in the forestry industry and more trucks are drawing timber to mills in Ireland than are drawing cattle to meat plants and factories. That is an amazing statistic which can be built on. The Government is fully committed to the forestry programme.

I am at pains at all times to encourage people to use their marginal land. I am not speaking

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in this regard about good land that can be used for dairy or beef production. There is a huge amount of marginal land throughout the country that could be made available for forestry. Like Senator Ó Domhnaill, I would encourage far more productive use of that land than is currently the case. There are many schemes in place to support this, through which substantial revenue can be gained. Many people who have inherited farms but live in Dublin, including in my own area, could ensure that land is put to good use. This would be of real value to the economy, not only in the context of jobs in rural areas but in the context of achievement of our carbon reductions. The new forestry programme has the support of all of the main farming organisations. It is a programme of which I, too, am fully supportive.

TreeMetrics was mentioned in the context of an app launched last year. The app we launched last week with the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Michelle O'Neill, was in relation to the disease. TreeMetrics is the organisation that developed the technology which allows a forest owner to measure the quantity of wood in his or her forest prior to selling it. This is of major advantage to private forestry owners, particularly those with no great knowledge in this area. It is a good idea, which I launched last year.

Senator Ó Clochartaigh spoke about co-operation with Northern Ireland and the Minister for Agriculture and rural Development, Michelle O'Neill. There is North-South co-operation on a huge range of issues across the agriculture industry. This morning, I visited the Teagasc centre in Ashtown in relation to its research on the future of food, on which issue there is North-South co-operation. I welcome the opportunity to work in co-operation with Northern Ireland and have no qualms in doing so.

Senator Quinn and others raised the issue of biodiversity. I am aware of the importance of further research to assess the impact of ash disease on the environment. In regard to the book from which the Senator read a passage, I would like to have a look at that book. FRAXBACK action, which I referred to earlier, is a collaboration of more than 100 scientists to address this issue. The Department will work with this group into the future.

Senator Quinn also made an important point on an issue close to my heart, namely, community involvement in the growth of trees. Agencies such as Coillte and private foresters grow trees for financial advantage. Grants are available under the new GLAS scheme for the plantation by people or groups of trees on the roadside, on farms and so on. Local authorities and councils also provide grants for the planting of trees. The greater the number of trees planted by tidy towns committees etc., the more points they get. We should try to ensure that into the future local authorities encourage the planting of more trees in our towns, villages, streets and schools. Last year, I planted a tree in the local school in my area. This created great conversation among the schoolchildren and had a great impact on the immediate environment. Forestry is a subject of interest to many people. There are so many different varieties of trees, some of which take a long time to grow while others are fast growing. It is an issue of huge environmental connect. I support the Senator's call for the payment of grants into the future in respect of tree planting. It may be possible to do so through tidy towns committees and so on.

Senator Whelan raised an issue relevant to his constituency. I have received correspondence on this matter, not only from the Senator but from many people in his constituency. I acknowledge this is an issue. I am due to visit the area next Saturday week and would be happy to meet then any group to discuss the issue. Since taking up my post as Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine I have had a lot of dealings with Coillte. In my opinion, it is pro-development of walkways countrywide, including through forests. The

Forest Service is encouraging community development and involvement in this regard. There is also a scheme in place through which financial aid is available to communities. Walkways are being opened up through the Galtee Mountains in Tipperary, in Kerry and many other areas. I commend Coillte on its work throughout the country in terms of the development of tourism from forestry. Rather than hammering Coillte, I would like to work with it on these issues. I have listened to and heard what the Senator had to say and I am happy to meet a deputation on the issue when I am in the area next Saturday week.

I thank Senators from all sides of the House for the opportunity to debate this issue. I also thank my officials who, as rightly pointed out by many Senators, have worked very hard on addressing this issue. It is not an easy problem to resolve. We do not know where we will be in this regard in six months time. I cannot give any guarantees as we do not know what will happen. During our discussions on this matter prior to coming to the Seanad for this debate, one of my officials pointed out to me that there is no way we can anticipate what might happen six or 12 months down the road. We are protecting the species. Reference was made to the European issue. We are ahead of what is being done in Europe because of the importance of this to our country. I again thank the officials from all sections of the Department for their commitment and dedicated work on this issue.

I take this opportunity to also thank my predecessor, the late Shane McEntee, to whom many Senators referred, for his great work and leadership on this issue.

Senators: Hear, hear.

Sitting suspended at 2.10 p.m. and resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Sport Ireland Bill 2014: Committee Stage

Sections 1 to 7, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 8

Question proposed: "That section 8 stand part of the Bill."

Senator Paul Bradford: This is an omnibus section which outlines the functions of Sport Ireland. On the basis of promoting elite athletes and excellence in competitive sports, the Minister of State may be able to advise me what will be the relationship between Sport Ireland and the Olympic Council of Ireland, a body which selects Irish Olympians and other high ranking sporting organisations. Apart from the funding and organisational elements of Sport Ireland and the promotion, encouragement and development of the participation of young people in sport, will Sport Ireland have a hands-on involvement at high level such as the Olympics? The Olympic Games are held every four years and there are often difficulties associated with selection and which sports are to be represented. Does the Minister of State envisage Sport Ireland having some form of role at that level, quite apart from the funding level?

I raised previously with the Minister a subject which is close to the Acting Chairman's heart, the development of League of Ireland soccer. I put down a Commencement debate matter, asking that the Department, through the Minister and perhaps through Sport Ireland, would have discussions with the League of Ireland or the FAI to see if anything can be done to save League of Ireland soccer from itself. The new season is under way and while I am not the expert in

this House on the League of Ireland or maybe the greatest League of Ireland soccer fan, I am concerned that, once again, the problems, crises and disasters which have happened almost every year over the past five or six years are emerging again. Whether it is management structures, finance or whatever, the league, as a serious and credible entity, is disappearing before our eyes. The league comes under the ambit of the FAI but in our promotion of sport under the functions of Sport Ireland we should recognise that a semi-professional League of Ireland, if properly functioning, properly managed, properly marketed and properly supported, could be as successful as any of the semi-professional leagues in some of the European countries such as the Scandinavian countries. Every League of Ireland club is not just a sporting organisation; it is a focal point for its own community and a mini-employer, a generator of economic activity. However, it is crumbling. There may be some mechanism by which the new organisation could sit down with the main players and try to knock heads together. Otherwise, there will be no League of Ireland of any credibility in the next number of years.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The relationship between the Olympic Council of Ireland and the new Sport Ireland will be the same and there will be no change in that relationship. The current Irish Sports Council is funded by the Government and the Irish Sports Council distributes that funding to the national governing bodies. It will be the same relationship.

Senator Bradford has raised this issue on many occasions. I come from the same school as him in this regard. I have great respect for the League of Ireland and for the players who play with the league. I like and support the sport of soccer. An increasing number of club players are playing in the League of Ireland. In Mayo, a number of players from clubs in the county are playing with Longford Town, Galway United and Sligo Rovers. A lad from a local club won a championship medal last year with Dundalk. I agree with Senator Bradford and, if he wishes, I could ask John Delaney to come in here to meet a few Senators and to discuss the future of the League of Ireland.

As Minister of State I cannot interfere with the way the FAI, the GAA or the IRFU runs their business. The FAI has to deal with the issue. Many clubs come to me looking for funding. Senator Bradford knows that it is becoming much harder for local clubs to raise funds. A further issue raised with me is that the affiliated organisations are asking clubs for too much money. This is something that we could discuss with the FAI, the GAA and the IRFU. They are encouraging children to participate in sport. My role as Minister of State with responsibility for sport is to determine policy. The Sports Council's role at present is to make sure that funding is spent on grassroots sport, not on the professional game. It should be used for projects like the late-night leagues in Dublin, involving the Garda and the FAI. It is the same with the GAA which is working with disadvantaged communities. That is really the basis for it. It is something I will do if the Senator wants me to do it, but I cannot interfere in the day-to-day running of the FAI.

I raised this issue with the FAI. Its representatives, including Fran Gavin, would tell the Senator that they have made many changes to, and set up new structures in, the organisation over the past number of years. Many clubs were trying to be like clubs in England, over-extending themselves and overspending. Many clubs, especially in Dublin, were in serious difficulty, and some of them still are. That is because they were trying to be professional clubs, although they did not have the resources. I have no difficulty asking the FAI to meet a group from the Oireachtas. There used to be committee in the Houses and Senator Jimmy Harte - I send my best wishes to him as I know he and his family have gone through a very difficult time

- was chairman. The Senator might come back to me about organising that if he wishes.

Question put and agreed to.

Section 9 agreed to.

SECTION 10

Question proposed: "That section 10 stand part of the Bill."

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I welcome the Minister of State and would like him to expand on something I asked about on Second Stage. Section 10 provides that: "Sport Ireland may appoint such consultants and advisers, as it considers necessary for the performance of its functions." The same section also provides that: "Sport Ireland shall comply with any directions concerning the employment of consultants and advisers which may from time to time be given to it by the Minister, given with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform." The Minister of State gave the impression on Second Stage that this relates very much to sporting consultants. It is strange for it to be specifically mentioned in the Bill. What would his Department consider appropriate by way of the appointment of consultants or advisers? Is there a limit whereby Sport Ireland would have to refer back to the Minister of State to make an appointment? Would we have a situation in which Sport Ireland would appoint consultants itself up to a certain cost without referring back to the line Minister?

Deputy Michael Ring: I referred to this last week. What I do not want to see happening is large amounts of money going on consultants' fees. That is taxpayers' money and I want to see it going into grassroots sports. We are bringing powers back to ourselves so that when the new body is formed, if it wants to bring in consultants, it will refer back to the Department. We will not be interfering with its day-to-day running. Even if I am not the line Minister, I do not want to see large sums being spent on consultants' fees, as has been the case in the past number of years. Sometimes if one is paying consultants, the question one asks depends on the answer one wants to get. If the need is genuine and good for sport and is something on which it does not have the expertise itself, it will need to get outside expertise. However, I do not want people spending large sums of money we do not have on consultants' fees.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I thank the Minister of State. I know and respect that he does not want any excessive money spent in this area, nor do I or any of my colleagues. It is appropriate from time to time to seek expert advice if the expertise is not within the organisation. Unfortunately, we were not given due time to table amendments to this legislation and that is why we opposed the Order of Business this morning. The fact Committee and Report Stages are being taken together does not allow me to table Report Stage amendments. I understand this is not the Minister of State's responsibility.

I would have thought it appropriate to set a limit in section 10, over which it would have to be referred to the Minister. Subsection (3) provides that: "Any remuneration due to a consultant or adviser shall, having regard to guidelines issued from time to time by the Minister or the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, be paid out of moneys at Sport Ireland's disposal." I am assuming those guidelines would pertain to the upper limits of what can be paid. It is very vague and, as we cannot amend it at this stage, I would ask the Minister of State to give it consideration. He has stated that he is opposed to excessive moneys being paid and I do not understand why the Department would not have set a limit over which it must be referred to the Minister. Is that something the Minister of State would consider?

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Deputy Michael Ring: What I do not want is to tie the hands of the new sports body. There are enough controls in that there will be discussions between Department officials and the new body. I would expect that guidelines will be drawn up and that there will be discussions with the Department before it could hire consultants. That is the whole point of this. There would have to be a policy decision by the Minister and Department to ensure it is something that cannot be done in-house. I do not know what might arise in the future and do not want to tie its hands. When a problem arises, it must have the power to deal with it.

The Senator would have to agree that at least we are tightening up on this. It is very difficult to tie it down and put a figure on it in any particular year. One year it might want less than the figure set out. If we put a figure in the legislation, it will feel it has to spend it as it will not want to give money back. I do not want it to hire consultants for the sake of it. Each year it will sit down with the Minister and Department officials and will devise a policy. There may be some issue that will come up we cannot foresee.

Senator Paul Bradford: Senator Darragh O'Brien has raised a valid query and I acknowledge that the Minister of State's response is possibly as good as it can be under the circumstances. Thinking about these two words "consultants" and "advisers" and the role played by such figures in the economic history of the country over the past decade, they have become two very frightening and negative words. When we are setting up a new body, such as Sport Ireland, it has to be our hope that the quality of the people initially appointed will be such that they will be able to do their jobs. We have seen too many situations in the past ten years in which decision-making has been farmed out. First it was farmed out from politicians to State boards and then from State boards to anonymous consultants and advisers.

The Minister of State made the valid point that we cannot completely tie the hands of the new body but we must try to ensure by virtue of the appointments at board, management and staff levels that people will be able to do their jobs 99.9% of the time. The less reliance we have on consultants and advisers the better. We need accountability and I am happy that there is provision in the Bill for Sport Ireland representatives to appear before the appropriate Oireachtas committees to answer for their steering of the organisation. We should at least take on board the warning, if not the objection, from Senator Darragh O'Brien that consultants and advisers should be excluded to the maximum extent possible. People who are being paid with taxpayers' money should be doing the job for which they are paid.

Senator Eamonn Coghlan: Having been on the board of the Irish Sports Council over the past number of years, I know consultants were employed in a number of different ways. In particular, they were employed in the areas of sports science and high-performance sports as well as to evaluate the activity levels of the youth and adult populations in Ireland. While the employees of the Irish Sports Council do a wonderful job and are diligent in the delivery of increasing sports participation and high-performance sports in Ireland, there are certain aspects outside their realm where they may need expert help. In political life people need consultants and advisers. We could look into this too deeply with some fear but I believe we need have no fear when it comes to the Irish Sports Council seeking advice in these particular areas.

With the merger of the Irish Sports Council and the National Sports Campus Development Authority, there is another area for which they will perhaps need independent advice because over the coming years, we will see Abbotstown grow into an enormous monument for sports and for the people. I am not referring to elite or high-performance sports people but the population throughout the country, including the young boys and girls who wish to participate. They

can utilise these facilities through their clubs. At certain times the new body will need expert independent advice on the delivery of these facilities, aside from what they receive by way of tenders from public companies. I agree with the Minister of State that the Irish Sports Council and Sport Ireland, when it comes into being, will be frugal in their use of consultants and advisers.

Deputy Michael Ring: Senator Bradford made a point on a particular provision but it is a standard provision. It is common across all Acts when we are setting up State boards or new agencies. It gives them the power to appoint consultants when they need advice. Senator Eamonn Coghlan is correct in that Abbotstown will be an example in future. It is developing at such a fast pace. I made a request in this House last week to Senators and I hope they will take it up. They should see what is actually happening there and what is proposed for the future. It is worth going to see. My Department will engage closely with the new body. There will be Government guidelines on consultants.

Senator Darragh O'Brien made a valid point. I can give two figures on what was spent on consultants in 2014. The Irish Sports Council spent €357,383 and the National Sports Campus Development Authority spent €286,405. That comes to almost €600,000 of State money spent on consultants. As someone who came through the local authorities to the Dáil, one thing I hate to see is large amounts of money being spent on consultants. I used to see that in Leader programmes. People used to come to me looking to do a project. The first thing they wanted was a feasibility study. In some cases, these are needed but some projects were only small and it turned out that more money was being spent on consultants and feasibility studies than on the actual projects.

This is common across all State agencies and our Department will have guidelines. Each year officials will sit down with officials from the new body for discussions and the priorities will be outlined. If there is an emergency or a problem, it can be addressed. Senator Eamonn Coghlan referred to the new Abbotstown campus. He knows all about high-performance sports. Sometimes we need to get consultants in or advice has to be sought on issues like that.

Question put and agreed to.

Sections 11 to 21, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 22

Question proposed: "That section 22 stand part of the Bill."

Senator Darragh O'Brien: As I said earlier, I would have tabled amendments to this section if we had been given sufficient time but that is not the fault of the Minister of State. This section relates to the appointment of the chief executive. Section 22(2) states: "Subject to subsection (5), the chief executive shall be appointed by Sport Ireland with the approval of the Minister, and may, with the approval of the Minister, be removed from office for stated reasons by Sport Ireland." That is the main part of the section. I will go through section 22(3) and (4) in a moment.

In August last year, the Minister of State said that the chief executive of Sport Ireland would be appointed by him following an interview process. He stated that he would set up a mechanism where there would be an interview process and that anyone would be free to make an application to that. However, he stated he would be appointing the first chief executive and that it

would be a matter for individuals whether to make an application for that job.

That is clearly not the position in the Bill the Minister of State has brought before the Seanad. Section 22(3) states: “The Minister may, before the establishment date, designate a person to be appointed the first chief executive of Sport Ireland for a term to be determined by the Minister.” Since it states “may”, the Minister of State may say he will not do that. Section 22(4) states: “Where a competition to appoint a chief executive is held prior to the establishment day, the successful candidate may be appointed by the Minister as the chief executive officer designate.” The section then goes on to list the powers of the chief executive.

I am aware of the commitment of the Minister of State and of many Members to sport and of the important role it plays in this country. It also has an important role in terms of culture, education and the economy. The chief executive will drive the ethos and the future direction of that body and will make most of the decisions of that body.

The chief executive will be appointed by Sport Ireland. Let us forget about the interim chief executive, which is provided for in this Bill. In future, will the board of Sport Ireland appoint the chief executive? The Bill makes no reference to an interview process, public consultation process, public advertisement process or anything like that. This is a deficiency in the legislation. Every organisation needs to be refreshed. We should not be giving people jobs for 20, 30 or 40 years, although if they are doing the job well, then that is fantastic and they should keep doing it.

Let us consider the next subsection. The Minister can designate a chief executive for Sport Ireland. The Minister of State said on Second Stage that the position would be for 12 months.

3 o'clock

Section 22(3) refers to “a term to be determined by the Minister”. If it is the case that the Minister designates an interim chief executive for 12 months, from what date will that appointment commence? Will it be set down clearly that after 12 months, a public interview process will be held and Sport Ireland will advertise for a chief executive? If that is the case, who will decide whether the interim chief executive will be part of that decision? Will the existing board of Sport Ireland be part of that decision? Those are my questions on section 22. I would have tabled amendments but there was insufficient time to do so.

Senator Paul Bradford: I have listened with interest to Senator Darragh O’Brien. He makes a valid case and has made some interesting observations. If this is to be a new entity with a new beginning and if it is to do all things properly and within the confines of the required standards, it would be far preferable if the first appointment were preceded by a public competition. That would ensure the vacancy was open to all suitably-qualified people and that all suitably qualified people could be considered. The Minister of State might explain to us why that is not the case and why a direct appointment must be made.

Perhaps the term of office for the first appointee could be relatively limited in scope - not as a compromise but as a bit of reassurance - so that it would not be a job for life. We previously referred to advisers and consultants. The Minister of State referred to the fact that it is standard practice across all agencies when bodies are being formed that space is provided for consultants and advisers. I would not think it is normal practice for chief executives to come under the ambit of Government Departments. For example, if this was legislation from the Department of Health setting up the HSE or local government legislation setting up new council structures, the initial chief executive positions would be up for general competition and would not be decided

in advance. I look forward to hearing the Minister of State explain why it is being written this way. I will not say it is a closed shop because I will not exaggerate but based on my lay analysis of the situation, it is rather unusual that the first appointment is certainly not an example of open-door policy at its best. I look forward to hearing what the Minister of State has to say and perhaps he will convince me otherwise.

Deputy Michael Ring: The reason I will not appoint the first CEO relates to bringing some clarity to the new organisation. Two boards and two agencies are coming together as one. Deputy Dooley raised this with me in the Dáil. I am doing exactly what Senators Bradford and Darragh O'Brien want me to do. I do not want to interfere with the process. I could appoint the first CEO. It is provided for in the Bill but I do not want to do that. I will appoint somebody in a temporary capacity for one year and get the chairman and board up and running. The board will appoint the CEO, as it is normal practice for agencies to run a competition. I fully expect that the board of Sport Ireland will follow the normal practice and run a competition. The first CEO will be an employee of Sport Ireland and not a board member. The second CEO will be appointed by the board and the first CEO will have no role in the appointment. The chairman of the board will make that appointment and not me and it will go through normal practices. The reason I did that was because I did not want Senators, like Senators Bradford and Darragh O'Brien, accusing me of appointing a chief executive and politicising it. I am not doing that.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: To be fair, there has been no mention of a public advertisement for this in the Minister of State's response. He is in effect appointing the first chief executive who will be called "an interim chief executive", so that is his appointment. What is happening is something he did not want to happen last year. He is appointing the interim chief executive for the term of one year and I understand from his answer that the board will appoint a permanent chief executive. Will that be after a public advertisement? Will the board advertise for the chief executive role after 12 months? This is where I want to get to. Has the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform already approved the interim chief executive and if so, at what salary level is that person being appointed?

Deputy Michael Ring: The answer to the last question is "Yes". I presume the salary will be the same as that being paid now.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: The same salary but the person has not yet been appointed.

Deputy Michael Ring: I will have to check that with my officials. I understand the salary will be the same. I was not part of the negotiations but it has been agreed with the Department. I will write officially to the Senator and give him details. I was not part of those discussions, so I do not know. I will appoint the first chief executive for one year and I am doing it simply because the Senator and his party had concerns about me appointing someone for five years. I did not want that. The new board must be appointed through the new arrangements and the chairman of the board will be appointed. After one year, it will be signed into law that the board must appoint the chief executive, like other State agencies. This is the way other State agencies operate. The Minister of State will have no say in it. I presume the board must go through Government procedures. Current procedures will be used.

Senator Eamonn Coghlan: I support the Minister of State on this particular aspect. The Irish Sports Council and the National Sports Campus Development Authority have worked hand-in-hand for quite a number of years. As we all know, the Irish Sports Council was established under the Act in 1999 while the National Sports Campus Development Authority was

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established in 2006. Since 2006, both bodies have worked hand-in-hand on every aspect of sport in Ireland. Under the reform, we are bringing the two bodies together under one board. As I said last week, the most difficult part of the Minister of State's job will be to identify one chief executive and one board. Currently, there are two chief executives and two boards. The approach the Minister of State is taking brings about continuity because of the working relationship both bodies have had over the past number of years. Why does it bring about continuity? It does so because the knowledge that is there will remain there for the next year or so. The Minister said that the CEO will be designated for one year.

People can apply to join the new board of Sport Ireland through open application. This will be in the public domain. That board and its chairman will be appointed. This brings continuity to the appointment of a chief executive when after one year, anybody, including myself, can apply for the position of chief executive of Sport Ireland. It is very important that continuity in the area of sport is maintained, particularly with world championships and the Olympic Games coming up in 2016. Week after week and month after month, we talk about the wonderful successes of Irish sportsmen and women in this House, not just at international level but at local level. That is because of the working relationship that has been established between the two bodies and that continuity must continue throughout next year. I support the Minister of State in this regard.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I thank the Minister of State for his answer but what we have learned now is that the interim appointment has already been made.

Deputy Michael Ring: No.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Has the interim appointment not been made?

Deputy Michael Ring: The appointment has not been made.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Has it been approved by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform?

Deputy Michael Ring: Can I clarify something?

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Please do.

Deputy Michael Ring: The salary approved for the CEO of the new body reflects the wider role of the new CEO. The salary has been agreed for the CEO of the new body. When I appoint somebody for one year, naturally enough, that will be the salary for that person and for whoever continues afterwards. I just wanted to clarify that.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I was going to ask how much the salary was.

Deputy Michael Ring: I do not know but I will get that information for the Senator.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: We do not know how much the salary is. Is it greater than what is currently being paid? The Minister of State said that it reflects the enhanced role, which leads me to believe that this means an enhanced salary in Government-speak. The Seanad should know what the salary is. It is a public appointment that will be made by the Minister of State.

Perhaps I did not put my question correctly. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has approved that salary level. Has the Department been told who that interim chief

executive is? This is the person who will be getting the job without interview and by ministerial appointment. Do we know who that person is? Does the Department know who that person is and what the salary level is? It is very important that we know. It is important, if we are dealing with the roles and responsibilities of the chief executive of the new Sport Ireland, that we know how much that person will be paid. We should know that before we leave here today.

Deputy Michael Ring: The salary is approved for the role but not for the person. It is very unusual - I have never heard it before - for Senators to talk about salaries. However, I have no problem with it because people know what Senator Darragh O'Brien and I are paid.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Absolutely.

Deputy Michael Ring: I have no problem in that regard. I do not have an issue with that. Let us be fair as well. There will be an amalgamation of two boards and greater responsibility. In particular with Abbotstown, there will be serious responsibilities because there are serious issues there that will have to be taken over. I am sure Senator Darragh O'Brien will be well aware of that.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I am.

Deputy Michael Ring: A lot of those issues were created there and there are a lot of serious issues that have to be dealt with.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I agree with the Minister of State. They were created in the first instance.

Deputy Michael Ring: The chief executive, whoever gets that job, will have a major responsibility in taking over two agencies. There are also a lot of other substitute agencies in that regard. It is a big responsibility-----

Senator Darragh O'Brien: A job.

Deputy Michael Ring: -----a big job. Personally, I do not have a problem with telling Senators. I do not know what the salary is but I will get that information to Senator Darragh O'Brien.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I thank the Minister of State.

I agree it is a big job and it is a very important job. I do not expect someone to do the job for nothing. We want people in these roles with the expertise.

Senator Terry Brennan: Has Senator Darragh O'Brien somebody in mind?

Acting Chairman (Senator Pat O'Neill): Senator Darragh O'Brien, without interruption.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: No. Senator Brennan is his party's spokesperson in this area and I have a particular interest in the finance side. The problem is that the interim chief executive is a ministerial appointment and not by public interview. It is not open to anyone to make an application to take over the role of chief executive of Sport Ireland because it is in the gift of the Minister. While I appreciate and fully agree with the answer that the salary is for the role and not the person, because the Minister of State said it is an amalgamation of two roles and an enhanced responsibility, is the salary now more than it was previously? If the Minister of State does not have the amount, his officials or the Department should know. Is it more? If it is an

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increase, what is the percentage increase? Many people appear before the committees where salary levels are discussed. With a public appointment, I do not see why we cannot be told what the amount is and whether it is more than that for the current chief executives' roles in both of the bodies. If it is, what is the level of that increase?

Senator Paul Bradford: I appreciate that the role of the person to be appointed is broader than either of the two previous portfolios. Notwithstanding the economic straightjacket under which we all must exist, we would expect there will possibly be an increase in the salary. If the salary has been approved already by the Department, presumably it is not a State secret. It would be helpful, before the debate concludes, that the figure would be made known.

My questions relate to the fact the Minister of State will be making this appointment. Deputy Ring made a reasonable case as to why he has a 12-month limit on the interim appointment and why he needs to proceed as the legislation is written. I have two questions. First, is there a timescale or has the Minister of State an idea as to when the appointment will be made? Will it be within a number of days or weeks of the legislation passing? When might Deputy Ring be in a position to make that appointment?

Second, on the basis that the appointment is in the Minister of State's hands, are those who might be outside the fold already, but who might be interested in this interim appointment, in a position to contact, or apply to, him? The Minister of State is, in a sense, the competition for this job. There is no competition authority and the Minister of State is the person making the appointment. If a person is interested, can he or she make his or her interest in being considered for the interim appointment known to the Minister of State or has he thought about how he will take this relatively difficult decision? The timeframe and process, I suppose, is what I am wondering about.

Deputy Michael Ring: On the timeframe, the minute we get the legislation through, I will make a decision on it because we need to get the new agency up and running and I want to put an interim chief executive in place. Then I need to put in place a chairman and board. I want to have all of this done because one year from when it is set up, this new position will be made available. We could have made the appointment for life but I did not do that. Senator Darragh O'Brien must be fair. Under the Act, the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, and I could give ourselves the power to put this person in for life or set a timeframe but we do not want to do that.

Senator Bradford asked a question to which I will give an honest answer. I want to get this up and running as quickly as possible because there are a lot of very serious problems outstanding in some of these agencies. I want to get this board up and running and I want to get the chief executive in place as quickly as possible. I do not want two agencies running sport. One agency is enough.

The new chief executive, whoever that person will be, will have a big responsibility and have a major role. In the next number of weeks, I will discuss with the interim chief executive staffing problems, quotas and everything else to try to get this up and running as quickly as possible. Shortly after this legislation is passed, we will appoint the short-term chief executive. Then it will be up to the board. As with every other State agency, the board appoints the CEO. At the end of the day, naturally enough, it will have to go through the rules and regulations of the day.

I understand the approved figure for the role - it is not really over the top - is €125,000 per

year. Senator Darragh O'Brien now has the answer. I do not know whether that represents an increase. Although I am open to correction, I think it does not.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: That is okay.

Deputy Michael Ring: I want to make it clear to Senator Darragh O'Brien that nobody has been appointed because there is no job, and the person cannot be appointed until we get the legislation through.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I thank the Minister of State for that clarification. It is better that we know. It does not seem to be an excessive amount. The Minister of State said he could have appointed someone with a job for life. No one wants to see that in any of the roles, or certainly I do not want it. If somebody is performing his or her functions well, there should be a proper evaluation and that term can be extended, which is fine.

Section 22(2) states: "the chief executive shall be appointed by Sport Ireland with the approval of the Minister, and may, with the approval of the Minister, be removed from office for stated reasons by Sport Ireland." The first interim chief executive will be appointed for a year. Has the Minister of State set down a specific term for the chief executive appointed after that? Is there a review? Is it a five-year term? What is it?

Senator Paul Bradford: I refer to my second question to the Minister of State. I appreciate he needs to achieve progress and does not want a long delay between the passage of the Bill and the appointment of the interim top man or woman, but is there a window for those who might be interested, who feel that they have the abilities, the vision and leadership in Irish sport? Are they in a position to make their names known to the Minister of State or ask that they be considered? I appreciate there is not an open advertised competition but on the basis that the appointment lies in the Minister of State's hands, is it possible for those to whom I refer to let it be known to him that they would be interested in being considered for the interim appointment?

Deputy Michael Ring: On the first question as to the terms and how long the person will be in place, the normal terms of a contract are agreed with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Normally, CEO contracts are for five to seven years. That is what it will be. There will be no change in that.

In regard to the appointment, what I am trying to do is to facilitate continuity. That is why I am not making the appointment. I am not opening up the process. What I want to do is to appoint somebody in a temporary capacity for one year. I want to give the board the opportunity to appoint the right person and to go through the channels. There will then be an opportunity for people to make an application.

Question put:

| The Committee divided: Tá, 21; Níl, 12. | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Tá | Níl |
| Bacik, Ivana. | Bradford, Paul. |
| Brennan, Terry. | Byrne, Thomas. |
| Burke, Colm. | Craughwell, Gerard P. |
| Coghlan, Eamonn. | Heffernan, James. |
| Coghlan, Paul. | Leyden, Terry. |

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Comiskey, Michael. | Mullen, Rónán. |
| Conway, Martin. | Norris, David. |
| Gilroy, John. | Ó Domhnaill, Brian. |
| Henry, Imelda. | O'Brien, Darragh. |
| Kelly, John. | Power, Averil. |
| Landy, Denis. | Walsh, Jim. |
| Moran, Mary. | Wilson, Diarmuid. |
| Mulcahy, Tony. | |
| Mullins, Michael. | |
| Naughton, Hildegarde. | |
| Noone, Catherine. | |
| O'Donnell, Marie-Louise. | |
| O'Neill, Pat. | |
| Sheahan, Tom. | |
| Whelan, John. | |
| Zappone, Katherine. | |

Tellers: Tá, Senators Ivana Bacik and Paul Coghlan; Níl, Senators Darragh O'Brien and Diarmuid Wilson.

Question declared carried.

Sections 23 and 24 agreed to.

SECTION 25

Question proposed: "That section 25 stand part of the Bill."

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I have a question on the superannuation of staff who do not fall within the public service pension scheme. We all know we do not actually have a pension scheme as all pensions are paid out of current revenue. I would certainly like this to be changed. That aside, will the scheme that will be set up for staff who do not fall within the public service pension scheme operate on a defined benefit basis or defined contribution basis? I cannot see this in the section. Perhaps I am missing it.

Deputy Michael Ring: I understand there will be no change in status. Whatever scheme they are in at present, they will stay in it.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: That is fair enough but I am talking about new entrants. I am not trying to be pedantic or difficult. What type of scheme will new entrants in Sport Ireland join? Will it be a defined benefit scheme or a defined contribution scheme? It is perfectly correct that staff transferring to the new body will keep what they have. Obviously, there will be new staff, such as a new chief executive. What type of pension will that person or other new entrants have?

Deputy Michael Ring: For new entrants, the new public service scheme will apply. For any new staff, there will be a defined benefit.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I thank the Minister for the clarification. New entrants to

Sport Ireland will come under the gold-plated defined benefit scheme that is not applicable to people such as the Aer Lingus and airport pensioners about whom I have been talking and who have had their benefits cut by 50% or 60% by the Government. I am sure the latter will be very interested to know that new entrants to Sport Ireland, a new State body, will have access to a defined benefit scheme. I thank the Minister of State for his answer.

Question put:

| The Seanad divided: Tá, 23; Níl, 11. | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Tá | Níl |
| Bacik, Ivana. | Byrne, Thomas. |
| Bradford, Paul. | Craughwell, Gerard P. |
| Brennan, Terry. | Daly, Mark. |
| Burke, Colm. | Leyden, Terry. |
| Coghlan, Eamonn. | Mullen, Rónán. |
| Coghlan, Paul. | Norris, David. |
| Comiskey, Michael. | Ó Domhnaill, Brian. |
| Conway, Martin. | O'Brien, Darragh. |
| Cummins, Maurice. | Power, Averil. |
| Gilroy, John. | White, Mary M. |
| Henry, Imelda. | Wilson, Diarmuid. |
| Kelly, John. | |
| Landy, Denis. | |
| Moran, Mary. | |
| Mulcahy, Tony. | |
| Mullins, Michael. | |
| Naughton, Hildegard. | |
| Noone, Catherine. | |
| O'Donnell, Marie-Louise. | |
| O'Neill, Pat. | |
| Sheahan, Tom. | |
| van Turnhout, Jillian. | |
| Zappone, Katherine. | |

Tellers: Tá, Senators Ivana Bacik and Paul Coghlan; Níl, Senators Darragh O'Brien and Diarmuid Wilson.

Question declared carried.

Sections 26 to 33, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 34

Question proposed: "That section 34 stand part of the Bill."

Senator Terry Brennan: I am more convinced now than ever that Senator Darragh O'Brien

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has a candidate, a man or a woman, lined up for this job.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: It is Mick O'Dwyer on the way back from Louth.

Senator Terry Brennan: It is a possibility, as he is one of those boys.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: Are we speaking on the section?

Senator Terry Brennan: I commend the Minister of State on the one-year appointment. Section 34 deals with liabilities and my recollection is that there are outstanding High Court cases. What is the approximate cost of these cases? It must be approximately €1 million at this stage and they are still not complete. It would be better to spend the outstanding moneys on sports facilities as is done with the sports capital grant. Will these liabilities carry on to the new board? In the past it was a Fianna Fáil man or woman for life and I congratulate the Minister of State on his approach.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: That is an outrageous statement.

Deputy Michael Ring: Major court cases are taking place and there will be major legal fees but we must wait for the outcome of the case. The liabilities will pass on to the new board. The liabilities of the Irish Sports Council and the National Sports Campus Development Authority will become the liabilities of Sport Ireland. These liabilities may be covered by the Exchequer since the bodies are State bodies and there will be no change in this. The new body will be a State board backed by the Exchequer. The answer to the question is that any liabilities of either of the two bodies will carry on to the new body. At the end of the day Exchequer funding will cover everything. If there is a problem, the State will have to cover any liability. We will have to wait. I will not speak about the court case. Like the Senator, I would prefer to see money spent on sport and not on lawyers, barristers and courts.

Question put and agreed to.

Sections 35 to 43, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 44

Question proposed: "That section 44 stand part of the Bill."

Senator Paul Bradford: The section states a person who fails to comply with the Irish anti-doping rules shall not be eligible for funding to represent the State in sport. Is there a time limit on this? Would such a time limit be under the regulation of the Irish anti-doping rules? Is someone who fails to comply permanently excluded from representing the State or is there a limit on the restriction?

Deputy Michael Ring: My understanding is that someone caught doping faced a two-year ban but since January the ban is four years. I am open to correction on this. They are the rules and timelines set down with regard to doping.

Question put and agreed to.

Section 45 agreed to.

SCHEDULE 1

Question proposed: “That Schedule 1 be a Schedule to the Bill.”

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I seek clarification on the resignation or removal of members of the board. The Bill states a person shall be disqualified from holding and shall cease to hold office as a member of Sport Ireland or a committee if he or she is judged bankrupt or makes a composition or arrangement with his or her creditors. Why would either of these circumstances prevent someone from being a member of the board? Since our Constitution came into existence until quite recently we had a prohibition on someone standing for either House or being a Member of either House if he or she was judged bankrupt. This has changed. Is it now a fact that people are eligible to stand for either House of the Oireachtas, the Presidency or the European Parliament if they are judged bankrupt but cannot be a member of Sport Ireland if they are judged to be bankrupt or have come to an arrangement with their creditors? I wish to ask about the constitutionality of what is proposed.

Senator Paul Bradford: I wish to ask about the appointment of the board. We are advised the Sport Ireland board shall consist of 13 members, one of whom should be a chairperson and the members shall be appointed by the Minister. The tradition now with the appointment to State boards across the spectrum is that while the Minister might make the appointments, at least some if not all the appointments are made following nominations received by various agencies, groupings and bodies. Here it appears the Minister will have the unhappy task of making the 13 appointments himself or herself. Would it not have been possible to have a requirement that certain organisations or groupings in the broader sporting, cultural or educational fields should make nominations to the Minister who would then pick the nominations? It appears from how it is written that the Minister will simply make the appointments and there is no possibility of nominations from third or fourth parties. The GAA or IRFU will not be in a position to make a name available. It appears to be going contrary to what is the norm for board appointments. The Government makes much play of the fact that board appointments are generally made on the recommendation of other agencies and the Minister picks from a list made available to him or her. Will any groupings be in a position to submit names to the Minister or will it be purely a matter for the Minister and the Department to make the nominations? If it is, perhaps it is disappointing. Without overplaying the words “transparency” and “accountability” we need to ensure the board looks very representative, open and democratic. We have a difficulty, and I admit it is minor, with the direct appointment by the Minister of the first interim chief executive, but if the Minister on his or her own will appoint the longer-term appointments of the 13 members, it does not present a helpful picture. What range of involvement and engagement will there be in selecting the initial board? It will have much power in appointing a chief executive and taking major decisions down the line. How open will the nomination process be?

Progress reported; Committee to sit again.

Business of Seanad

Senator Maurice Cummins: I propose an amendment to the Order of Business that we will conclude at 4:15 p.m. and not 4 p.m. to allow us finish the Bill.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Question again proposed: “That Schedule 1 be a Schedule to the Bill.”

Senator Darragh O’Brien: I thank the Minister of State for his answers so far. The Schedule states the board will have a number of committees reporting to it and the members of the committees do not have to be members of the board of Sport Ireland. I wish to ask specifically about the chairpersons of the committees. Does the Minister of State have any view on whether they should be from the board of Sport Ireland? I particularly reference the anti-doping committee as the appointment in this regard will be very important. Will the board pick people itself to be members of the committees? If this is the case I will not support it. When the committees are established, it is important to have people with the required experience and knowledge in each area. I would hate to think any of the committees would be simply appointments of the board itself. Will the Minister of State let me know how he sees it working?

Senator David Norris: Following on from Senator Wilson’s contribution, I can understand the argument for excluding somebody on the grounds of bankruptcy because it would cast some doubt on their business expertise, creditworthiness and so on but I am not sure about the exclusion of somebody who comes to an accommodation with his or her creditors. That seems a fairly logical thing to do and it does not necessarily constitute a black mark against a person. I am not sure, therefore, that there is a sustainable argument for excluding people on that basis alone.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): In regard to Senator Wilson’s point about the exclusion of particular people from appointment to the boards, paragraph 3 deals with the resignation and removal of members from the board. These are normal provisions in respect of boards such as Sport Ireland. There is nothing different being done in relation to this board that does not apply to other boards.

On appointments to the board, Senator Bradford or any other person interested in putting their name forward must adhere to the new regulations in this regard. Such persons can express their interest on the State boards’ website when the specifications have been advertised. One of the issues considered in this regard was whether sporting organisations such as the GAA, FAI or IRFU or other sections of society should be allowed to nominate a person for election to the board. However, in the context of funding allocation, I could not allow this as it might lead to particular organisations representing their own sport. As Senators will be aware, the new governing procedures are in place. The posts will be advertised and people will have an opportunity to apply for membership of any State board.

On committees, a number of new sub-committees will be necessary. As Members will be aware, there is already in existence an anti-doping committee. Consideration is being given to outside people having an opportunity to chair some of these committees. These important committees, particularly the anti-doping committee, will comprise professionals with expertise in the area. It is anticipated that three to four chairpersons will need to be appointed in respect of the new committees. In regard to appointments generally, people will have an opportunity to express their interest in that regard. As discussed earlier, there will be times when we will have to engage consultants to address a particular problem.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I have the height of respect for the Minister of State but I do

not believe it is right that a person who enters into an arrangement with his or her creditors or is declared bankrupt should be deemed ineligible to sit on this particular board or any other board. The Minister of State gave the usual answer that this is a normal provision. Why is it a normal provision? It should not be. It was previously a normal provision that a person could not stand for election to either House of the Oireachtas or the European Parliament. However, when that provision was challenged by a citizen, it was deemed to be unconstitutional. I put it to the Minister of State that it is unconstitutional to include that provision in this Bill. I ask that he reconsider it before final passage of this Bill through the House. We have moved on. We are in different circumstances now. This country was hit by a financial tsunami, leaving many people who would not normally find themselves in financial difficulty having to come to arrangements with their creditors, including sports people, managers, business and ordinary people. We all know them; they are household names in this country. Their expertise would be ideally suited to membership of this particular board, if not the post of chief executive officer. The people concerned are being prevented by way of a provision in this legislation, comprising two sentences, from applying for board membership of Sport Ireland, which in my opinion is unconstitutional. I ask that the Minister of State reconsider this before progressing any further with this legislation.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: Senator Wilson has raised an issue which is of importance not only to Sport Ireland, but to society in general. If it is not recognised, I would argue that it might reflect poorly on the Government. At a time when mortgage arrears, negative equity and personal debt issues are affecting every parish and GAA club and their members, people are endeavouring to survive. Many very good people are struggling to remain in their homes or to hold on to investment properties they purchased during the boom as a result of the banking fiasco. It would be wrong and disingenuous to exclude such people from appointment to any State board.

I know for a fact that this particular criteria does not apply in respect of appointment to all State boards, including State boards whose legislative remit passed through this House in the past 24 months, one of which makes decisions about companies and the level of grants they receive. A period of reflection is required. On the one hand, the Government is encouraging the banks to do deals with mortgage holders and those who find themselves in negative equity while, on the other, it is saying that anybody who does such a deal will be excluded from playing an active role in decision-making. That is very wrong and it would send out a very dangerous message. It is not possible to square a round hole. There are sporting clubs up and down this country, many of them in my own constituency, that are currently trying to do deals with banks. Some of the people involved in those organisations who could play a key role in this area and whose names, if mentioned in this Chamber today, would ring of national sporting significance would be ruled out. There is a need for calm. We need to take a step back.

As far as I am aware, the Companies Act 1963 does not stipulate that to be a director of a company a person must meet these criteria. We should be encouraging individuals to do deals with creditors, particularly financial institutions. We should not be discouraging them from doing so. I am not attacking the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, because I know this provision was probably drafted by another Department. If this provision remains unchanged, however, a person who would like to put himself or herself forward for this position but is currently trying to do a deal with a creditor in relation to the retention of his or her family home or business could not be considered for appointment to the board. That is wrong.

The board will comprise 13 members, whose terms of office will be between three and five

years. One of the members is required to have wide experience and be competent in financial matters and others need to have experience in legal matters. Many of those with experience in financial matters may have gained much of that experience from dealings on their own behalf or on behalf of others with financial institutions in respect of debt write-down. I appreciate the position in which the Minister of State finds himself. However, I believe he needs to reflect further on this. If this provision goes unchanged, it will send out the wrong message, particularly in light of the Government's encouragement of banks to engage in burden sharing or debt write-downs in relation to mortgage arrears.

Let us look at this from another angle. Much of the financial crisis in this country arose because of a lack of regulation by the banks. I accept that the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, and Fine Gael were not in government at the time. The burden of responsibility for the provision of free and easy money lies with the banks. It has been proven through various documents that the economists and financial brains available to the banks at the time were even better and sharper than those available to the Department of Finance. Why were they not allowed, facilitated or encouraged to share some of the debt burden in all of those investments, including family homes and investment properties?

The point I am making is that if we were to exclude people, we would send out the wrong message. I commend my colleague, Senator Wilson, for raising this important issue, which extends much more widely than this legislation. Maybe we should have that debate separately. If we proceed with this legislation, thereby allowing this condition to be placed, we will send out the wrong message. Senator Wilson raised the constitutional parameters. There are other issues as we come at it from a moral point of view, or from the point of view of debt sharing.

Senator Terry Brennan: Will canvassing for this board disqualify an individual? There is a lot of canvassing going on here today. I am just asking. Perhaps it is mentioned somewhere in the Bill but I am failing to see it. Will canvassing disqualify? I hope that is a simple question.

Senator Terry Leyden: The Senator will qualify.

Senator Terry Brennan: I am asking about being disqualified.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I agree with Senator Wilson. We should not ban any man or woman who has gone through hard times and has come to some sort of arrangement with his or her lenders from anything. We should be applauding him or her. Anybody who is prepared to pick himself or herself up and restart after going through something like that deserves the full backing of the entire country. I believe that Senator Wilson is correct and that to have this in the legislation would be unconstitutional. I cannot fathom the thinking behind it. I went broke in 1983 and lost everything I had other than the shoes and clothes I walked out of Galway city with. Where would I be today but for the good people who stood behind me and gave me a second start? We have to start looking at these things honestly and decently. We should not flog a man or woman forever just because he or she went broke. If he or she has managed to make some sort of deal with his or her banks or lenders, we should get behind him or her. We should not be shutting down this kind of expertise just because somebody made a bad business decision at some stage. I really think the Minister needs to look at that.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: I will be brief because I know time is pressing and the Leader has extended the time already. I would like to make a formal request to the Cathaoirleach and to the Leader. Senator Wilson has raised a very important point here. This item within the

Schedule could very well be unconstitutional. On that basis, I ask the Leader not to proceed with the Final Stages of the Bill. I suggest we should deal with Committee Stage and let that happen. We could schedule Report Stage separately. I formally ask the Minister of State and his officials to seek specific advice from the Attorney General on this specific point relating to section 3(4)(a) of the Schedule before this Bill is passed. All of us want to ensure any legislation that is passed here is constitutional. An important point has been raised. We should get Committee Stage done and park Report and Final Stages. That would give the Minister of State time to go formally to the Attorney General and seek advice on this point. Our belief is that it is unconstitutional.

Progress reported; Committee to sit again.

Business of Seanad

Senator Maurice Cummins: I would like to propose another amendment to the Order of Business in view of the points that have been raised. I propose that we complete Committee Stage now and come back for Report and Final Stages at a later stage.

Senator Darragh O'Brien: That is agreed. I thank the Leader.

An Cathaoirleach: Can I get clarification on what is happening now?

Senator Maurice Cummins: We are taking Committee Stage only.

An Cathaoirleach: Is there a timeframe on it?

Senator Maurice Cummins: Committee Stage is to be completed by 4.20 p.m. I think the points have been raised by the other side.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Sport Ireland Bill 2014: Committee Stage (Resumed)

SCHEDULE 1

Question again proposed: "That Schedule 1 be a Schedule to the Bill."

Senator Terry Leyden: I just want to come in on this. I welcome the Minister of State, by the way. I thank him for his work. I must say he is a very accessible Minister of State and available to everyone on all sides. In fairness, anyone would say that about his work as Minister of State. I just want to make the point that when somebody is adjudged to be bankrupt, it is basically a conviction for life. The Minister of State will accept that. Decent people who were bankrupt have been cleared. Now we are reducing the relevant number of years to three and possibly to one. The relevant number of years in Britain is one. It is a conviction for life. Honourable people can be bankrupt. Walt Disney was bankrupt twice or three times. I mean there is nothing dishonourable about it. These things happen in life and in business. Why should a person be deprived of this right for all time? I do not think it is acceptable to tell someone they can never again serve on this board. I support my colleagues, Senators Craughwell and Darragh O'Brien, on this point. I think the Minister of State will look at this in a humane way. I am sure

he will not be found wanting.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I have been placed in a very difficult position. We are in different times in a different country. As Senators are aware, every Bill is proofread. This Bill was drafted by draftsmen in the Chief State Solicitor's office. Naturally enough, I have to take their legal advice on the issue that has been raised here today. Many people, particularly in the climate of this country over recent years, have found themselves in very serious situations. Some of it has not been of their own doing. I certainly would not like to see anybody being debarred from any State board. When I was bringing this legislation through, I was even unhappy about making a distinction by putting an accountant and a legal adviser on the board. I decided to do that because I believe somebody on a board should have some kind of qualifications in legalities. This is necessary to stop the Irish Sports Council and other bodies from finding themselves in court every single day in relation to the way their organisations are being run. That is why I want an accountant to be one of the people on the board. I am doing that to make sure there are people on the board who can deal with delicate financial situations that may develop. I have to accept what our people say. At the same time, something has been raised here today and I need to look at it. I am prepared to look at it.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule 2 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment.

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to take Report Stage?

Senator Maurice Cummins: Next Tuesday.

Report Stage ordered for Tuesday, 5 May 2015.

Mental Health Services: Statements

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I welcome the opportunity to discuss mental health policies and services for children and adolescents. The promotion of positive mental health and well-being in general is important to us all. For many reasons and in many respects, mental health is a complex and emotive issue. It is encouraging that in my time as Minister of State, I have generally found that Members of Houses have taken a non-partisan approach to improving the area of mental health and implementing A Vision for Change, which is a widely supported policy. While I remain as open as ever to constructive criticism or realistic suggestions, I ask for objectivity and, above all, the best interests of service users to remain paramount today. I welcome the increased focus on mental health in recent years. The service was, with some justification, tagged with Cinderella connotations, primarily due to historic neglect and under-investment. In particular, the question of developing mental health services for young people, coupled with a real appreciation of changes required to meet evolving need, was only highlighted by an ever-widening gap against non-delivery of both agreed policy and best international provision. This Government has, therefore, prioritised investment in mental health, including community and mental health services, CAMHS, and the

HSE has been steadily implementing change on the ground. Given our starting point, and the many variables that influence real change, I have always said that this can only be achieved on an incremental basis and that there is no magic wand solution to developing the modern service we all desire.

Reforming mental health has led to much needed additional investment, but it also requires new approaches to enable the capacity of our system, in terms of new delivery models, to realise a common vision. This ranges from overcoming staff recruitment and retention issues to rebalancing services at local level between acute and community-based care in order to achieve the objectives of A Vision for Change. Until relatively recently, mental health was an issue hidden away, reinforced by high walls of stone and the higher walls of stigma and attitude. Fortunately, our culture is changing to one of greater sympathy, understanding and tolerance. Most importantly, better treatment options for the individual now exist to the point that recovery is much more achievable, including for the most severe cases requiring inpatient care. It is in this context that the HSE mental health services nationally has set about tackling the challenges of re-orientating from a hospital and bed-based focus to developing structures and processes required for enhanced community provision in line with A Vision for Change. Notwithstanding the difficult financial position we faced, the Government nonetheless prioritised the development of our mental health services. The genuine implementation difficulties we face on the ground in some areas, and which I have often acknowledged, do not primarily relate to a lack of money. It is, as I have indicated equally often, more a question of change catching up with the funding provided. Overarching factors coming into play on CAMHS range from securing the type of specialists we need in the right place to increasing demands on our CAMHS system in recent years.

The Government has provided €125 million ring-fenced funding for new service initiatives. Many of the initiatives undertaken to date, or planned, have a clear dimension to improve community and mental health services on the ground. This involves new posts and a more integrated client-centred service. Overall, we have provided funding this year of some €790 million to the HSE for mental health, including the €35 million I secured in the last budget. Every region has benefited from additional consultant psychiatrists, social workers, occupational therapists, nurses or allied professional staff. We have approved more than 1,150 new posts since 2012. Around 260 of these were specifically designated for CAMHS of which the majority are now in place or well advanced through recruitment.

At the end of 2014, despite staff turnover and recruitment difficulties, there were some 520 staff in HSE community and mental health services. Actual clinical staffing of CAMHS teams increased by 47, or around 10%, from September 2013 to December 2014. This is in a context of wider staffing difficulties elsewhere in our health system. A further 100 new posts in 2014-15 will improve CAMHS resources by around 20%. I acknowledge that issues such as recruitment, retention or staff mobility between regions present particular difficulties. It should be remembered also that the child and adolescent service is without doubt one of the most challenging work environments across our entire health and social care system. I will be the first to admit that the pace of acquiring additional staff to strengthen community teams has been slower than desired, but steady progress is being made.

The HSE mental health division, MHD, is committed to ensuring that all aspects of CAMHS are delivered in a more consistent and timely fashion across all regions, including the key issues of assessment and access. Therefore, a child and adolescent mental health services improvement steering group was established last year, together with a dedicated project group to

improve key performance indicators for CAMHS nationally. One of the primary objectives is to develop a standard operating procedure for both inpatient and community and mental health services. The purpose of better standardisation is to ensure that delivery of services is carried out in a more consistent and transparent manner across the State; the care and treatment offered reflects the identified clinical needs of the child; and those who access treatment programmes for similar clinical presentations will receive a level of clinical care consistent across all child and adolescent services. There is clearer direction and information for CAMHS teams, and other partner services, about service provision.

These objectives are being underpinned by various new initiatives which the HSE hopes to advance this year to promote robust preventative and quality mental health services for all children and adolescents. Examples include a CAMHS community forensic team to work at national level with at risk children accessing mental health services and known to Tusla and the juvenile justice system. This team will be a precursor to the new ten bed CAMHS forensic inpatient facility being developed as part of the new forensic hospital in Portrane, due for completion in 2018. A clinical care eating disorder programme will design pathways of intervention for both children and adults with moderate and severe eating disorders. A new eight bed inpatient unit will also be developed in collaboration with the national children's hospital. There are proposals to expand the day hospital model for adolescents in need of intensive mental health service supports in the geographic areas of the north west and south east as well as other provincial sites. Funding will be provided for Headstrong to provide Jigsaw programmes in ten sites to support young people's mental health, and further access to psychological therapies, both psychology and counselling, in primary care for young people who would otherwise be referred to the more specialist CAMHS care.

In addition to these planned initiatives, the National Office for Suicide Prevention currently funds approximately 40 agencies to provide health promotion programmes and support to children, adolescents and adults. There is continued investment in health education campaigns such as Let Someone Know and Your Mental Health that promote positive mental health, and stress the importance of talking and listening.

The provision of inpatient beds and community mental health services are integral components of a range of services required to appropriately meet the needs of young people with mental health issues. Interventions are provided, in the first instance, through community mental health teams and, if required, access to relevant inpatient services is also available. Nationally, inpatient bed capacity has increased from 12 beds in 2007 to 58 at present - 26 in Dublin, 12 in Cork and 20 in Galway. This represents an increase of almost 400% in the number of beds over eight years. A new purpose built 22 bed child and adolescent inpatient unit located on the grounds of Cherry Orchard Hospital is due to be completed shortly and to become operational towards the end of the year. The existing 14 beds in the current temporary facility will transfer across, thereby giving a net increase of eight beds in the facility. The HSE intends also to open an additional eight beds, currently closed, in the Eist Linn Unit in Cork when current staffing recruitment issues are resolved. Overall, the Health Service Executive is targeting a total operational capacity of 74 beds nationally in 2015 which, if achieved, would be a significant increase in capacity.

It is a priority for me to address the issue of children and adolescents having, at times, to be admitted to adult acute units. While these inappropriate admissions have decreased continually in recent years, there is room for improvement. Figures for 2014 indicate that there were 89 admissions of children to adult psychiatric units, with the majority being, voluntary and involv-

ing parental consent. Approximately 85% of these admissions were 16 to 17 year olds, with a third of these discharged within two days of admission, and two thirds within a week. Some of these admissions relate to a crisis situation where no adolescent bed is immediately available. Some may only last for a few hours - to help cope with a short mental health episode and where the practical solution is to temporarily place the child in an adult unit. Distance to the nearest CAMHS inpatient unit can also be a factor when immediate clinical assessment and treatment may be an inevitable requirement. In some cases, the presenting clinical needs of the young person, who may be nearly 18 years of age, may also have to be taken into account. The HSE has recently refocused various operational initiatives to achieve improvements in this area in 2015. This includes priority actions to enhance performance and national oversight to reduce admissions of children and adolescents to adult units to only 5% in 2015. This is an ambitious and challenging target, notwithstanding the increased funding available for child and adolescent mental health services. I firmly believe, based on my direct experience of visiting centres, that there is still scope to ensure better use of existing CAMHS beds in some local units and I am strongly pushing this with the HSE.

Central to an improved CAMHS service is the need to address waiting lists. I would like to take this opportunity to correct statements made during the course of a Topical Issue debate on mental health in the Dáil on 22 April last. In the first instance, Deputy Boyd Barrett alluded to the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, that I may have misled the House recently by indicating that staffing levels in child mental health services were filled up to 80%. It may be a question of misinterpretation by the Deputy but in a written reply to a parliamentary question to him on 16 April 2015, I stated that since 2012, around 260 new posts have been allocated specifically to CAMHS and approximately 80% of CAMHS posts were in place at the end of March 2015. I was, therefore, referring clearly to 80% of the 260 new posts approved to date by this Government, and not to all CAMHS posts in the HSE. Second, Deputy Keaveney stated in the course of the same debate on 22 April that 3,000 children this year will wait 12 months for a CAMHS appointment. However, in a reply on 20 April last from the HSE to the Deputy, it was stated quite clearly that at the end of January 2015, the total number of children on the CAMHS waiting list was just under 3,000. Furthermore, of these, 1,200 were seen within the first three months. Some 470 children were waiting 12 months or longer and not the 3,000 as indicated by the Deputy. I have always shared the common view that it is highly unacceptable for a child to wait longer than 12 months to be seen by any of the 62 CAMHS teams. I have also said that misinformation does no one any favours, particularly parents worried about their child's mental health. The reality is that a number of factors influence the complexity and provision of individual CAMHS cases. These include at local level the number of emergency cases presenting, CAMHS capacity and administrative supports or links with related services such as Tusla or the National Educational Psychological Service, NEPS. These in turn can impact on discharge rates, increased numbers on waiting lists or longer waiting lists for routine assessments. In respect of CAMHS waiting times, I wish to highlight that all cases are triaged and urgent cases are seen as a priority. Many of these urgent cases are seen within days. In 2014, 55% of children who were seen were seen in under four weeks. This is against the backdrop of an increasing number of referrals to the service, including 16 year olds and 17 year olds.

The CAMHS waiting list nationally currently stands at around 3,000, representing a 10% increase in demand over the corresponding period last year. At my request, the HSE recently commenced a specific and urgent validation exercise on the list to clarify if all children are being referred to the appropriate specialist psychiatric service. It should be remembered that mental health problems are not the sole remit of CAMHS. The new level of validation now

being undertaken will help to determine if all children are being referred to the appropriate specialist psychiatric service or if they actually need other services. There is some evidence that children are being referred to CAMHS due to difficulties in accessing less specialised services. In this context, the HSE is examining proposals to enhance related service provision jointly with primary care. This may involve a new early intervention initiative to allow some children and adolescents to be seen by a more appropriate service. Those assessed as needing CAMHS treatment could then be expedited.

A number of issues are of relevance in the context of the ongoing validation exercise. Despite the increased rate of referrals, the CAMHS teams nationally are achieving the targets set out in the HSE service plan. However, these targets are set against the backdrop of teams which need improvement, as I indicated earlier. The first phase of the validation is concentrating on those waiting for more than 12 months and will then move to those in the three month to 12 month waiting list category. The greatest possible focus is being placed on CAMHS referral sources such as general practitioners, child health services, NEPS and primary care services to help inform what operational improvements can be adopted in the future for the most appropriate referrals. While those with a co-morbid presentation, such as ASD with mental health issues would require a CAMHS service, others with general emotional difficulties may not require specialist CAMHS intervention and might, for example, be covered more appropriately by disability or primary care services. There are many examples of good work being carried out by CAMHS teams across the country and it is obviously necessary to extent this to all areas.

I would be the first to accept that while some progress has been made, we have some way to go to achieve the type of CAMHS we need. We owe it to our most vulnerable citizens - young, middle-aged and elderly - with mental health issues to keep working in partnership as politicians and administrators to change our laws and services for the better to meet their needs. However, it must be acknowledged that we are righting a wrong in this country that put mental health at the back of the queue for funding and reform until very recently.

Senator Thomas Byrne: The Minister of State talks about progress. Both she and the Government are always willing to blow their own trumpet. We saw this in the Dáil Chamber all week. I do not know if we are going to discuss the spring statement here but the Minister of State's speech is in stark contrast to the self-glorification in the Dáil during the spring statement about how great things are. What the Minister of State describes as progress is a 10% increase in the waiting list every year, or certainly for this year. The figures I have correspond with what the Minister of State is announcing in respect of waiting lists with 3,000 children and teenagers waiting to access mental health services. The Minister of State thinks this is an achievement and that the Opposition is giving the wrong figures but these are the real figures. The real figures are absolutely terrible. They are the figures over which I am standing and with which the Minister of State seems to agree. The number of people waiting for over a year is far in excess of 400 and there is a fairly wishy-washy commitment to deal with those in terms of priority.

My party and I are very committed to the issue of mental health. In fairness, the entire country is wising up to mental health. It is time it is taken very seriously at the highest levels of Government. If we are looking for a decent society and country, we would put things like this and try to deal with young people's mental health problems first before we start talking about spending again, having an election and bribing the electorate. The public will not wear it because in all parts of this country, there is a lack of decency. Deputy Kathleen Lynch is there as Minister of State and is certainly doing her bit but this Government does not seem to be committed to this issue. People in this area, in many other parts of the health service and throughout

wider society are falling through the cracks.

Approximately 3,000 children and teenagers are waiting to access mental health services in the community and the number waiting for more than a year is substantially in excess of 400. The waiting lists are going up. The Minister of State said that much progress has been made but the waiting list seems to increase by 10% every year at a time when we realise that there is a national crisis in this area. It is a crisis that can be dealt with if we make sufficient resources available and, perhaps, change the approach. The demand for services is increasing and the Minister of State gave some unverified information that this may be because people are trying to get on other waiting lists, but she did not give any evidence of that. That is just an excuse.

We do not seem to be serious about this at all, or about the fact that many young people get admitted to adult wards. Those of us who have visited adult psychiatric wards, including Senator Gilroy, who worked in this field, will realise they really are not very nice places. One would question whether one would bring one's own children in to see a patient one had to visit. Saying this is not discriminatory or insulting to anybody; it is a fact that the facilities are not nice places. They are not a suitable environment in which to treat children.

Approximately one third of all child and teenager admissions are to adult wards. This is completely and utterly inappropriate. That we are allowing this betrays an incredible lack of decency in society. This has been highlighted by the Mental Health Commission, which has said it is not acceptable. Nobody believes it is acceptable in any way, yet it still continues to happen. The chairman of the commission stated:

We're talking about teenagers who may find themselves in wards with much older people in environments that can feel threatening and fearful. They lack the kind of therapeutic input that is the norm in a children's setting.

That stands to reason and is common sense, and nobody would need to be a professor of psychiatry or expert on children to realise it.

It looks like the increase is continuing and that there will be year-on-year increases in the number of children and teenagers admitted to adult units. Therefore, there are many problems. For the Minister of State to come in here and criticise the Opposition and claim there has been much progress is not appropriate. We have developed our own strategy on youth mental health and also proposed the establishment of a mental health authority. Having a national agency focusing on one particular issue could result in some good work. The Road Safety Authority comes to mind. Such an agency seems to have an effect if given the necessary budget and resources and the power to be independent of the Government. Such agencies seem to make an impact. The one I propose could play a useful role in tying together the work of all the great voluntary organisations around the country that are working very hard. In some cases, they may do a better job if they are co-ordinated better or given more resources to do the job they want to do.

The reality is that mental health issues now comprise a considerable problem given the suicide epidemic. One in four students is said to experience psychological problems at any given time. Our policy will greatly enhance the role schools and colleges play in promoting positive mental health and equipping young people with coping skills. Many schools do operate effective strategies but there needs to be much more co-ordination in this regard because some schools do not have such strategies. That is simply a fact. Some have very good anti-bullying

policies, for example, while others simply do not. There needs to be a focus on positive mental health promotion at all levels of the education system. Some 20 years ago, there was a considerable discussion on sexual and reproductive education and protection for children and vulnerable people as they grow older in school. There was a big controversy at the same time. This is now covered and the strategy applies at all levels of the education system. Perhaps a structure similar to that of the relationships and sexuality education framework could be introduced in respect of mental health. Such a strategy does not appear to exist, nor does there appear to be a will to produce it.

With regard to bullying and cyberbullying, there is considerable emphasis on peer support. It is a question of informing people what social media are appropriate and how to operate social media. Some people may be ignorant in this regard. All schools and colleges should have their own mental health promotion plans, with students, staff and parents involved in their development and implementation.

There is an implicit criticism by the Minister that nothing was happening in regard to mental health until very recently. At the same time, she wants to implement A Vision for Change, which was the policy of the last Government. We support it and want to see it implemented fully. It is the policy for future services in the area of mental health. We are glad the Government states it is committed to it. It obviously needs to be reviewed. We believe it should be reviewed and the work should start on that process. Clearly, there is more to be done.

I would like to see this issue treated with much more seriousness. It is totally and utterly wrong that a child or teenager should be put through the trauma of going into an adult psychiatric ward. In many cases, the wards are absolutely horrible places, including for the adults who have to attend. Adults have said that. We have visited the places and noted they are absolutely awful. My saying this does not disrespect the staff because they would agree that, in many cases, the facilities are in old buildings of the old style that we should be moving away from. There is some work going on.

I would like the Minister to answer my question on Navan. There has been much confusion there about the move to Drogheda and about what is staying in Navan and what is going to Drogheda. Perhaps the Minister could clarify that in terms of the general service.

Senator Imelda Henry: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, to the House and thank her for the work she has done in her Department on giving priority to increasing resources for child and adolescent mental health services and the establishment of community-based multidisciplinary child and adolescent mental health teams, as set out in A Vision for Change. The community mental health teams are the first line of specialist mental health services for children and young people who are directly referred from a number of sources, mainly by general practitioners and the National Educational Psychological Service.

There have been many negative comments on the number of children on waiting lists. As the Minister of State said, all cases are triaged and urgent cases are seen as a priority. Some 55% of children seen in 2014 were seen in under four weeks. I remind Senator Byrne that we have come a long way from the times of Fianna Fáil in government when waiting periods of four years for an initial assessment of children presenting with symptoms were the norm. At that time, budgets set aside for mental health services came back unused.

I can rely only on what people tell me from their first-hand experience of dealing with the

services. I know levels of service and waiting lists vary in different parts of the country. I have several friends with children attending mental health services and know we have travelled a long road and made great progress since the days of waiting periods of three and four years. Urgent cases are often seen within days. One friend, whose 11 year old child was having difficulty with learning in school and life, and who had worrying symptoms, had that child seen by the mental health services within three days of referral. This child was subsequently diagnosed with anxiety disorder, neurological development disorder and borderline intellectual disability. Thanks to early intervention and diagnosis, he is still attending mainstream school and his mother cannot speak highly enough of the team that has helped her and her child at every hurdle. She tells me that if there is an urgent problem, the child will be seen within hours.

The Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, and her Department have made great strides in improving services and continue to work to improve services in areas where they do not meet the standards the Department would like. Great headway has been made in difficult financial circumstances over recent years.

I wish to mention the restoration to the cuts made to the respite care grant, although I realise it is not within the direct remit of the Minister of State. The cuts have adversely affected parents of children with mental health issues in addition to children with physical disabilities whose grant was subsequently cut. The Minister of State will use her influence to ensure the grant is fully restored.

When children are having difficulties that cannot be addressed by outpatient services, the next level of service is inpatient services. A Vision for Change recommends the provision of 80 child and adolescent psychiatric inpatient beds. There are currently 58 beds nationally, with plans to raise the number of operational beds to 74 by the end of this year. The planned national paediatric hospital will include a 20-bed inpatient CAMHS unit, including a specialist eating disorders service for children and adolescents. I know that 58 out of a perceived need of 80 beds is progress and 74 beds operational by the end of this year would be more progress. It is extremely important, particularly with regard to children with eating disorders and children who are in danger of self-harm, that they have access to inpatient services without delay.

This brings me to the issue of the admission of children to adult psychiatric units. When there are no inpatient beds in adolescent units, then the adult services are the next port of call. The fact that so many are admitted to adult psychiatric units means there is an urgent need to increase the number of inpatient beds for children. The figures for admission of children to adult units have from a peak in 2008 of 247 admissions been reduced to 89 admissions in 2014. While this is progress, it is still hugely worrying that so many vulnerable children will find themselves admitted to adult psychiatric units. Children who are vulnerable should not be exposed to adult psychiatric units under any circumstances. I know the Minister of State will do her utmost to reduce this figure.

I also mention the need for interdepartmental co-operation with regard to children and young people and other policy documents relevant to this debate. I refer to Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, the national policy framework for children and young people issued by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The policy identifies five national outcomes for children and commits the Government to a range of actions on mental health, including ensuring equity of access to mental health services for all children and young people and the promotion and improvement of early intervention approaches for combatting mental ill health. The need for interdepartmental co-operation also extends to the Department of Social Protection. A great

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many children with mental health issues, autistic spectrum disorders, intellectual and learning disabilities are refused the domiciliary care allowance in the first instance and subsequently awarded the allowance on appeal. Many are turned down on medical grounds. I dealt with a case last week of a 16 year old, diagnosed with autism by a leading consultant child psychiatrist, who was turned down for a disability allowance on medical grounds, despite the fact that he had been in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance since his diagnosis. Either the Department believes the consultant or it does not. The parents were asked to submit additional medical evidence and they are at a loss to understand what further medical evidence they should submit.

This discussion is about children's mental health services and while we talk about multi-disciplinary community-based teams, it is imperative to have multi-disciplinary departmental teams and greater co-operation between Departments for better outcomes for children. Parents have to do battle with three Departments, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Education and Skills, to ensure that children with any disability get their entitlements.

We need better outcomes for parents also. Life is difficult enough for any parent dealing with the pressures of modern life but parents of children with mental health issues have added worries, concerns and difficulties. We must do our best to ease the burden on them. Parents should not have to fight for their children to get their entitlements. We are here as legislators and that is our job. We should do it better and make it easier.

The inability to recruit and retain appropriate levels of staff has a significant impact on the quality of services provided and access to these services. The Minister of State recently announced that 63 CAMHS are operational and that since 2012 this Government has provided an additional €125 million for mental health services from which 260 dedicated CAMHS posts were funded and that 80% of all CAMHS posts were in place by the end of March this year.

The Minister of State has completed a significant body of work and I am confident that she will continue until 100% of the posts are in place. I have no doubt that she has the will and the ability and that she will do her utmost to ensure this outcome.

Senator Jillian van Turnhout: I welcome the Minister of State. The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland produced a report on the mental health of young people in Ireland. It found that by the age of 13 years, one in three young people in Ireland is likely to have experienced some type of mental disorder; by the age of 24 years, that rate will have increased to one in two. Significant numbers of young people are deliberately harming themselves and by the age of 24 years, up to one in five young people will have experienced suicidal ideation. The experience of mental ill health during adolescence is a risk factor for future mental ill health and substance misuse in young adulthood.

This gives an idea of the scope of the issue we are discussing today which is children's mental health and the need for the services to be developed. As the evidence clearly shows, and I can speak from my experience in this area, when there is a deterioration in mental health in those adolescent years, how that is dealt with frames the person's health for life. For me it is even more urgent that we ensure that we have appropriate and timely mental health services for our children and our young people.

I called for this debate on several occasions and the latest occasion was following the results of the national review panel report chaired by Dr. Helen Buckley. Those findings were pro-

duced on 26 March 2015. They reviewed the cases of 26 vulnerable children or young people either living with families known to the child protection services, in the State care system or in aftercare. Of those 26 vulnerable children, eight young people died by suicide, compared to four such deaths in 2013. Shockingly, when I read the report, three out of the four teenage girls who died by suicide were known to child protection services and for lengthy periods before their deaths were on waiting lists to be seen by psychological services. According to the individual reports pertaining to the circumstances surrounding 12 of the deaths, one of the young girls - Jennifer - at one point before taking her life, had been on a waiting list for psychological services for two years. Her mother had tried to access mental health services the week before she died. This happened last year.

I refer to another case of a teenage girl named Zoe who had been in and out of State care in childhood. Her case with the social work department had been closed months before she died by suicide. Dr. Helen Buckley, who is the chair of the national review panel, said that mental health difficulty is very prevalent among young people and among their parents. She referred to the long waiting lists for psychological services - the report cited up to two years - and the treatment time is often limited. A person may have access to a service but there is very little scope for ensuring he or she has recovered. Dr. Buckley also called for more integrated mental health services. She said that a strong theme was the difficulty in accessing appropriate psychological and mental health services for suicidal young people. Indeed, this is replicated by the child care law reporting project which is being led by Dr. Carol Coulter and her team and which gives us an insight into child care proceedings in the courts. When I read the reports from the child care law reporting project the characteristics and the demographics and all those interplaying factors identified by Dr. Buckley are strikingly similar to those identified by Dr. Coulter. This is the most recent research but it seems to me to be a groundhog day. I could have been making the same speech four years ago and that is my frustration. In my opinion, which I think is shared by others, there is a systemic and endemic problem within our child and adolescent mental health services.

The Minister of State has identified that it is not an issue of funding. There have been delays in staff recruitment under three successive budgets. The money is ring-fenced but we cannot
5 o'clock get the people and yet, children like Jennifer and Zoe are in need. Many child and adolescent services are under-resourced. The waiting list has increased by 8%. More people are seeking help. Community teams are struggling to cope with the increased demands on services. There are too many agencies involved in children's mental health care and inadequate inter-agency communications and collaboration between the services. I have raised this matter with the Minister of State. I strongly believe the child and adolescent mental health services should have been part of the Child and Family Agency and this should be rectified. I do not understand what part of child and adolescent mental health services does not fit into the Child and Family Agency because when I talk to parents or study the reports, the pathway to CAMHS is not there. It should be available through the Child and Family Agency. Families are finding it difficult to access CAMHS due to lack of information, restrictive referral criteria and pathways, lengthy waiting periods and the lack of out-of-hours crisis services. Our mental health does not switch on at 9 a.m. and switch off at 5 p.m. and that one can choose to access services between these times. Many mental health services in Ireland offer support to young people with moderate and severe mental health problems and they rely on formal diagnosis. However, I have been informed many times that there is a lack of services for those experiencing mild and emerging mental health problems. We need to wait until it comes to a crisis point and that is not good enough.

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We know we have to be dealing with it earlier.

I also have a concern that the doors of some CAMHS are only open to those under 16 years of age whereas others are available to those up to 18 years of age which means there are fewer clear pathways for those between the ages of 16 and 18, depending on where one lives. As a result, these young people do not always receive the developmentally appropriate care in a timely manner.

It is shocking that one third of all children concerned, that is, 89 of them last year, were admitted to adult wards. We have all agreed it is wrong and should not happen, and yet one third of the children went into an adult ward.

I will try to be more constructive about what we can do. We need to increase information. In fairness, the National Office for Suicide Prevention is doing excellent work at empowering and encouraging NGOs and civil society organisations to promote positive mental health. The key on which we need to focus is the delivery of and access to services and that is the role of the CAMHS and the HSE. We need to resource mental health services, particularly in primary care. There needs to be a clear framework for co-operation, which needs to be published and which everyone needs to know in order that we can hold people to account.

We also need to get better data. It is an issue I have raised previously with the Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch. I want to be able to applaud her but if we are not collecting the data, I cannot know whether services are improving or deteriorating. My problem is the reports tell me it is getting worse.

We need to develop local alternatives to inpatient services such as an assertive outreach early intervention in psychosis and other community-based intensive supports. This is a recommendation from the Children's Mental Health Coalition. We need the HSE to develop community-based alternatives to those inpatient services. We need to ensure there is accessibility to developmentally appropriate and evidence-informed specialist inpatient services for children with complex or acute mental health difficulties, including children or adolescents with a dual diagnosis of mental health and substance misuse, which diagnosis arises increasingly in my experience.

As we are discussing the issue of CAMHS, I applaud in particular the work of Headstrong and the Jigsaw initiative. This innovative initiative for those between the ages of 12 and 25 is in ten communities in Ireland, and I hope it will expand. The preliminary evaluation findings of Jigsaw are what we all want to aim for. One young person stated: "When I came here to Jigsaw first, I was always crying. Now I walk out smiling." That is what we want to achieve. We want to intervene early with young people and equip them for life, but also ensure the services are in place when they need them. We should not wait for it to be a crisis but, equally, the services must be in place when there are crises.

Senator John Gilroy: I welcome the Minister of State to the Chamber. I am glad to see her here again. No one in this Chamber or outside would ever doubt her commitment to reform of the mental health services.

I will take a look at the historical or legacy obstacles that face us to put in context some of the challenges with which we are faced in the mental health services, both child and adolescent services and adult services. More than 30 years ago, as a young student nurse I walked into a mental hospital in Cork where 1,000 patients were living in Dickensian conditions. They were

segregated, between male and female, and never the twain would meet. Male nurses looked after male patients and female nurses looked after female patients, and the level of abnormality was only compounded in that situation. Over the years, the system has gradually and achingly changed.

Before 1984, in Cork, in the same hospital I was working in, there was a child and adolescent unit on the campus of St. Stephen's Hospital which had a complement of 20 inpatient beds. We closed that unit in St. Stephen's Hospital in Cork and we did not replace it with any beds until five or six years ago when we opened eight temporary beds, also on the campus of St. Stephen's. We closed those because they were temporary and we built a special unit for the purpose on the grounds of Bessborough. Now we have eight beds there. I am not even sure how that is working.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: There are 12 at present.

Senator John Gilroy: There are 12 at present but my information is that not all these are functional.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: No, 12 are.

Senator John Gilroy: In 1984, there was another momentous development. In 1984, the report, *Planning for the Future*, was published. *Planning for the Future* proposed a pathway through which we would close the large institutions and move psychiatry and mental health into the community. That was followed by a series of seven-year plans, which worked and built upon the policy framework set out in *Planning for the Future*. Then, in 2006, we published *A Vision for Change*.

A Vision for Change is a visionary document. It really is the way forward. It is, on paper, the single best document that I can find in the English-speaking world where mental health services are provided. I am disappointed by the piecemeal roll-out of *A Vision for Change*, and I am not the only one because many, including the Mental Health Commission, have commented upon it. It seems to me, as someone who has worked in the services for more than 30 years, who was involved in the trade union movement and staff representative organisations and who remains linked in to this day to all the hospitals throughout the country, that despite the existence of *A Vision for Change*, there is a lack of strategic planning in the delivery of mental health services.

We are in a period of transition which is exciting for the staff working in the services. We are moving from the paternalistic sort of delivery system we have currently. Even though we closed most of the institutions from 1984, we did not really open our hearts to the new way of delivering the services. While we moved people from the institutions into the community, the walls that were around the institutions, while not physical anymore, were just as real as if they were. New therapies are evolving and older, more established therapies are expanding, and yet the mindset in the mental health services is not accommodating these new changes.

There are many matters I want to talk about in this regard and I hope I will be able to keep my talk coherent. Before Christmas I visited a major general hospital, not in Cork but in this city, where we discussed the admission of children to adult services, which is utterly unacceptable. Some 84, one in three, of all children who were admitted in that year were admitted to adult units. Those figures are not truly reflective of how bad the situation is because the staff in the hospital told me that in the previous week, 13 children suffering with mental health issues were admitted to the hospital, which is a general hospital, because there was nowhere else

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for them to go. If we were to say it is bad having them admitted to adult wards of psychiatric hospitals, which it undoubtedly is, those figures are not the true figures of the poor situation existing among the child and adolescent units.

Senator van Turnhout correctly mentioned the difficulty in recruiting staff. All the information coming to me from the coalface indicates that there is a problem with staff in the hospitals. There are not enough staff within the mental health services at every level. It is quite simple. Senator van Turnhout highlighted this, but why must we ask this question at all? What is so unattractive about the mental health service that it cannot keep its own staff? There are several causes. A systemic problem within the services that we have not dealt with is the cause of the lack of staffing and, indeed, of all our problems in the mental health services. I refer to leadership at local level. Leadership at local and regional level is not what we would desire it to be and leadership at national level, not at political level but at operational level, is appalling. We do not have a director of mental health services at present, rather we have someone acting in that capacity. The Minister of State spent a long time trying to find someone to fill the role of director of mental health services and as soon as the post was filled, the person was seconded out of it to a financial role somewhere. At present, we are looking. Why have we not got someone in this role?

Perhaps even more important than someone in the role is, as I have suggested for a long time, the need for us to appoint someone senior, a competent, capable and credible person, with responsibility for the roll-out of A Vision for Change. That visionary document is being criticised left, right and centre. Unfortunately, it is like Planning for the Future in 1984 which, unbelievably, is still not implemented. There are still 400 people living within the walls of large institutions as we speak, which is a fundamental breach of anybody's human rights. It was recommended 31 years ago that should not happen. I am afraid A Vision for Change is going down the same road.

I wish to speak about the €125 million extra investment. What is the number of net jobs created as a result of this investment? Concerns have been brought to my attention in several places in regard to some of these jobs. Some of these jobs are new jobs but not new posts within the service as people within the service are being promoted to different jobs within it and that is being counted as a new job, although the salary for the old job has been reabsorbed by the HSE back into general funding. How many child and adolescent mental health teams are in the country and how many have been fully populated with competent and appropriately qualified people?

As the Reach Out national suicide prevention policy expired last November, we expected the Minister of State to have a framework for suicide prevention published last November. I am disappointed it is six months late. There are many areas in mental health services that are not receiving the service provision they require. Does the Minister of State intend to provide more resources for a very intractable and serious problem affecting young people, that is, specialised care for people suffering from anorexia nervosa? There are many other questions I would like to ask but I will leave it at that.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): Three Members are offering. I must call the Minister of State to reply at 5.20 p.m., so perhaps they might take account of that.

Senator Mary M. White: I welcome the Minister of State. As Senator John Gilroy said, we have absolutely no doubt about her genuine commitment to her portfolio. However, the

Minister for Health, Deputy Leo Varadkar, and the Minister of State have a major job to do to live up to the 1916 Proclamation. I have said on numerous occasions that I do not regard Ireland as a true republic. In particular, in the area of children's mental health, it is more like a Third World country. I draw attention to the line in the Proclamation that we cherish all the children of the nation equally. The Minister of State knows as well as I do that if one has money and one's child has a mental health problem one can get fast access to services. I am surprised at times we do not have a revolution given the various inequalities in the country.

Children who do not have access to private medical care face unacceptably long waiting lists for mental health services, patchy service provision across the country and a lack of focus on early intervention that could prevent future problems. In a shocking violation of their human rights, children continue to be treated in adult inpatient mental health units. We have been talking about this issue since I became a Member in 2002. It is deplorable that children with psychiatric issues continue to be accommodated in adult units. I am deeply concerned at the continued delays in children accessing the mental health services they need. Our services are completely understaffed and overstretched. HSE figures show that at the end of last year there were more than 3,000 children and teenagers waiting to access mental health services in the community and more than 400 of these were waiting for more than a year. If this was highlighted on television about an African country we would not be surprised but in what we call a developed country, it is pathetic.

A new study by the Children's Mental Health Coalition shows that while demand for services is increasing, the number of staff in the area is falling. The report states that at the end of last year, community and mental health teams for children and teenagers have just 42% of the staff recommended in the much-lauded Government's mental health strategy, *A Vision for Change*. *A Vision for Change* is purely vision, nothing else. Children have a right to enjoy the highest possible standard of mental health but this right is not fully respected in this so-called Republic of Ireland. The shameful practice of admitting children to adult mental health units is also continuing.

Last year the Mental Health Commission reported that significant numbers of children with mental health problems continue to be admitted to adult psychiatric units despite repeated warnings that the practice should be a measure of last resort. Figures show that in the first half of 2014, 53 young people were admitted to inappropriate adult mental health units, representing one third of all acute admissions involving children or adolescents. This is totally unacceptable.

It must be remembered that a child's needs are very different from those of an adult. Mr. John Saunders, chairman of the Mental Health Commission, said we are talking about teenagers who find themselves in wards with much older people in environments that can feel threatening and fearful. They lack the kind of therapeutic input that is the norm in a child's setting. Alarmingly, if the numbers continue to rise at their current rate there will be a year on year increase over the 91 children admitted to adult units last year. The ongoing policy of admitting children to adult wards constitutes a human rights violation of the children involved. Up to one in four students at any given time experience psychological problems.

Fianna Fáil strategy includes proposals to improve supports in schools and colleges and reduce the alarmingly high rate of suicide among our young people.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): The Senators has 30 seconds remaining. I am sticking strictly to the time.

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Senator Mary M. White: Our policy would greatly enhance the role that our schools and colleges play in the area of mental health.

I am a bit cynical about the Minister for Health, Deputy Leo Varadkar. I know he is a media person and is glamorous but he is very much a PR man. On 17 October last year, he launched the roll-out of the free breast care screening. I was shocked when I realised it would not begin until the end of 2015. Why is he launching a screening programme a year in advance if it will not commence until the end of the following year? Let us see him deliver something other than fancy pictures in the newspapers and smart talk. Obviously, he is intelligent but let him sort out the impracticalities and inefficiencies in his Department.

Senator Mary Moran: I thank Senator Colm Burke for allowing me to contribute. I know we are pressed for time, having started 20 minutes late. Much of what I wanted to discuss has been raised by my colleagues, so I will not deal with that. I will concentrate yet again on an area in which the Minister of State knows I have a major interest, namely, the mental health of children with a disability. I have requested debates on that topic on several occasions since becoming a Member of the House and I do not believe there has been a debate on mental health in which I have not raised it.

In March 2014, I raised an issue that had reached a crisis point where a family was refused help by CAMHS and the paediatric services. When they visited their general practitioner, the only option given was sedation. There was no child psychiatrist for the Louth-Meath area. As of today, we still do not have a child psychiatrist in that area. The recruitment process is ongoing.

This is an issue I have raised with the Minister of State and members of staff but it is still an issue. I went to see the director of mental health services and was again told it is a case of recruitment, which other people raised earlier, but where should children between the ages of 16 and 18 go when there is no local child psychiatrist? They do not fall under the CAMHS remit or the paediatric services. Where should they go? It is now over a year later and I am still asking the same questions.

I have been told that funding for the child psychiatrist is available. As the child psychiatrist is not in place, can that funding be allocated to parents who have paid more than €700 in many cases for private assessments? Would it be possible to provide for that? I welcome members of ServiceSource who are in the Visitors Gallery. It provides an excellent alternative in terms of recruitment facilities and it reports, as do Bluebird Care and other agencies, that it has the staff. Can we access that a bit better or can we engage more with them and listen to their models, so that we can improve the situation? Others have raised the issue of children in adult units. Again, 89 were admitted last year. In my maiden speech in the Seanad four years ago, it was something I was very vocal about and about which I felt very strongly. Four years on, I appreciate the work the Minister of State is doing, but it is another area we need to look at. Some 400 people are on a waiting list for mental health services. That is 400 too many. We are looking at people who are extremely vulnerable and, as a result, families that are extremely vulnerable. People are on waiting lists for more than a year. It is not acceptable. I spoke with someone yesterday who was on a waiting list for a year and a half and the only options they were given were sedation or to wait and see. That family has lived in trepidation, waiting for an appointment, which, they are told, will be 18 months down the line. It affects the whole family.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): Could the Senator finish up?

Senator Mary Moran: I will. I would like us to talk about adult mental health when we talk about children's mental health.

It is about local services. I do not apologise for making it local, but in my area, Drumcar respite facility for children and adults with an intellectual disability closed its doors last week to facilitate training for the next six weeks. I believe there is a HIQA inspection going on. It is unacceptable that a facility that is providing the only respite for families can decide it is closing for six weeks to facilitate this and give parents and family members a couple of days' notice that it is closing for up to six weeks. Will the Minister of State look into this as a matter of priority with St. John of God's and the HSE and see whether an alternative is being provided? It is not acceptable in this day and age that we can deny the most vulnerable people and their families respite care.

Senator Colm Burke: May I move that we extend the sitting by ten minutes? This debate started 20 minutes late and it is not unreasonable to ask, but I am in the Acting Chairman's hands.

Senator Mary M. White: We started late.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): I have received instructions from the Leader's office, through the Seanad Office, that it will not accept an extension of the time, so I have a dilemma. I do not wish in any way to prevent that, but it seems that is the advice to the Seanad Office from the Leader's office. One of the Senator's colleagues already sought an extension of time and it was declined by the Leader's office.

Senator Colm Burke: It is an important issue and the debate was delayed by ten minutes.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): The Senator is the Acting Leader.

Senator Colm Burke: It is only taking ten minutes off the two hours of the other debate.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): I know that, but I also have a difficulty in that I already advised Senator Cullinane, who was sitting throughout the debate, that he would not be able to speak, and now Senator Craughwell, who came in after Senator Cullinane had left the House, is also seeking to speak. It is a difficult issue, but Senator Burke is the Acting Leader and is entitled to move as he has said, and if the House agrees-----

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I only require 30 seconds.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): It is not about that. It is about the fact that Senator Cullinane was waiting here for over an hour.

Senator Colm Burke: I move that we continue the debate for an extra ten minutes.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): Is that agreed?

Senator Thomas Byrne: No. Ten minutes might be sufficient for one speaker from the Government, but two Opposition speakers are waiting to speak. Senator Cullinane is probably in his office watching this. If we give the chance to one, we must give it to the other.

Senator Colm Burke: In fairness to Senator Byrne, I only intend to speak for two to three minutes, so I do not think-----

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Senator Thomas Byrne: For three speakers, we would be looking at an 18 minute extension.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): I have asked it and it is not agreed.

Senator Thomas Byrne: It is not agreed in that it is not enough. It is not fair to people who have been sitting here all day that the Government can come in and decide to give its speakers extra time.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): The Minister of State has also indicated that she cannot stay beyond 5.30 p.m., so-----

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I assure the Minister of State that I will not take longer than 30 seconds.

Senator Colm Burke: If Opposition Members thought this issue was so important, they would not now be opposing a ten-minute extension.

Senator Thomas Byrne: We do. We are looking for a sufficient extension. We are not objecting to an extension.

Senator Mary M. White: Give us another 15 minutes. It is a very serious issue for our culture.

Senator Maurice Cummins: I propose an amendment that we conclude at 5.35 p.m. to allow the Minister of State to respond.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): No further speakers.

Senator Maurice Cummins: No.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): The Leader wants the Minister of State to respond at 5.35 p.m.

Senator Maurice Cummins: Yes.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): The Leader wants the Minister of State to be called now. Is that agreed?

Senator Thomas Byrne: It is not agreed.

Senator Maurice Cummins: We have other Ministers to come in as well.

Senator Thomas Byrne: We cannot agree to those terms, from the Government that just closed down debate. It is not agreed. We cannot accept orders like that from across the Chamber.

Acting Chairman (Senator Paschal Mooney): I am putting the question that the debate conclude at 5.35 p.m. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I want to make clear that I am not closing down this debate, just in case there is any misunderstanding.

I will start by responding to Senator Byrne's remarks. It was never my intention to blame

the Opposition. I was simply setting the record straight. I do not have the information on Navan, but if there is any information to be got, I promise that-----

Senator Thomas Byrne: I just want to know what services will be where.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: If there is information on that, I will ensure that the Senator receives it.

Senator Henry spoke about the respite grant. Thankfully, that is one of the areas for which I do not have responsibility, but I understand the Senator's position.

Senator Henry also spoke about people under 18 in adult wards. That came through in the contributions of most Senators. It is an issue we must be very conscious of, but, as I outlined in my speech, the majority of people who were inappropriately placed - I fully accept that they were inappropriately placed - were there for very short periods of time. Parents contact me from time to time at a local level and I go and see for myself the circumstances experienced by people who should be in an adolescent unit but who are in an adult unit. In my experience, and I have checked this out on several occasions, they are always cared for by a psychiatric nurse on a one-to-one basis and they always have an individual room, so there is no way that they would be sharing facilities or that there would be any great threat to the individual. I have seen that personally and have confirmed it by checking it out. That must be some kind of consolation to the parents of these children, because it must be distressing enough to have a child with mental health difficulties without adding to that distress by saying they are in some sort of danger. They are not. They are inappropriately placed, and that is completely accepted. I set the target of 5% in the service plan. The HSE wanted it to be higher and I refused and said that is what we will aim for and we will insist on it. I also asked the Mental Health Commission to ensure that if 87 children are inappropriately placed, we are also looking at how many appropriate beds are vacant in CAMHS units. From time to time beds which could be accessed are not being accessed. I have asked for that but it will take a while to come through the system. It is a relevant piece of information that we should be looking for.

Senator Gilroy talked about appointing a particular person. We cannot do that any more as the legislation provides that it must come through the Public Appointments Service. That is just as well because if we did not do that, no matter how well qualified a person might be in terms of mental health expertise, we would leave ourselves open to the accusation of jobs for the boys or the girls.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: There are 80 people on the panel with the HSE at the moment. Why have they not been appointed?

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: It is not done that way any more. I am talking about a head of mental health services, not lower grades. I know what the Senator's concerns are and I hope to address them in my summing up.

I agree with Senator van Turnhout. In the past number of weeks, I have looked for verification of the waiting list and I know that sometimes strikes terror among people on the list, as if we are asking if they really needed to be on it. I am accepting fully that the 3,000 children on the list need to be on it but I wonder what they need and if they should be waiting for the intensive CAMHS assessment. There is a different service, as Senator Moran has said, that can provide what those people need at a much earlier stage and that intervention needs to take place. My argument to the unit is that if someone is 12 months on that waiting list, he or she cannot be

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acutely unwell because if someone is acutely unwell, he or she should not be 12 months on the waiting list. It is about applying logic to all of that. Maybe the service for which those children are waiting 12 months could be delivered in a different way by a different organisation.

I fully accept what Senator van Turnhout says about Jigsaw and that is why we are increasing its provision. We are constantly looking at that list. There will always be the 5% which needs the kind of intensive care that only CAMHS, as a specialist service, can give. Surely, we should be able to treat children at an earlier stage and more appropriately. I still do not understand why we are referring children to CAMHS to see whether they need a classroom assistant. I am in talks with the Department of Education and Skills about all of that.

I still have not received clarification on the issue of why we cannot employ counselling psychologists, which was Senator Coghlan's issue. That is another part of the verification and I must ask why we are not doing that. There are people on that list who could very well be treated by counselling psychologists. We have the money - we have not returned any of the money in respect of recruitment - but we have huge difficulties recruiting clinical psychologists and psychiatrists for children. Senator Gilroy has asked what is so unattractive about the area and I do not know. Maybe it is the whole corporate thing in that we have damaged the health delivery system so much that people do not want to work for us. I am not certain.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Is it tough work?

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: Of course, it is. It has never been easy in psychiatry and the psychological services in this country. None the less I do not know why it is so difficult now when we are putting more resources in. We are now on our second recruitment campaign in a year and are still not getting enough people. If service delivery, as it is currently structured, is not working, we will have to look at a different way and that is exactly what I am doing. I do not believe in asking the same question and getting the same answer all the time.

Action Plan for Jobs: Motion

Senator Hildegarde Naughton: I move:

That Seanad Éireann:

noting that:

- 330,000 jobs were lost in this country during the tenure of the last Government;
- unemployment peaked at 15.1% prior to the effects of the present Government's job strategy being felt;
- unemployment is on a steady downward curve; and
- jobs are being created in all sections of the economy and across every skill-set;

further noting that:

- 90,000 jobs have been created since the launch of the Action Plan for Jobs in 2012 and 29,100 jobs in 2014;

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- 24,000 new jobs have been created in agriculture, 23,000 in accommodation and food services and 16,500 in retail, health, construction and education;

- the unemployment rate is down to 10% from a peak of 15.1% in February, 2012;

- employment has grown in all 8 regions since the Action Plan for Jobs;

- full-time employment is increasing rapidly while, consequently, part-time employment decreases;

- as a result, GDP rose by 4.8% in 2014, making Ireland the fastest growing economy in Europe; and

- domestic demand grew in 2014 for the first time since 2007; and

agreeing that:

- the target of getting 100,000 people back to work by 2016 will be delivered this year;

and

- the Action Plan for Jobs has been an unmatched success in any Government's history of job creation;

calls on the Government to:

- continue its concentration on employment as the most effective anti-poverty measure available;

- continue its implementation of the Action Plan for Jobs, including its regional strategy; and

- continue its drive to obtain full employment by 2018.

I thank the Minister for coming to the House. As the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, said yesterday, such was the scale of the crisis we inherited that we have lost nearly a decade of economic growth and job creation. I will not dwell on the performance of the last Government in terms of job creation. The 330,000 people who lost their jobs during its tenure in office are a lasting testament to its economic incompetence. It is lost in the verbiage that some pass off as economic analysis these days that this State was very nearly out of funds four years ago, with almost no money for salaries for our teachers, doctors and nurses.

Since 2011, it has been the task of the Government to repair the economy and public finances. In doing so, the concentration was on job creation. The strong growth in employment over the last four years has been due to a multi-annual strategy and implementation mechanism to enhance the operating environment for employers, namely, the Action Plan for Jobs.

It is no coincidence that unemployment peaked just as the action plan was unveiled and began its steady decline when its effects were felt. The evidence is incontrovertible. The plan is working and it has five main objectives: to support 100,000 additional jobs by 2016; to get Ireland back up to a top five ranking in international competitiveness; to build world-class clusters in key sectors; to build an indigenous engine of growth that drives up the export market

share of Irish companies; and to stimulate the domestic economy and generate employment in locally traded sectors. The ambition to create 100,000 jobs by next year will in all likelihood be achieved by this year. Further examples of the success to date of the programme are almost 90,000 more people at work since the launch of the first Action Plan for Jobs in 2012. The unemployment rate is down from 15% to 10%. In 2014, over 140,000 people left the live register to take up work. Ireland's competitiveness ranking internationally is steadily on the rise. Indigenous exports and foreign direct investment are at record levels. Exports grew in 2014, with notable increases recorded in exports to China, Japan, the US and France. Exporting firms created 15,000 net additional jobs in 2014. Each of those jobs spurs another in local trade and business. Enterprise Ireland, which works with Irish-owned exporting companies, added more than 8,000 of these new jobs, meaning Irish companies are at the heart of our recovery. The OECD has stated:

The APJ's most striking innovation in the Irish public policy context is a co-ordination mechanism that ensures high-level political buy-in and oversight, whole-of-Government engagement and the establishment of quarterly targets underpinned by a robust monitoring system. These are important steps towards addressing long-standing gaps that undermine successful policy implementation.

The OECD rightly calls it a significant positive development and stated it "marks an important innovation in Irish governance".

I will address one aspect of the proposed amendment to the motion, namely, JobBridge. An independent evaluation of the JobBridge scheme conducted by Indecon economic consultants in 2013 found that three in five participants secure employment after their internships. The evaluation found that 61% of interns progressed to paid employment after completing their internships. This 61% progression rate for JobBridge is one of the best in Europe, where progression rates for similar internships average at just 34%. Indecon's evaluation also found that 96% of host organisations would recommend JobBridge to another employer. Some 89% of interns stated that JobBridge had given them new skills. Interns also benefited from increased self-confidence and the opportunity to gain quality work experience and establish a network of contacts. Following discussions with the Labour Market Council, a third independent evaluation of JobBridge will be conducted later this year.

The scheme is voluntary. Nobody is forced to do it. The commentary by some of the Opposition makes it sound like indentured servitude. Approximately 97% of JobBridge inspections found that the requirements of the scheme were met. In any such programme there will always be unscrupulous people who will try to take advantage, and such practices are taken very seriously by the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Burton. Those found in breach of the scheme's terms and conditions are prevented from further participation.

I refer to another Sinn Féin amendment to the motion. I agree that the issue of regional development is important, and it is the reason the Government has included specific measures aimed at balanced regional development in this year's Action Plan for Jobs. I had the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, come to the Seanad last autumn and I questioned him on the Industrial Development Authority's failure to adhere to its own regional development targets. It is unacceptable that all concentration is on Dublin and, to a lesser extent, Cork. All Members of the House, Government and Opposition, are concerned about this issue. The message has been heard. The Government has allocated €250 million over five years for the purpose of stimulating job growth in the regions.

The Opposition will join me in welcoming today's live register figures, which show that the unemployment rate has continued to fall for the 41st consecutive month and that unemployment has dipped below 350,000 for the first time since 2009. Far too many people remain unemployed and the plan the Government has implemented has shown how it can be tackled in the years to come. If we stick to the plan, we can be confident that full employment will be achieved by 2018.

Senator Maurice Cummins: I have pleasure in seconding the motion. As my colleague, Senator Naughton, mentioned, 330,000 jobs were lost during the previous Government's tenure. As the motion mentioned, unemployment peaked at 15.1%. Since the Action Plan for Jobs, unemployment has been on a steady downward trend. Jobs are being created throughout the length and breadth of the country. We were all worried about the boom being confined to Dublin, Cork and, possibly, Galway, and not filtering around to the rest of the country. As Tip O'Neill said, "All politics is local". I can see the strong growth in employment in my native city, which was hit harder than most in the country. Since the collapse of TalkTalk, Glanbia has opened a wonderful facility in Waterford port, creating jobs. In the past few weeks Sun Life has announced jobs and NearForm has created 100 jobs in Tramore. Another 100 jobs were created last week in Portlaw and Genzyme is advertising for more employees. This morning, there was a wonderful announcement by Bausch & Lomb regarding 125 extra jobs and 150 construction jobs.

Senator Mary M. White: Congratulations.

Senator Maurice Cummins: We have our advance factory, which is complete and will be marketed and filled with employees in the not too distant future. We have seen progress in the regions, and, as Senator Naughton mentioned, it is not before time. The plan was put in place by the Government and we can see the creation of jobs. The Action Plan for Jobs is a multi-annual strategy and implementation mechanism to enhance the operating environment for employers and has five overarching strategic objectives, which it seeks to achieve by implementing each instalment in its multi-annual series. The first of these is to support 100,000 additional jobs by 2016. When this goal was stated during the last election campaign, people on the Opposition side, including all parties and the Independent Members, said it was pie in the sky and unachievable. Not alone is it achievable, but we are going to break the target. We have already created 90,000 jobs and there will be another 40,000 by 2016. It is a strong measure of the commitment and priority the Government has given to job creation.

Unemployment has decreased from 15.1% to 10%, and it will decrease further. There has been a significant decrease month on month and quarter on quarter, and please God it will continue. It is all down to the prudent policies the Government has adopted on job creation, getting the structures right and dealing with export-oriented businesses rather than relying on the construction industry. We are broadening the base in many areas. Exporting firms have created 15,000 net additional jobs in 2014, and each of these jobs spurs another in locally traded businesses. The small businesses that are setting up and creating one or two jobs are very important in every town and village in the country.

The OECD review of the Action Plan for Jobs is very positive and when it was launched in February 2012, it was described as a most welcome and important initiative. It focused on private sector-led export oriented job creation by getting framework conditions right and continually upgrading the business environment is a sound approach. The focus on building and strengthening linkages between the domestic SME and multinational sectors is welcome.

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When our SMEs are put together with the multinational sector and develop accordingly, they will prosper. The rigorous quarterly monitoring and reporting system is another significant and positive development in the area.

The disruptive reform in 2015 is the national talent drive. There have been six disruptive reforms. I do not know why they are called “disruptive” reforms, because they are very positive reforms. These actions aim to strengthen employability of learners and enhance employer engagement at all levels, link up with the institutes of technology and universities and draft a new skills strategy. The Government will increase higher education ICT graduates by 60% between 2015 and 2018. This is a very important area, given that we need to update the skills and have the skills for the jobs that are being created. In 2018, some 74% of ICT skills demand will be met through domestic supply. This will require the return of many of our talented migrants. One of the main barriers to their return is our tax system. The Government is committed to easing the burden of people at work, which, in turn, will create greater finances to fund services. I commend the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, and the Government on their efforts in this regard. It is a good news story, although I accept we have a lot more to do. The Government made addressing this issue its number one priority and, based on the figures mentioned here this afternoon, it is succeeding.

Senator Mary M. White: I welcome the Minister, Deputy Bruton, to the House. I would like to respond to the Government’s spring statement in the context of the truth about the lives of people in Ireland today. Last week, I organised a public meeting on the mortgage and debt crisis, at which there were many outstanding speakers, including Ms Noeline Blackwell from FLAC and Mr. William Prior from the Phoenix Project. During that meeting, some shocking truths came to light. I am sure that the Minister, in terms of his constituency work, is aware that people are frantic with worry about their personal circumstances. Many of the people who attended the meeting did so because they needed help. They also expressed huge appreciation of the work being done by FLAC and the Phoenix Project.

The cost of renting continues to increase. As people are now opting to rent rather than buy, this means there is no security of tenure for those wishing to set up a family home. During the period of irresponsible banking, 30 year mortgages were given to people in their 50s. This means these people will be paying mortgages into their 80s. These are the types of issues raised at my public meeting. The personal consequences of debt to individuals and families is enormous. Stress is a major factor in understanding the response pattern of those who are struggling with multiple debts, which is now a fact of life for some people. Not alone do people have large mortgages, but they have mounting household bills, including water charges and property tax, car loans and credit card debt. Each mortgage holder has their own story to tell. Any increase in mortgage interest rates will result in a worsening of their situation.

One of the main issues of concern was the purchase by vulture companies of mortgages, leading to huge distress, uncertainty and anger as banks take losses but refuse to listen to or accept offers from mortgage holders. Solutions are designed to help banks at significant cost to families. During the meeting, people spoke with great passion and anger about the Government’s failure to listen to them. It was said that there are people going without food, many of whom are ashamed to admit their mortgage problems. People believe the Government is turning its back on them while at the same time presenting itself as the poster boy or girl of Europe in terms of recovery.

How can we speak about spring statements on recovery and plans for the future when the

Government is not facing up to the reality of the present? I acknowledge that the Minister, Deputy Bruton, has put his heart and soul into his portfolio. There is no doubt about that. Hundreds of thousands of people have emigrated over the past number of years since commencement of the recession. While I accept that unemployment has decreased to 10% and that it is expected to reduce further into the future, 160,000 people have been out of work for more than 12 months. This represents a major social and economic challenge, which will not be solved by the JobBridge scheme alone. Long-term unemployment can lead to de-skilling and result in people becoming detached from the labour market. Avoidance of long-term unemployment is important to the achievement of a reduction in the overall unemployment rate. The experience of other countries facing high unemployment in the 1980s was that long spells of joblessness increased the probability of permanent skill loss and an exit from the labour force, thereby increasing unemployment.

Foreign direct investment is treated with kid gloves. As we all know, every tax incentive possible is provided in this regard. The multinationals want only to locate in large urban areas where there is exceptional telecommunications and transport infrastructure while indigenous companies operate in every corner of Ireland. We must ensure a level playing field between indigenous industry and foreign direct investment. I may not be adequately articulating the point I wish to make on this issue. The Centra store in Killorglin and small business in Border counties such as Monaghan must be given the same status as foreign direct investment. I know the Minister will understand the point I am trying to make. This issue is not being properly addressed. While much help is being provided to indigenous industry there are many instances in which this is factious. While everything is packaged well for the multinational, the small and medium-sized enterprise sector gets only a bit of this and a bit of that. I am not in saying that being disrespectful of the Minister because as I said earlier he has put his heart and soul into his portfolio. It would be remiss of me not to say that.

Senator John Kelly: I, too, welcome the Minister to the House and compliment him on all the good work that has been done in this area by him and the Government. As previously stated, while the detractor said it could not be done, unemployment has been reduced from in excess of 15% to under 10%. It is hoped this figure will be further reduced through the use of schemes such as JobsPlus, JobBridge and so on. I do not propose to reiterate all of the statistics quoted by Senators Naughton and Cummins. They speak for themselves. I would like instead to focus on rural Ireland. During the Celtic tiger era, economic growth in rural Ireland was judged on the basis of the number of houses built. Unfortunately, in many parts of Roscommon, Mayo, Leitrim, Sligo and many other counties far too many housing estates were built. In my own town of Ballaghaderreen, there are at least 200 houses that are unoccupied and will never be occupied because there was never a need for them in the first instance.

There is a big difference between economic growth in the cities as distinct from rural Ireland. During the past three or four years since I came to Dublin, there has been no sign of the recession here. However, when I go to my home town at the weekend, all I hear from people is doom and gloom because nothing is happening there. I know that the Minister has committed to a return to full employment by 2018 but I would like to know how he proposes to address the issues arising in that regard in towns like Ballaghaderreen, Castlerea, Boyle, Swinford, Charlestown and so on. In this regard, I make the following suggestion. Consideration should be given to the zoning of a substantial tract of land around Knock Airport as a tax-free zone, as was done in the context of the Shannon free zone, one of Ireland's earliest tax reduction initiatives administered by the Shannon Free Airport Development Company.

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It was one of Ireland's earliest tax reduction initiatives. In order to establish an operation in a free zone, a licence is required from the Customs-Free Airport (Amendment) Act 1958. This licence is issued by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Employment. We should focus purely on job creation. The IFSC was set up primarily as a job creation measure. I know there would be issues of displacement if, for example, one set up an industry in a tax-free zone where there was a similar industry that was not in a tax-free zone. It could impact on the latter industry. I am aware of many industries that we could bring to those areas. It is in the Minister's gift. He can decide what industries can come to a tax-free zone. I know of one company that manufactures affordable houses in China and would gladly come to Ireland if there was an incentive for it to do so because labour is so cheap in China that it would need something like this. I ran this idea by two county managers in Mayo and Roscommon and both of them agreed that there would be serious merit in considering this because one is then talking about creating a hub of employment around Knock Airport where people from Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and even some parts of east Galway would be able to avail of work. I would appreciate it if the Minister would consider what I propose.

6 o'clock

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I move amendment No. 2:

“To insert the following lines after ‘calls on the Government to’:

- ‘immediately end the use of zero-hours contracts in all sectors;
- take immediate steps to address the cost of childcare, which is crippling young families;’.”

I believe in offering credit where credit is due and I fully acknowledge the work the Government has done. I am not here to criticise in any way the work that is being done by the Government. Without doubt, coming from where we were, the Government has achieved a lot.

However, we have achieved a lot on the backs of workers in the private and public sectors. Through no fault of the Minister or Government, the type of employment that is being created is unstable and uncertain and lacks any sort of commitment from the employer to the employees. In particular, I am talking about the zero-hours contract which has become the scourge of employment. Even in the public sector, nurses and teachers and lecturers in institutes of technology are being employed on zero-hours contracts, which is simply not good enough. It is not real employment. I know the Minister is bringing forward more Bills in the not too distant future and I sincerely hope he will address that issue.

Having recently become a grandfather, I have become acutely aware of the cost of child care. Any thriving economy must find a way to meet the costs of child care for those who wish to avail of work. The Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2015 was debated here a couple of days ago. One of the issues concerned getting people back to work. I do not know how anybody expects someone to go back to work on low wages when one looks at child care costs running at between €1,000 and €1,500 per month. As the economy improves, it falls on the State to start providing decent child care facilities for those who wish to work. If we were really doing our work right, there would be a crèche beside every national school. I know that where education and training boards have provided crèches for adults going back to college, they have been a tremendous success. Unfortunately, the last Government cut the funding for those crèches. I think the Minister has an opportunity to do something here, so I call on him to do that. I do not have an awful lot more to say. I am not in any way disputing anything that has

been said by the Government side other than to add those two points to it.

An Cathaoirleach: Is Senator Barrett seconding the amendment?

Senator Sean D. Barrett: I second the amendment. I welcome the Minister, the debate and the success at this time. Few people have been more active in the field of start-ups up and down the country than the Minister and great credit is due to him and his agencies. I have just come from a meeting of the Joint Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis. I hope that when that report is complete, it will make a contribution as well to the future economic development of the country because that was a major disaster that cost €64 billion. The Governor of the Central Bank estimates that the net cost might be €40 billion but it is €40 billion for which we could have found alternative uses. Mistakes were made in housing, banking, the construction sector and the auditing and regulation of those activities which imposed huge costs on the rest of us. When the report comes out, the reform agenda that came up in 2011 must focus on those sectors. In his optimistic vein, the Minister highlights many areas where we have been doing very well but it was a handful of sectors and a relatively small number of people who imposed such terrible costs on the wider economy from which we are now starting to recover, which is so welcome.

Approximately 60% of people now go on to third level education of some kind. This is a major asset in attracting industries here. It is an optimistic one because for the €3,000 fee the student pays and the €8,000, on average, added by the Government, one gets an international ranking in education for €10,000 or €11,000 which would cost €40,000 to €50,000 were one to attempt to buy the same ranking in education in a place like California. The fact that all these extremely talented young people will be entering the labour force must be an advantage to the country. They will be a significant asset to the country.

There is one gap. The Minister's colleagues have been edging towards it in trying to develop policies. We have about a dozen apprenticeships in this country. There are hundreds of apprenticeships in Switzerland, Norway and Germany, which are very prosperous countries. In these countries, these apprenticeships are within firms and many of the people recruited to firms become chief executives and occupy senior positions. It is something we have been missing out on.

Every single policy must be compared with alternatives. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has a major role to play in this regard. We can never go back to throwing money at problems, particularly at election time. There are techniques of evaluation and cost-benefit analysis which should be used. I would like to see all the alternatives put before the people. We should put the studies up, possibly have a six-month period to discuss what the cost-benefit analysis is and then make the choice rather than rely on the haphazard way decisions on public expenditure were sometimes made in the past. When one makes mistakes like that, one is left with a bundle of debt and there is no asset and no income from it, so we cannot go down that road again. It is part of reforming ourselves.

In a country where 98% of post is delivered the next day, I am not sure we need the new post code system. I have not seen any cost-benefit analysis of it. I hear that we are the only country that does not have it. I speak as someone whose constituency includes voters in Northern Ireland where I can never remember the seven-digit code. From writing to constituents, I know that Clones is in County Monaghan and that there is a 98% chance that a letter will be delivered there the next day so is there a benefit from that particular project, about which another presen-

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tation was made yesterday? We cannot go back just because somebody thinks it is a good idea, that we should promote it and that it makes us the same as any other country. We made a lot of those mistakes in the past. Let us not do it again.

As the Minister is aware, I am opposed to the sale of Aer Lingus. Tourism, financial services and pharmaceuticals must be part of the development of this country. Routing people through Heathrow, as the Scots must do, does not seem to be the way we want those people to come here. I compliment Aer Lingus on having developed nine routes on the north Atlantic from a country of 4.6 million people. By contrast, there are no north Atlantic services from Scotland, which has 5.3 million people; none from Manchester, which has about 15 million people; and none from Birmingham, which has about ten million people. Aer Lingus has generated 11 million passengers from its home population of 4 million while British Airways, the takeover airline, generates 38 million from a home population of 64 million. In 1948 the former Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, hoped, with a fleet of five Constellations, to get on the north Atlantic route. The incoming Government sold the aeroplanes and we did not get back to that route for ten years. There is a 40% increase in income per passenger and a 23% increase in volume of passengers on the north Atlantic route. That kind of development should be taken into consideration rather than some stockbroker saying we can sell this for €300 million and give half to the Troika.

I hope this developmental impact will influence people again because we have come out of a very dark era. Let us promote the growing, dynamic sectors. Lemass was of the view, even in the 1940s, that aviation was a growth sector. We need something similar this time around to go forward with the Minister and everybody in this House towards the full employment target. Nobody could disagree with that. I wish the Minister continued success in achieving that goal. He will have the support of these benches.

Senator Cáit Keane: I welcome the Minister. If we were giving out stars, the Minister would be the best boy in the class for jobs and work productivity, if it was measured.

Senator Mary M. White: Hear, hear.

Senator Hildegard Naughton: Hear, hear.

Senator Sean D. Barrett: Hear, hear.

Senator Cáit Keane: We all talk about productivity and value for money which the Minister has achieved. Bad news makes news all the time but good news makes it only for five minutes. I will repeat some of what Senator Naughton said. There are 90,000 more people at work since the launch of the Action Plan for Jobs. In 2014 over 140,000 left the live register to take up work. For every person who leaves the live register approximately €20,000 extra is made available for health services, education and everything else. It involves more than giving the person the dignity of getting a job, which is the best way out of poverty, because it does something for everybody else in the country in that the money gained in tax goes back into the system for medical and educational services.

Ireland's international competitiveness ranking is steadily on the rise. Its international standing must be applauded as must the Minister for bringing Ireland back on track. People are now looking at the fastest growing economy in Europe. It is great to say that when one thinks we were the worst boy in the class a few years ago. The growth is now built on a steady footing, not construction. It is stable. Exporting firms created 15,000 additional jobs. Enterprise Ireland, which worked with Irish-owned exporters, added over 8,000 of those jobs.

I agree with Senator Craughwell who spoke about child care. Senator Naughton and I were at the launch of Hands Up for Children today, which is all about child care. When I was on the old Dublin County Council I had the first local authority crèche in Ireland opened. It is not possible to get people back to work if there are no facilities for those who want to go back to work. The people who want to stay at home and mind their children need child care too. All the Ministers have to work together. I know the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, will put his shoulder to the wheel for child care along with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Deputy James Reilly.

The plan is working. I am delighted the Minister put it in place and that there has been an increase of over 1,200 jobs per week in the private sector over the past year. That is some achievement. A total of 11,200 left the live register to take up work in February 2015. I have a few more good things to say but in case I do not have time to say the bad things I will say it is not all rosy in the garden.

I met a man this morning who has a growing business. His productivity grew 16% last year. He wants to open a new business but he had one business in the downturn that went into liquidation. He paid €17,000 to the Revenue Commissioners last year and another €25,000 this year but he cannot get a tax clearance certificate even though he is willing and able to make an agreement. It is not that he will not have the money. He will employ three extra people and will take two people off the dole under JobBridge, a total of five people. The Minister will not believe this but he has come up against a huge problem. He has got a site on the Belgard Road and has got planning permission but has found out that because the South Dublin County Council did not ask for the development levies in 1981, he has been asked for development levies of €20,000. It is not a new business, it is a change of use, which would involve much lower development levies. He has been asked to prove that in 1981, no development levies were paid. We moved the old Dublin County Council to south Dublin. The files cannot be found and he cannot prove it. The legislation puts the onus on the individual who is starting the business to prove it. The Statute of Limitations has come against him. He is in limbo. His business is going to go down the Swanee as a result of red tape and people saying these are the rules and this is what one must do.

Senator Mary M. White: Foreign direct investment could help him.

Senator Cáit Keane: AIB is running an advertisement saying it will give a loan within 48 hours. The circle starts with the liquidation. The current business is not in liquidation but AIB did not respond within 48 hours. After ten days, he rang the bank and was told it means 48 hours after it leaves the desk of the person it was sent to. It can sit on that desk for three weeks. There is some tidying up that needs to be done. I have to work on the Statute of Limitations and the planning issue of 1981 because he has come up against this problem of development levies not being paid in 1981 and the onus is falling on a new business starting up to pay all the development levies. That is wrong. We have to tweak that legislation. It is the responsibility of the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. I heard about this only today but this man knows of others similarly affected.

I will finish on a good note. This is not the Minister's fault or that of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation but the Minister's job is being made more difficult by planning, the Revenue Commissioners and the banks. If they all worked better with the Minister we would be doing much better. The Minister should keep up the pressure and the good work.

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Senator Marc MacSharry: I welcome the Minister and offer him best wishes in his on-going work in his Department. We are all in his corner in the sense of what he is trying to do. When we were in government the congratulatory Private Member's Bills introduced used to crack me up. I do not blame any Senator because I know this has come from on high, from some official in the Department. The Minister probably first heard of it today too. They bore very little relationship to reality then and certainly bear very little relationship to reality now. For example, yesterday in Sligo, where I live, there was an announcement of 70 job losses in Elanco. The Minister is aware of this. It is a veterinary pharmaceutical company, which made a significant investment in the area very recently, and now there is a mixed message about its intentions. Last October, while trying to advance the case for foreign direct investment on the east coast of the United States, the Minister announced jobs in a company called JenaValve, also in Sligo. I am reliably informed that he will preside over an announcement by that company to lay off and cease operations in Sligo, in addition to the job losses yesterday.

Being from the north west most of my focus when speaking here is on the region but I would not want to jeopardise any other region. No matter who has been in government, and this is not to absolve the failures of previous Governments or to overly criticise or let the current Government away with its neglect of the region, we have never been provided with the necessary infrastructure to perform to our potential. The brilliant IDA Ireland team in that part of the country includes Mr. John Nugent, a very significant player in bringing Facebook to Ireland when he was based in the US. Others include personal friends of mine and people I grew up with and they do an excellent job with IDA Ireland. They are world leaders in their field, as the Government so often says, and they are the envy of the world in terms of delivery. Consistently, governments, including this one, have made a mockery of their efforts to bring investment to that part of the country in their absolute failure to provide infrastructure and resources to allow those regions to perform to their potential. As people approach Sligo, there are 30 white crosses on the N4, marking the 30 people killed over the years. We have presided over motorways and two plus one highways and vital connectivity to Castlebar and Westport. Everywhere is entitled to a road but while we prioritise the links between Ennis and Galway and Cork and Limerick, we have cast aside the N4. This includes other governments - I am not letting anyone away with it - but I will not allow the current Minister away with it by saying the previous Government should have done this. I know that and I fought with the previous Government on this issue but the current Government is now in command and I will fight with it. It is the responsibility of the current Government.

The sum of the political parts of the Government in that part of the country do not have a significant say to get it over the line. As a lowly Senator, I know my place and I know I am not listened to by the Department. The Minister's special adviser is from Sligo and can vouch for everything I am saying. He and his family are familiar with what I am saying and will verify its validity. Some 350,000 people are unemployed and they do not give a damn about the spin announced in the spring economic statement. It means nothing to them and nothing to the 70 people in Elanco or the 15 to 20 people in the jobs announced from San Francisco last October in JenaValve, which is now pulling out of Sligo.

Some 43,000 people have jobs who did not have jobs last year. We are delighted with this, and well done to the Government, but governments do not create jobs, rather they create the atmosphere that creates jobs. If we do not have the infrastructure, we cannot do it. From speaking to IDA Ireland officials, it is not just a case of grant indication. Only 19% of IDA Ireland's budget is spent in the north-west region. That is not enough and grant indication is probably

the last thing on the list. We have people skills and Collins McNicholas, a recruitment company that specialises in that part of the country, does an excellent job. Abbott and AbbVie Ireland can testify to how well and how easily professionals can be brought to work in any field.

The major aspect is access and when people are explaining, they are losing. As they set off from IDA Ireland headquarters in Dublin to bring people to Carrick-on-Shannon, Sligo, Donegal town, Ballyshannon, Bundoran or other areas in that part of the country, they must explain that when they come off the superhighway that goes all the way to Longford, there will be a problem for 60 miles because no Government gives a toss about people in the north west. No Government is able to think strategically and, instead of thinking of the region as the proverbial pain in the butt, take strategic positions and provide the region with resources to perform to its potential. That is all we want in the north west. Whether it is the Minister, his predecessor or whoever comes after him, we want to be provided with the resources for the infrastructure to perform to our potential. Then we will have an easier job attracting more like Elanco and Jena-Valve, which has unfortunately shed 100 highly paid jobs in the region.

Senator Michael Mullins: I welcome the Minister and I compliment him on the superb job he is doing. I am pleased to support the motion.

One of the biggest challenges faced by the Government in 2011 was the level of job losses and the economic cost of it in terms of supporting people when they are out of work and the loss of tax revenue to fund various services like the health service. The Action Plan for Jobs was the Government's statement of intent to address the issue and create the environment in which overseas companies could invest in Ireland and indigenous companies could grow and prosper. The Government has worked tirelessly to repair our reputation internationally and many trade missions were undertaken by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, most of which were led by the Minister. The results were dramatic. Some 90,000 jobs were created since the launch of the Action Plan for Jobs in 2012, of which 29,000 were created in 2014. The unemployment rate has reduced from 15.1% to 10% and the plan to create 100,000 jobs by 2016 will be achieved in 2015.

Much remains to be done and the Government has no intention of resting on its laurels. The revised action plan has some significant targets and it is good to see the recovery is slowly beginning to spread to the regions, although not all parts of the country have seen a drop in unemployment levels. A point I like in the revised action plan is that, by 2018, everyone who wants a job will be in a position to obtain one. This will see full employment by 2018 and 40,000 additional jobs will be created this year. The ambitious plan to attract 160 new foreign direct investment projects in Ireland is welcome. I also welcome the investment in 1,250 extra ICT places.

We all hope the plan to invest €3.6 billion under the State capital investment programme will spread jobs throughout the country and bring much-needed employment to some rural areas. The 18 planned overseas trade missions led by the Minister will hopefully be successful and I welcome the fact that the Minister is planning to support 945 participants on management development programmes in the coming year. Small and medium-sized enterprises are the lifeblood event of business in rural communities and we must do everything possible to support them and reduce the level of red tape and bureaucracy that makes life difficult for them. In the initial plan, red tape was to be reduced by 25%. Perhaps the Minister can comment on how the plan is going in that respect.

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I would like to see an urgent roll-out of the new apprenticeship scheme in response to proposals from key sectors. We must be innovative about how we can quickly address the shortage of skilled personnel in many sectors of the economy. I hope many young skilled people who have gone abroad will return over the coming year to fill some of the shortages. Broadband in rural areas is a major issue and I am pleased to see action No. 52 of the revised plan promises a tender for the delivery of high-speed broadband to all parts of Ireland that cannot be served by commercial operators in 2015. Planning was also mentioned and action No. 221 commits to allowing An Bord Pleanála to accept electronic applications and appeals, which is to be welcomed. Community enterprise centres have made a great contribution to job creation, providing incubation and start-up facilities. There is one in my town of Ballinasloe, run by the Ballinasloe Area Community Development, which currently employs 190 people. I hope many of the businesses will grow and move from the centre and provide employment in our region. I am keen to see further investment in these centres. The Minister might clarify the position in respect of the funding of professional managers for these centres. One or two other centres may emerge if funding was put towards the provision of a professional manager.

Retail businesses, including small shops and pubs, are going through a tough time, in particular cash businesses. The banks are treating them appallingly. Recently in the Seanad I raised the matter of the prohibitive cost of lodging cash. Were it not for the credit unions, many of these small businesses would not survive.

I cannot let this opportunity go without welcoming the significant job announcements that have been made in Galway city and in some parts of our county in recent years. I very much welcome the Apple investment in Athenry, which, I hope, will draw in some further development. However, the east of the county is still an employment blackspot. The town of Ballinasloe has lost 1,000 industrial jobs in the past decade. I appeal to the Minister to keep the pressure on Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland to market Ballinasloe as a fantastic location for industry. It is located in the centre of Ireland on the motorway, an hour and a quarter from Dublin Airport, Shannon Airport and Knock Airport. There is plenty of availability of land for industrial development. We have an excellent infrastructure for broadband and public transport. We have an available workforce, good schools, excellent recreational facilities and housing for families to locate there. This is an area that I am keen for the Minister to concentrate on.

Most people in the country aspire to have a well-paid job and to provide for their families. The Government needs to continue to focus on job creation and promoting a spirit of entrepreneurship. I urge the Minister to continue to support small business and to continue to facilitate further investment in tourism products and our greenways. We expect to have 7 million visitors in Ireland this year.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator, you are way over time.

Senator Michael Mullins: I hope that will bring far more economic activity and job creation into rural parts of our country.

Senator David Cullinane: I welcome the Minister. It would be churlish of any of us in opposition not to accept that we have seen significant numbers of jobs created in recent years since 2011. This Government and this Minister took over an absolute mess that was left by the previous Government. Hundreds of thousands of people were unemployed. Far too many of our young people emigrated. We have lost possibly a generation of young people and they may or may not come back. We hope that many of them do. I know the Minister is focused on

creating jobs to position the country to encourage as many of them as possible to come back.

I commend the Minister on the efforts he has made in the south east. We still have a long way to go nationally and in the region I represent, but we have had some significant wins in recent times and these, too, must be commended. Today, more jobs were announced for Bausch & Lomb in Waterford city and I understand more jobs are to be announced in Waterford in the coming weeks and months.

As the Minister is aware, the city was hit hard during the recession. Large numbers of manufacturing jobs were lost. There was much discontent among the Waterford people for a long time because those jobs would not be coming back to the city. Therefore, to see any number of jobs coming back is obviously a boost for all of us. I am keen to put on the record my appreciation of the work the Minister has done in leading a task force and working group for Waterford and the south east in the past three years since the disastrous job losses in TalkTalk in 2012.

Having said that, there is a long way to go. While I have commended the good work done, it is important for those in government not to indulge in over-congratulation or slapping themselves on the back. Certainly, no champagne corks should be popped. The reality is that we still have far too many people unemployed - I expect the Minister will accept that. We have many people in low paid jobs. Some 20% of all workers in this State are in low paid positions and 19% of all workers in the State experience in-work poverty, which is a major problem. We have a difficulty with precarious work, part-time work, low contract hours, under-employment and exploitation in some of those areas, as the Minister well knows. We have discussed many of these issues on the Order of Business and in the Minister's presence at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation as well as in the House on several occasions. Moreover, the Minister will beware of the plight of the Dunnes Stores workers, who represent only one example of the experience of many workers on low pay and low hour contracts who feel they are being exploited by profitable companies. We also have a difficulty with access to services for some people in work, which is a driver of in-work poverty. Child care is one of these difficulties. Lack of affordable housing is also an issue.

While it is important for those of us in opposition to recognise that progress has been made and to acknowledge and celebrate it - every job created should be celebrated and I have done so - I was astounded yesterday when I heard the Minister for Finance make what I saw as rather outlandish commitments on job creation. He said: "we will pass the 2 million people in employment mark next year, replace all of the jobs lost during the downturn by 2018 and, in total, between 2015 and 2020, add 200,000 new jobs." The reality is that 69,300 net jobs have been created in the past four years. A total of 26,900 of these were created in 2014. If the commitments of the Minister for Finance announced on Tuesday are to be met, then the Government's record on job creation would have to increase annually by 50%. That is rather outlandish. I wish the Government the best of luck in its efforts in reaching that bar, but I believe it has been set far too high. I believe it was part of the spin and over-sell that we got from the Government as part of its so-called spring statement.

The Minister maintains that our young people are coming back and I hope many of them do. However, the facts and the reality tell a different story, unfortunately. There are 60,900 fewer people aged between 20 and 34 years in employment since Fine Gael and the Labour Party took office. These are facts - the Central Statistics Office figures. The Minister talked about job creation in the State. We hear from IDA Ireland and the enterprise agencies about Ireland Inc. and how it is important that we create jobs. Obviously, it is and we need to create jobs. However,

another major problem relates to regional disparities. This was one of the reasons in 2013 I published the south east economic development strategy. I was keen to be part of the solution. I wanted to come up with ideas or proposals and not simply sit back, criticise the Government and declare that we have to create jobs. I was keen to go out, talk to stakeholders and develop policy and realistic credible deliverable proposals that could be implemented and that would help to create jobs in the region, and that is what I did. The reality of the regional imbalance is a concern. Employment in the west has fallen by 4,800 in the year to December 2014 and by 5,000 in the south west. The numbers in employment in the Border region have fallen by 1,300 since this Government took office. While there have been modest increases in employment in the south east, we are still 3.5% above the national average, which is very high.

We have a long way to go. Earlier I raised the matter of low paid jobs and in-work poverty. Unfortunately, many of those jobs are occupied by women. The fact is that 60% of low paid workers are women and 50% of all females earn only €20,000 per annum or less. We must acknowledge the inadequacy of existing legislation to protect vulnerable workers who have no guarantee of hours and no consistency of weekly income. In an effort to be constructive, Sinn Féin published a Private Members' motion which recommended banded-hour contracts, full implementation of the EU part-time working directive, proper collective bargaining, trade union recognition and having a legal right to go from part-time to full-time work if the hours are available. These issues have been supported by the Labour Party. A number of weeks ago a Labour Party Deputy organised a cross-party briefing on all of these issues. We presented ICTU's proposals to the Government in the form of a Private Members' motion and it was rejected.

While I commend all of the good work that has been done, I ask the Minister to look more at regional development and accept we have much more work to do with regard to job creation, and with regard to low pay, particularly precarious work, underemployment and low-hour contracts. We have a significant job of work to do to protect workers in those vulnerable sectors. The Government should also look at the regions and see what more can be done to create jobs outside the urban areas. Those created in urban areas are welcome and should be celebrated, but if we are serious about making sure that everybody benefits from the upturn and we do not have a two-speed two-tier economy between urban and rural, or Dublin, Cork and Galway versus the rest of the country, we need much more regional-focused policies.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire. I am glad the Minister, Deputy Bruton, is here for this debate which is central to the country's economic recovery. Much has been said by many speakers on all sides of the House about where we are at in the country at present, and while recovery is being driven partly by some of the policies of the Government, much of it is being driven by people willing to take risks by establishing their own businesses or creating an additional job in an existing firm. This must be welcomed. While one can blame the Government for not creating enough employment or for all the jobs being lost, it is not the Government's job to create jobs; it is the Government's job to create the environment to provide jobs. While some progress has been made and reference has been made to this, I want to touch on a couple of points.

Over the past 25 or 30 years the average median rate of unemployment in Ireland was approximately 10.86%. The highest unemployment rate was back in 1985, when the country had 17.3% unemployment. The rate was also high before the Government took office due to the economic downturn and the crisis. Half of the jobs lost before that were due to the construction sector which hollowed out as a result of the banking crisis. According to the April figures, we are at approximately 10%. One could say the figures are massaged to an extent by the ap-

proximately 86,000 or 87,000 people on various schemes. Some of them are happy to be on schemes as they hope it is a means to an end or a platform for a better future. The viability or non-viability of these schemes is a debate for another day.

With regard to the role of the Government in economic recovery, many jobs have been created but the Government is not necessarily responsible for job creation, apart from in the public sector. If its record on job creation in the public sector since coming to office was examined, it would not be very appetising because 30,000 jobs have been removed from the public sector since 2011. This was done through redundancies and other exit schemes for employees, who have not been replaced. If the Government was serious about rolling out job creation in the public sector, this is an area which could be further utilised.

Employment in the private sector has risen and State agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Shannon Development and, in particular, IDA Ireland have been to the fore in creating many of these jobs and assisting companies to create them. With regard to regional disparity in job creation, according to the Nevin Economic Research Institute, NERI, report published a few weeks ago, 94% of all the jobs created through the State agencies in 2014 were in Dublin or the commuter belt. I understand from these figures that only a couple of hundred of these jobs were supported in the north west and a greater number of jobs were lost than created in the south east. A total of 125 new jobs in the south east were announced today and we all welcome this. It is great news. We will have job gains and job losses, and the role of the State is to balance the scale on an upwards trajectory, which is not easy.

The Minister's Department is one of the key Departments in defining where we go as a country over the next 25 years in terms of geography and demographics. According to Teagasc and CSO figures, 60% of the population will live within 25 miles of the eastern seaboard by 2025. This will hollow out rural Ireland. The Department has an obligation to implement a regional development strategy to benefit the regions and clearly this is not happening. Economists may argue that foreign direct investment companies now look at basing their enterprises in cities rather than countries. If we want to go ahead with this fine, but if the State has a role in providing the environment to create jobs then by extension it also has a role in providing the environment to make it attractive for those companies to locate in the regions.

My age group has left my county of Donegal. The only people left are those who are unemployed, who have a job in the State or who have a mortgage. Those who have the option of leaving have left and many of them have emigrated. Over the past four years, 145,000 people have left the State with a third level qualification. Many of them may not return. I hope they will. People say one has an option to leave and one will see the world but if one establishes roots in another country, one will not return. We must decide whether we are serious about the critical issue of balanced regional development. We are either serious about providing money to the regions or we are not. We must look at how we spend money, value for money in the economy and the fairness in where money is spent with regard to capital investment. A fundamental reason many companies do not go into the regions is to do with broadband. A total of 30% of the properties in the State have inadequate broadband and they are all located in the regions. This needs to be addressed. The Government must take this by the scruff of the neck and decide on these fundamental and core objectives.

The OECD published a report on Ireland's employment trajectory over the past six months and its recommendations were startling. They were all based on what I have just said about the inadequacy of Government policy in supporting the regions. I know great work must be

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done, but it is our job to come here and raise issues on which we think there should be a focus. While a rising tide may raise all boats, if we leave Dublin develop at a much faster pace than the rest of the country we will be left with a two-tier recovery and this will only lead to what is projected in the CSO figures, whereby people move from west to east and if one wants to have a holiday home in the west fine, but one will live, work and have a mortgage in Dublin . This is not what-----

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator is way over time.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: I apologise. It is not where we should be going.

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I thank the Senators who participated in the debate, particularly Senator Hildegard Naughton, who moved the motion.

We are in a difficult transition; that is the reality. A number of Senators commented on the circumstances when we started out. The reality was that most people were scared out of their wits that their job would be the next to go. That was the environment we were living in. Some 330,000 jobs had been lost. Roughly 20% of the private sector was wiped out in the space of a couple of years. In the case of construction, well over 60% of jobs were wiped out. That has had a huge impact, especially in the regions.

To echo Senator Craughwell, I would be the first to recognise that the effort to rebuild a new economy out of the ashes of the old has been extraordinarily tough on people. I refer not only to the fiscal decisions but also to the employment impact and the pressure on wages. However, we can see that the journey we have travelled is the right one. We can look back on our track record over recent years and see the approach we have taken, a whole-of-government approach, was correct. We knew there was no silver bullet. It was about getting every single Department to state what its part of the jigsaw could do to enhance enterprise growth and create jobs. The work in education is crucial as we seek to consolidate and regrow our economy. The same applies to the work in the Department of Finance in respect of banking and access to finance and the work in the infrastructural Departments across the system, such as the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. We have to continue to work.

We built on the track record we have achieved. We are setting an ambitious target of full employment by 2018. I do not agree with Senator Cullinane when he suggests the Minister for Finance's projection yesterday that 40,000 new jobs will be created each year over the coming years is unachievable. That is the target we have set for this year, 2015, and we will achieve it. Over the past two years, we delivered 90,000 jobs. That is in excess of 40,000 per year. Therefore, I believe we can achieve the target. At the start of this journey, people said it was unachievable to deliver 100,000 jobs by 2016. We will deliver them 21 months ahead of target.

The Irish economy, businesses and workers have shown extraordinary resilience. Throughout the country, one can hear fantastic stories. Today's story about Bausch & Lomb is fantastic. Some 12 months ago, we were facing the entire closure of its plant, with 1,200 jobs on the line. Today we are seeing €115 million invested, with 175 more jobs back in the company. There are 150 people at work in the construction phase. This is because people recognised change had to be made. They accepted the change, difficult as it was, and now they have won the extra investment. That is a great story.

I accept Senator White's statement that many legacy issues will remain. We have many

difficult issues to address. What characterised this recession, unlike most others, was the huge legacy debt. We all know about the one in the public sector. The one in the private sector was equally great, both in business and households. That is a much harder type of recession to get through. We are working on that steadily.

I do not agree with Senator White's comment that activation measures will not reduce the rate of long-term unemployment. It depends on the figures one is looking at. Quarterly national household survey figures show we have made considerable progress in reducing the rate of long-term unemployment.

Senator Mary M. White: I referred to youth unemployment, in particular.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The rates of long-term youth unemployment and youth unemployment are coming down. There have been 30,000 fewer long-term unemployed over the past two years. We are having an impact but the Senator is correct that we have to build on the measures. However, I reject the suggestion by Sinn Féin that some of the measures, such as JobBridge, are not effective. Senator Hildegard Naughton dealt with that.

I do not accept that foreign direct investors receive charmed treatment in comparison with Irish businesses. The reality in my Department is that 70% of the money I spend goes to SMEs. Only 30% goes to the multinational sector. Virtually all the initiatives we have been driving, be they to help start-ups, improve access to finance, make it easier to recruit, help people to find new markets overseas, build capability in companies through innovation and partnership agreements of different sorts, or build sectors such as the food and tourism sectors, are focused exclusively on the capability of our indigenous companies. We are determined to build an indigenous engine of growth. In the past 12 months, we have heard some fantastic stories. Irish companies such as Combilift, EPS in Mallow, Glanbia and Lakeland Dairies are fantastic and as good as any *Mittelstand* company in Germany. Irish companies have come through the recession toughened and they are looking way beyond the traditional markets of the United Kingdom and even the rest of Europe. They are now considering global markets and have global ambition. There are many of them throughout the country, in all regions.

Senator Kelly raised the role of smaller towns and suggested, in particular, a tax-free zone. The issue of tax-free zones is well outside my area so the Senator would need to take it up with the Minister for Finance. There have been mixed experiences of designated tax zones. We have seen their upside and downside. The one in Shannon, for example, was regarded as very innovative. Some of the other zones, which were created with the best of intentions, did not always have the intended impact and tended to drive towards construction rather than genuine, sustainable growth in communities.

The issue of child care costs was raised by Senator Craughwell, and he was right to do so. As we face the challenge of achieving full employment and maximising economic potential in the country, we will have to address child care costs in a more creative way. It requires money. Some €250 million is being spent at present on child care costs. This reaches approximately 100,000 children in total in just one year under the early childhood care and education scheme. Some disadvantaged parents get greater support over a more sustained period. As we seek to meet the challenges of creating a full-employment economy, this is one of the matters we will have to address.

I dispute the view expressed by Senator Craughwell, and repeated by Senator Cullinane,

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that the jobs being created are low-paid, unstable and uncertain. That is simply not the case. CSO figures show that all the jobs created in the past two years have been full-time. Part-time work is in decline at present. In the early part of the recession, there was a growth in part-time jobs. This trend is now subsiding and there is now strong growth in full-time employment. The jobs are being created in high-paid sectors. More than half are being created in high-paid sectors, such as those supported by the IDA and Enterprise Ireland and those in financial services. Of course, there is growth in lower-paid employment also. There has to be a balance. There is a recovery in the growth of high-paid construction jobs. Therefore, the comments of the Senators are not true.

7 o'clock

We are examining the issue of zero-hours contracts. We set up a study specifically on that. We are examining the capacity to increase the minimum wage. What the Senators suggested is certainly not true. People keep repeating it. The jobs growth is very much built on very strong enterprises hunting down new sectors. It is a new economy.

Senator Barrett is correct on the neglect of apprenticeships. This has been a considerable area of weakness in the Irish industrial base forever by comparison with countries such as Germany and Austria. We do not have the tradition of investment in apprenticeships. The call that was made in January under SOLAS has been very successful. Some 86 proposals have emerged from coalitions of sectors to take up apprenticeships. Roughly 41 pertain to the construction sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture, construction and natural resources. It is encouraging to see 24 in manufacturing. That is a really good number.

Another 26 are in business services, namely, financial services, IT, trade and distribution, sales and marketing while 18 are in more personal areas such as tourism, the arts and craft sectors. There is a good mix of emerging sectors which need to be supported.

I agree with Senator Keane that not everything in the garden is rosy. We are on a journey but we are successively cutting away things that obstruct the growth of businesses. That is one of the merits of the annual Action Plan for Jobs in that each year we look afresh at what can be done and we set targets in different areas. We delivered on the 25% red tape reduction, with €300 million saved by business as a result of various red tape reduction measures by my Department.

With regard to community enterprise centres, we intend having a competitive call under our regional strategy for enterprise initiatives and this will be open to established community enterprise centres or private sector groups or any groups who are willing to form. There will be an open call to create stronger centres that can support start-ups. That is a very important part of our work.

Senator MacSharry highlighted the job losses in Sligo, which is very disappointing. I refer Senator MacSharry to what happened at Stiefel in Sligo, where a company facing closure re-invented itself and it is now in a growth phase. It has recently won a leading mandate from a multinational as a result of the work of the people in that company. We are committing to advance facilities in Sligo. The IDA performance in the north west is exceptionally strong. I do not have the numbers with me but I think it is approximately a 20% growth in the employment base in the past two years. That is a really strong performance in the north west. I refer Senator Ó Domhnaill to that information. However, we need to do more.

I thank Senator Cullinane because he has been banging on the door about the need for

progress in the south east. I absolutely agree with him on that. He has acknowledged today that we have made progress and need to continue along that line. I have dealt with his fear that what we have set out is unachievable. I believe the targets we set out are achievable. However, if we want to create a sustainable full employment economy, we cannot rest on our oars. We will need to see significant change in the way we create and generate challenge. That will present challenges in our universities and in the apprenticeship system. Those institutions will be challenged because they are the boiler house of the future of our economy. It is about a war for talent and it will be a challenging period for people working in those institutions to meet the growing demands and to open themselves to the changes that will be created by the growth sectors we hope to develop. It is interesting to read the IDA strategy or the Enterprise Ireland strategy and to note how central to that sector is the creation, development and retention of talent. There are many areas where we need to continue to be very reforming. It is disappointing to hear some people say, in the context of public pay, that there can be no linking or demands for productivity. Productivity in education means better outcomes for kids. We have to continually looking at how to achieve better outcomes.

Senator Ó Domhnaill is correct in that we have had to cut back public service jobs to fit the resources available. One could look at that from another perspective and see how strong the private sector recovery has been, with 90,000 extra people at work. That is a net figure, taking out the reduction in public sector jobs. We are in a position to rebuild public services in a very guarded and careful way and to restore some of the money that people in the public service had to sacrifice and to reduce taxes. If we continue to take a prudent approach and build those new commitments on the back of genuine employment creation and high productivity performance, we can deliver it.

I dispute the figure quoted by Senator Ó Domhnaill that 94% of the jobs are in Dublin and in the mid east, as it is called. That is simply not true. More than half of all the jobs created by the agencies are outside of Dublin and the mid east. The Nevin Economic Research Institute, NERI, report is simply wrong in that it picked a short time period and used statistics in a certain way to try to create a certain impression. In any one year, some regions will show a decrease. The very same statistic could have been presented saying that the midlands, the south east and the north west accounted for 75% of the growth. However, because some regions saw a decline, the view is distorted. One needs a more extended period of time to see where the job creation is occurring. There is plenty of job creation outside Dublin but not in every region equally. That is one of the challenges. The Department is creating a regional enterprise strategy. We are taking up that issue which has been raised here, in the Dáil and in the committees. We are taking on that challenge. It will not be easy but we are going through a process of regional stakeholder consultations, one of which was held recently in the north west and which was very successful. We will have regional calls where €100 million in resources from Enterprise Ireland will be available for people coming forward with sectoral or start-up initiatives that could work in their region. Those meetings have been well attended and there is a commitment. It is distinct from the infrastructural issues raised by Senators Ó Domhnaill and MacSharry. I do not mean to denigrate those because, of course, we need better broadband, better roads, better infrastructure and better water services and these must be included in a development plan.

I am trying to ensure the creation of a stronger enterprise capability in our regions by exploiting the competitive strengths of regions. Drumshanbo is a good case in point where a food hub has been created which is playing to the strengths of the region. There is a training centre, a distillery, a brewery and all sorts of food-related activities in a cluster and they are doing very

well. It points to the capability for building a hub of excellence in a fairly isolated area.

I thank Senators for their contributions. I fully support what they are asking which is to continue with the Action Plan for Jobs. It will be even more important in the coming years to have that broad-based approach. The one thing we cannot afford is to allow some sort of reform fatigue to set in or people thinking that reform was for the difficult times. Every growing business is continually looking at its processes, the innovation of its products and services and it is investing to build on that.

The issues raised by Senators, such as full employment by 2018, will be central to the work I will undertake over the remaining period available to me. I plan to deliver the roll-out of the regional strategy by mid-year, by July at the latest. I agree with the contention that employment is the most cost-effective anti-poverty measure. The risk of being in poverty is 37% for those out of work and it drops to 5% for those in work. If we can get more people out of the unemployed column and into the employed column, we will reduce the risk of poverty by seven and a half times. It has a massive impact on families. Full employment really should be a central policy. In my view, the purpose of the spring economic statement is to have a genuine debate about the sort of budget we want in 2016 but also about our vision for the country. For me, sustainable full employment by 2018 has to be at the heart of any vision. It is not just a narrow economic agenda. If we can get 200,000 extra people back at work, that is 200,000 lives back on track. It is 200,000 pay packages being spent in our communities, towns and villages. It is 200,000 workers contributing tax to allow us build the infrastructure and services.

The other side of the challenge is we must recognise that some of the success that we enjoyed and saw in the Celtic tiger years was not authentic. It was not only that it was built on construction, but also that it was not built on the sort of sustainable values upon which a community ought to build success. We have an opportunity over the next couple of years not only to be prudent but also to bring values to bear on the sort of choices we make. We must value enterprise and entrepreneurship, but we also must put in a process of solidarity with those who cannot achieve and support them. We need absolutely to commit to the sort of opportunities needed to equip people for the future, and all those require big changes. A full employment goal is a challenging one. It is a tough and challenging road for the next couple of years. However, it fulfils all of our ambitions, which is to ensure our families and their children have the chance to live and work at home if that is what they choose. It is central to what we ought to do.

As we approach next year in which we will hold elections, what needs to be at the core is the question of how we, as a community, sustain full employment. If I have one criticism for Sinn Féin and others, it is that I do not hear enterprise as any part of their vision of where this country is going. I never hear them say how one builds successful businesses that can grow, what the ingredients are to make that happen and how one celebrates those who make those businesses. That is very much a part of what we need to see as a country. We cannot reduce the difficulties, as if there is someone at fault for every difficulty. Difficulties are there to be solved, not to find someone to blame for them. Too much of the dialogue I hear in the other House is about finding someone to blame. Often, it is convenient persons, such as bankers, Irish Water or some whipping boy.

Senator Mary M. White: Professor Honohan blames the egregious behaviour of the bankers.

An Cathaoirleach: The Minister, without interruption.

Deputy Richard Bruton: As we look to resolve our issues for the future, the blame game will not solve it for us. It is about finding solutions to difficult problems. That is much more challenging and requires much more deep thought than we often have in the other House. In this House, maybe it is because it is built on the flat.

I thank the Senators for the contributions. We have created a moment of opportunity for ourselves. That is not to forget the difficult road we have travelled and the many who have been hurt on that road. However, there is a period of opportunity or a new phase ahead of us. We must seize that opportunity and put in place the right policies that will sustain us on that road, which can deliver so much of the aspirations of the people.

Senator Hildegarde Naughton: I thank the Minister for coming to the House today. What is clear is the success story he has within his Department and what the Government has done since we came into office in 2011. It is important we remind people of the difficulties that citizens had to go through since 2011. The only way we will eradicate poverty and achieve the services in areas such as health, education and housing is through job creation. The Minister outlined that clearly in his address.

The Minister is to be commended on his role, what he has done and the hard work throughout the country. The Action Plan for Jobs and the outreach into the regions will be critical. The engagement the Minister has commenced throughout the country with local enterprise offices, local authorities and stakeholders from all the regions will be key. If we want to ensure job creation, the right environment within the regions and the empowerment of local people, it is important that message goes out. For example, I saw what happened in Galway, the considerable goodwill there, and the suggestions of those who want to get behind their region and create jobs. The Government is creating that environment but local stakeholders have a significant role to play in this. The goodwill is there. Government, working closely with all these agencies, will be key in creating jobs throughout the country. I look forward to working with the Minister in his role.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Question put: "That the motion be agreed to."

| The Seanad divided: Tá, 21; Níl, 13. | |
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| Tá | Níl |
| Bacik, Ivana. | Byrne, Thomas. |
| Barrett, Sean D. | Craughwell, Gerard P. |
| Brennan, Terry. | Cullinane, David. |
| Burke, Colm. | Daly, Mark. |
| Coghlan, Eamonn. | Leyden, Terry. |
| Coghlan, Paul. | MacSharry, Marc. |
| Comiskey, Michael. | Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor. |
| Cummins, Maurice. | Ó Domhnaill, Brian. |
| D'Arcy, Jim. | O'Brien, Darragh. |
| Henry, Imelda. | Reilly, Kathryn. |
| Keane, Cáit. | Walsh, Jim. |
| Kelly, John. | White, Mary M. |

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| Landy, Denis. | Wilson, Diarmuid. |
| Moran, Mary. | |
| Mulcahy, Tony. | |
| Mullins, Michael. | |
| Naughton, Hildegarde. | |
| Noone, Catherine. | |
| O’Keeffe, Susan. | |
| O’Neill, Pat. | |
| van Turnhout, Jillian. | |

Tellers: Tá, Senators Ivana Bacik and Paul Coghlan; Níl, Senators Mary M. White and Diarmuid Wilson.

Question declared carried.

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to sit again?

Senator Maurice Cummins: Ag a leathuair tar éis a deich maidin amárach.

The Seanad adjourned at 7.30 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 30 April 2015.