

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN ROGHFHOCHOISTE UM EALAÍONA, OIHDREACHT AGUS GAELTACHT

SELECT SUB-COMMITTEE ON ARTS, HERITAGE AND THE GAELTACHT

Dé Máirt, 9 Iúil 2013

Tuesday, 9 July 2013

The Select Sub-Committee met at 5 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan (Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht),	Deputy Catherine Murphy,*
Deputy Dinny McGinley (Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht),	Deputy Gerald Nash,
Deputy Sandra McLellan,*	Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil.

* In the absence of Deputies Peadar Tóibín and Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan, respectively.

In attendance: Deputy Michael P. Kitt.

DEPUTY MICHAEL MCCARTHY IN THE CHAIR.

Estimates for Public Services 2013

Vote 33 - Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Revised)

Vote 34 - National Gallery of Ireland (Revised)

Chairman: I wish to advise members that they must turn off their mobile telephones as they interfere with the broadcast system.

This meeting has been convened to allow the select sub-committee to consider Votes 33 and 34, the Revised Estimates for the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht and the National Gallery of Ireland. The Revised Estimates and a list of suggested questions from the committee secretariat have been circulated to members. I hope they have had an opportunity to peruse them as it will prove beneficial in their engagement with the Ministers.

I welcome the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Jimmy Deenihan, and the Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Dinny McGinley. I also welcome the officials from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, An t-Uasal Niall Ó Donnchú, Ms Máire Killoran, an t-Uasal Brian Ó Raghallaigh, an t-Uasal Feargal Ó Coighligh and Mr. Trevor Donnelly. I thank them for their attendance.

I call on the Minister to address the committee.

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Tá áthas orm Meastacháin 2013 do Vóta 33, don Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta, a chur i láthair.

Members of the committee will be aware that my Department oversees the conservation, preservation, protection, development and presentation of Ireland's heritage and culture. My Department also promotes the Irish language, supports the Gaeltacht and assists the sustainable development of island communities. A gross provision of almost €255 million is available to my Department for these purposes in 2013, with a further €8 million allocated to the National Gallery of Ireland Vote.

Between 2008 and 2013 the overall programme expenditure provision, excluding departmental administration for my Department's four programme areas increased by more than €262 million or 54%. In broad terms, the 2013 allocations to my Vote group are as follows: some €133 million for arts, culture and film, including almost €61 million for the Arts Council; some €47 million for the conservation and protection of Ireland's built and natural heritage; almost €42 million for the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands and over €40 million for North-South Co-Operation, including support for two North-South implementation bodies - Waterways Ireland and An Foras Teanga.

As members will appreciate, a consequence of the significant fiscal deficit facing the country is that we just have not had the resources available to fund all the services that we would like to provide. However, failure to meet public expenditure targets now will have serious implications in the years ahead, including for our continued ability to maintain, promote and

protect Ireland's heritage and culture, to develop cultural tourism, to advance the use of the Irish language and to support the sustainable development of the islands.

The task ahead is how best to balance the competing demands of allocation reductions and the various upward pressures on expenditure, while at the same time maintaining the Department's core functions and the range of services provided to the public. In that context, I continue to place emphasis on supporting jobs in the audiovisual and wider arts sectors and in the Gaeltacht; investment in the culture and heritage sectors that will support cultural tourism as one of the most important elements of Ireland's tourism product; complying with EU directives, including investment in alternative solutions for those affected by the cessation of turf cutting in special areas of conservation and supporting the built heritage, the strategic development of our national parks and the development of our waterways in the context of the implementation of the Good Friday and St. Andrews Agreements.

I propose now to provide some further detail and my ministerial colleague, Deputy Dinny McGinley, will speak about the relevant aspects of the Gaeltacht, Irish Language and Islands programmes. Some €133 million has been allocated to the arts, culture and film subheads, including the National Gallery of Ireland for 2013. This funding makes an important contribution to protecting jobs and stimulating creativity across the country. Ireland's cultural and creative industries also play a major role in defining a positive image for Ireland abroad.

My Department continues to place emphasis on front line services, as well as on prioritising supports to artists. For example, the priority for the national cultural institutions in 2013 is to keep venues open and to maintain services to the public as far as possible. This is to ensure that these institutions can continue to attract large numbers of people, including overseas and domestic tourists.

In relation to film making activities, I was very pleased that the Minister for Finance in his 2013 Budget Statement confirmed that he was extending the film tax relief scheme, section 481, until the end of 2020. This is a major vote of confidence in the audiovisual production sector by the Government and will assist in giving the sector continuity and certainty for the future and allow projects to proceed in the knowledge that this important underpinning of the industry will be there for the next seven years. In 2012 it sustained 7,500 jobs, reflecting an aggregate investment of some €260 million. The largest single portion of capital funding for the arts will be channelled through the Irish Film Board, in recognition of its importance from a cultural and employment perspective. One of the key reasons Ireland continues to be chosen as a film location is the work the board does to promote Ireland in international film and television markets. The positive impact of this work is that it creates jobs in Ireland, leads to spending on local goods and services and promotes Ireland on the big and small screen to audiences of millions internationally. Given the significant investment in arts infrastructure in recent years, there is now a focus on ensuring resources are made available to support the operation of these facilities. Nevertheless, a small number of significant capital projects will continue to be supported this year, including the Solas cinema project in Galway, the Garage Theatre in Monaghan and the St. John's Square project in Limerick city.

The valuable work of the Arts Council in supporting the intrinsic cultural, tourism and economic value of the arts throughout the country has been recognised. This is reflected in the 2013 current allocation of almost €61 million. While this is a reduction of 4% on last year's provision, it will allow the council to continue to support arts organisations of varying sizes, from national bodies such as the Abbey Theatre to small local groups across a very broad range of individual art forms and practices.

VOTE 34 - NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND (REVISED)

In April my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, and I announced a further extension to the successful JobBridge national internship scheme which will provide for new internships in the arts sector. In association with the Arts Council, the new strand will provide exciting opportunities for those interested in careers in the arts. It will allow them to gain hands-on experience and enrich their skills. It will foster emerging talent in the arts and support local arts groups in theatre, film, visual arts, dance, music, literature and other areas of the arts.

Almost €8 million is provided for the Vote of the National Gallery of Ireland, in addition to the €125.5 million in funding provided for the arts, culture and film sector by my Department. In 2013 the gallery will continue to focus on delivering the best service possible within the resources available. Earlier this year I announced that additional resources of €10 million would be made available across 2014 and 2015 to facilitate the refurbishment of the historic Dargan and Milltown wings. Preliminary work in this regard will commence later in 2013.

I wish to speak about the heritage programme area. My Department remains committed to the conservation and protection of Ireland's built and natural heritage for the enjoyment of present and future generations and national and international visitors. A provision of €47 million has been made available in this regard. A further €1.2 million in funding has been carried over from the 2012 capital provision. Following a critical review in 2012 under the public service reform programme, the funding provided for the Heritage Council in 2013 will support the council in facilitating the grant-aiding of heritage projects from various sources and engaging with and supporting local government and communities in capacity building and support. While the scope to provide resources for the protection of the built heritage is constrained by the current contraction in the public finances, my Department will continue to provide funding for conservation works to heritage properties and national monuments in State care. In addition, the structures at risk fund which was established in 2011 to assist with works to safeguard structures in private and civic ownership that are protected under the Planning and Development Acts will continue in 2013, with an allocation of €475,000.

My Department is helping to increase the awareness of our rich heritage among international visitors and citizens. It is doing this by maintaining close links with local government, the Office of Public Works, Fáilte Ireland and the Heritage Council, by participating in major events such as the ploughing championships and by establishing a presence online through the development of its website and new social media channels. I am particularly hopeful the historic towns pilot initiative which is being funded by my Department in 2013, with an allocation of €240,000, will contribute to the heritage-led regeneration of three of Ireland's historic towns - Westport, Listowel and Youghal.

The key national heritage outputs in 2013 will focus on the maintenance, development, management and operation of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This includes meeting the running costs of the six national parks and 78 nature reserves, undertaking development and improvement works to visitor facilities, funding conservation-related scientific surveys and reporting to meet obligations under EU directives. The dispersed locations of national parks and nature reserves mean that they bring significant economic and employment opportunities to rural communities. Despite the current economic challenges, I intend to invest in visitor facilities in these parks and reserves to maximise their sustainable use and contribution to national economic recovery. It is estimated that there are approximately 3 million visitors to NPWS properties each year. They play an increasingly significant role in increasing Ireland's attractiveness as a tourism destination and investment location.

SELECT SUB-COMMITTEE ON ARTS, HERITAGE AND THE GAELTACHT

Turf-cutting and the protection of designated raised bogs continues to be a key concern. I remain determined to address the turf-cutting issue in a way that is fair, balanced and supportive of those affected. The compensation package approved by the Government as part of a special effort to resolve the turf-cutting issue and avoid the imposition on Ireland of major fines by the European Court of Justice will continue to be a major priority within the 2013 capital provision. Therefore, I have ensured funding towards achieving a resolution of this difficult issue has been allocated from my Department's Voted expenditure and the environment fund for a redress package for those affected. Some €6.55 million will be made available for turf-cutting issues in 2013 between the Vote of my Department and the environment fund.

Just under €42 million has been allocated to the Irish language, the Gaeltacht and the islands in 2013. My colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Dinny McGinley, will speak about the relevant aspects of these areas in his statement to the committee.

A provision of almost over €40 million is available this year to support the two North-South Implementation Bodies within my Department's ambit - Waterways Ireland and An Foras Teanga which comprises Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency. The Minister of State will speak shortly about An Foras Teanga. Waterways Ireland which is responsible for the inland navigable waterway system receives 85% of its funding from the State and 15% from Northern Ireland. A provision of over €25 million is being made available from my Department this year. Members will be aware that funding for these bodies is provided by my Department and the Northern Ireland Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in accordance with budgets approved by the North-South Ministerial Council. The 2013 budget is indicative only. It is subject to ongoing discussion with the co-sponsoring Department in Northern Ireland and the approval of the North-South Ministerial Council in due course.

I would like to refer briefly to two areas of significance within my Department's ambit - the EU Presidency and the decade of commemorations. Ireland's Presidency of the European Union offered a new platform for cultural links with our key European partners. I oversaw the accompanying cultural programme which represented an important opportunity to showcase Ireland's cultural heritage and artistic talent and to win positive publicity for Irish creativity on the European stage and further afield. Audience attendance has been strong, while feedback and media coverage have been very positive. In Berlin there were more than 1,200 attendees at the opening concert by the Gloaming. Visitor numbers to the "Changing States" art exhibition in Brussels have exceeded 8,000. The Centre Pompidou in Paris will attract approximately 500,000 visitors during the Eileen Gray exhibition.

The committee will be aware of a number of very important commemorations in the coming period. The decade from 1912 to 1922 was one of considerable economic, political and social change, not just in Ireland but in Europe and globally. I am proud to serve as chairman of the all-party Oireachtas consultation group on centenary commemorations which is dealing with the commemorative programme for the decade of centenaries. The programme will respect the various traditions on the island in a way that is sensitive, fair and reflective of our growth as a people of shared, disparate and, sometimes, conflicting interests, heritage and culture. I look forward to working with partners in both the North-South and east-west contexts as the various commemorative events take place in the years ahead.

I will be happy to expand on any matter Deputies may wish to raise after the Minister of State has made his contribution.

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Din-

ny McGinley): Tá áthas orm Meastacháin 2013 sna réimsí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus oileán do mo Roinn a chur i láthair an chomhchoiste seo. Tá sé i gceist agam léargas a thabhairt don chomhchoiste maidir leis na tosaíochtaí agus an caiteachas atá ar bun sna réimsí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus oileán, a bhfuil na feidhmeanna reachtúla ina leith tarmligthe chugamsa.

Is é an t-allúntas iomlán atá ann do ghnóthaí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus Oileán in 2013 ná €41.96 milliún. Ina theannta sin, tá allúntas de €14.613 milliún ann don Fhoras Teanga Thuaidh Theas. Mar atá ráite ag mo chomhghleacaí, an Teachta Deenihan, níl na hacmhainní airgeadais ar fáil i mbliana, ach an oiread le blianta eile, chun gur féidir linn maoiniú a dhéanamh ar na seirbhísí uile gur dheas linn a sholáthar don phobal. Sna cúinsí eacnamaíocha reatha, níl de rogha againn ach cinntí crua a thógáil arís i mbliana agus muid ag déanamh ár ndícheall chun an raon seirbhísí a chuirtear ar fáil don phobal a choinneáil ag imeacht.

Mar Aire Stáit, táimse ag tabhairt tús áite, taobh istigh de na hacmhainní atá ar fáil: don Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge agus, ach go háirithe, don phróiseas pleanála teanga faoi Acht na Gaeltachta 2012; do chruthú fostaíochta sa Ghaeltacht; agus do sholáthar seirbhísí iompair do na hoileáin. Ós rud é go bhfuil an fhreagracht uileghabhálach ar mo Roinn do straitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge, tuigfidh an comhchoiste go bhfuil mo Roinn ag obair go dlúth leis na príomhpháirtithe leasmhara chun an straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm thar thréimhse 20 bliain taobh istigh de na hacmhainní atá ar fáil. Táim ag súil le foilsiú na tuarascála faoin dul chun cinn atá déanta go dáta faoin straitéis níos moille an mhí seo, chomh maith le foilsiú na bpleananna forfheidhmithe faoin straitéis ag na Ranna Rialtais ábhartha, lena n-áirítear mo Roinn féin, ar ndóigh.

Ní miste a rá go bhfuil an straitéis fite fuaite le hobair agus le caiteachas mo Roinne sna réimsí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus oileán trí chéile. Tá allúntas de €8.223 milliún ar fáil do na scéimeanna tacaíochta Gaeltachta i mo Roinn i mbliana, chomh maith le hallúntas de €4.2 milliún atá ar fáil do na scéimeanna tacaíochta Gaeilge. Ciallaíonn sé seo go bhfuil ar chumas mo Roinne tacú le cur i bhfeidhm na straitéise sa Ghaeltacht agus ar bhonn níos forleithne taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht.

As an allúntas reatha de €6.723 milliún atá ar fáil do na scéimeanna tacaíochta Gaeltachta, caitear thart ar €2.5 milliún ar an chlár tacaíochta teaghlaigh, lena n-áirítear maoiniú do scéim na gcúntóirí teanga, do scéim na gcampaí samhraidh agus d'eagraíochtaí éagsúla atá ag tacú le cur i bhfeidhm an chlár áirithe seo. Tá sé mar aidhm ag an chlár tacaíochta teaghlaigh an Ghaeilge a threisiú mar theanga teaghlaigh sa Ghaeltacht. Caitear thart ar €4.2 milliún ar scéim na bhfoghlaimoirí Gaeilge faoina dtugtar cúnaimh do theaghlaigh sa Ghaeltacht chun lóistín a sholáthar do na foghlaimoirí Gaeilge. Is scéim teangabhunaithe thar a bheith rathúil í seo agus beagnach 24,000 míle dalta tar éis freastal ar na coláistí samhraidh sa Ghaeltacht in 2012. Tá an t-allúntas caipitil de €1.5 milliún ar thaobh na scéimeanna tacaíochta Gaeltachta á chaitheamh ar fhorbairt infreastruchtúir na teanga sa Ghaeltacht chun tacú le cur i bhfeidhm na straitéise ar an talamh.

Faoi na scéimeanna tacaíochta Gaeilge de chuid mo Roinne, tá an t-allúntas reatha de €4.1 milliún á chaitheamh ar mhaoiniú cúrsaí tríú leibhéal in Éirinn chun mic léinn a oiliúint chun freastal ar riachtanais Ghaeilge an státchórais in Éirinn agus ar riachtanais Ghaeilge na n-institiúidí Eorpacha. Ina theannta sin, cuirtear maoiniú ar fáil ón soláthar seo do chúrsaí Gaeilge in institiúidí tríú leibhéal thar lear a chabhraíonn le cur chun cinn na Gaeilge ar bhonn idirnáisiúnta. Chomh maith leis sin, cuireadh maoiniú ar fáil ón soláthar seo do thionscnaimh éagsúla téarmaíochta, aistriúcháin, logainmneacha agus foclóireachta, mar aon le maoiniú d'eagraíochtaí atá ag tacú le cur chun cinn na Gaeilge taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht.

Mar is eol don chomhchoiste, is é an gníomh is suntasaí a tógadh faoin straitéis ná achtú Acht na Gaeltachta in 2012. Faoin Acht seo, tabharfar aitheantas feasta do na limistéir pleanála teanga Ghaeltachta bunaithe ar chritéir theangeolaíoch seachas ar limistéir thíreolaíochta, mar a bhí go dtí seo. Ina theannta sin, beidh deis ag ceantair lasmuigh de na limistéir Ghaeltachta aitheantas reachtúil a bhaint amach mar líonraí Gaeilge nó mar bhailte seirbhíse Gaeltachta. Tá mo Roinnse ag obair i gcomhpháirtíocht le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta agus le Foras na Gaeilge atá ag cabhrú le pobail i gceantair éagsúla chun pleananna teanga a ullmhú agus a fheidhmiú i gcomhréir le hAcht na Gaeltachta. Chomh maith leis an maoiniú a chaitheann mo Roinn ar an Ghaeilge taobh istigh agus taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht, cuirtear maoiniú ar fáil d'áisíneachtaí a bhfuil ról reachtúil ar leith acu agus a thagann faoi chúram mo Roinne, is iad sin Údarás na Gaeltachta, an Foras Teanga agus Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga.

Maidir le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta, tá soláthar iomlán de os cionn €18.409 milliún curtha ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta i mbliana. Cuimsíonn sé seo soláthar reatha de thart ar €9 milliún do chostais riaracháin an údaráis agus €3.4 milliún d'eagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe agus teang-abhunaithe sa Ghaeltacht. Chomh maith leis sin, tá soláthar caipitil de €6 milliún ag an údarás ón Státchiste ar mhaithe le hinfheistíocht fiontraíochta sa Ghaeltacht agus tá foinsí maoinithe eile de thart ar €3.6 milliún ag an údarás féin chun cur leis seo i mbliana. Mar thoradh ar an maoiniú seo, táthar ag súil go n-éireoidh leis an údarás 400 post úr a chruthú sa Ghaeltacht i mbliana, chomh maith le bonn fostaíochta de 6,500 post a choinneáil slán i gcliantchuideachtaí an údaráis sa Ghaeltacht.

Is gné thábhachtach í d'obair mo Roinne tacú leis an chomhoibriú Thuaidh Theas agus tá suim iomlán de €14.613 milliún curtha ar fáil don Fhoras Teanga i mbliana. Tá dhá áisíneacht ar leith i gceist leis an Fhoras Teanga, is iad sin, Foras na Gaeilge agus Gníomhaireacht na hUltaise. Ach an oiread le hUiscebhealaí Éireann, tá an Foras Teanga cómhaoinithe ag mo Roinnse agus ag an Roinn Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta ó Thuaidh. Dá bhrí sin, beidh buiséad na bliana seo don Fhoras Teanga le haontú leis an Roinn ó Thuaidh agus le faomhadh ina dhiaidh sin ag an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh Theas. Tá soláthar de €599,000 curtha ar fáil i mbliana d'Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga chun a chuid feidhmeanna reachtúla a chomhlíonadh faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003.

Maidir leis na hoileáin, ní miste a rá go bhfuil feidhm thábhachtach ag mo Roinnse maidir le forbairt na n-oileán. Tá €5.9 milliún i maoiniú reatha ar fáil i mbliana chun fóirdheontais a íoc le soláthróirí iompair éagsúla a chuireann seirbhísí farantóireachta, lastais, bus agus aeir ar fáil chuig 20 oileán amach ón chósta. Ina theannta sin, tá €679,000 míle ar fáil i maoiniú caipitil i mbliana chun cothabháil a dhéanamh ar thograí infreastruchtúir ar na hoileáin. Tá léargas gairid tugtha agam ar na gníomhaíochtaí agus ar na forais a bhfuil mo Roinnse ag tacú leo sna réimsí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus Oileán. Is é an dúshlán atá romham mar Aire Stáit ná feidhmeanna mo Roinne a chur chun cinn sna réimsí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus Oileán laistigh de na laincisí airgeadais atá orainn agus cosaint a thabhairt oiread agus is féidir don raon seirbhísí a thugtar don phobal sna réimsí sin. Ach an oiread le mo chomhghleacaí, an Teachta Deenihan, beidh mé lánsásta ceisteanna a fhreagairt ar feadh mo chumais.

Chairman: The following headings are to be considered: programme A deals with art, culture and film; programme B with heritage; programme C with the Irish language, the Gaeltacht and the islands; and programme D with North-South co-operation. Vote 34 is for the National Gallery of Ireland. I will begin with programme A which deals with art, culture and film.

Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl: I thank the Minister, the Minister of State and their officials for the comprehensive and helpful report we have been given. The Minister, Deputy Jimmy

Deenihan, set out the real challenge facing the Government in meeting the required level of public expenditure in the current climate. It is a particularly tall order. We realise how major that challenge is and commend the Minister and his Minister of State for the efforts they are making, at least, to some extent.

Important work is being done by the Arts Council and its allocation of something over €60 million is significant. This year's allocation is down by 4% compared with a figure of 3.2% last year. One wonders, when we are told the climate is generally improving and that the cuts this year are to be less excessive than last year, why it is that we are seeing such a significant cut in the money being made available to the Arts Council. We know the Arts Council funds local arts centres across the country, and we know those centres are very effective at bringing art into the local community. What we do not know, and Minister may be in a position to address this, is the extent to which governance of those centres has been looked at by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht or, indeed, by the Arts Council.

The Minister and I have exchanged comments about, say, the Belltable in Limerick in recent times, following its closure. However, the closure of the Belltable, which was regarded as one of the more successful centres in the country, raises questions about the financial management systems that are in place in other arts centres. It is in everybody's interest that the systems and governance would be beyond question and that the financial management would be astute and effective in the current climate. The Minister might comment on that and he might also indicate how the Department works with the Arts Council to ensure there is an even distribution across the country, having regard to population and so on, of the moneys that are available.

With regard to the Irish Film Board and the work being done in that area, I salute the Minister for Finance for what he has done in extending the tax relief to 2020. In recent years there has been much harmful speculation as to whether the relief was going to be ended. This removes all of that and we have certainty in place until 2020. That is good for the audiovisual sector, which is highly productive. Is the Minister in a position to indicate what level of direct funding he is in a position to make available, and what funding he has made available in recent years, to production companies for the production of films in this country? Can he point to a film and tell us that the Irish State subvented it to the tune of, say, €1 million, €2 million or otherwise?

Deputy Gerald Nash: I welcome the Ministers and their officials. I wish to deal with subhead A2 of Vote 33, which had a provisional outturn for 2012 of €907,000 and for which the Estimate for 2013 is €1.337 million - this is a non-pay item. What accounts for the large increase in 2013 compared to the outturn in 2012? Can I have a breakdown from the Minister of what this measure funded?

Subhead A7 deals with cultural infrastructure and development. The 2013 Estimate is €5.29 million and I understand Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is funded through this measure. Will the Minister explain how much Comhaltas will receive in 2013 and what other bodies are funded through this measure? He might also outline to the committee what are the criteria to receive and qualify for funding under that measure?

Subhead A3 concerns the acquisition of works for the State to enhance the national collection. Is the Minister aware of any art pieces that the banks, particularly the covered institutions owned by the State, might care to donate to the State? Is he aware specifically of any pieces that might be in the ownership of IBRC, for example, in its Treasury Room, which may be of interest to the State and to the Minister in terms of the public's enjoyment of the art, given we effectively own some of the covered institutions?

Deputy Michael P. Kitt: I congratulate the Minister, Deputy Deenihan, and Minister of State, Deputy McGinley, on their work during the Irish EU Presidency. One of the things that came very much to the fore was the promotion of the arts, whether it was Irish music, song or dance. We often show the best features of Irish culture when we have visitors, whether they are visitors from Europe or visitors such as the Queen, President Obama or the Kennedy family, who were with us recently. There were some excellent performances and I would suggest the music, song and dance were probably better than some of the speeches.

I want to raise with the Minister the issue of the Solas cinema project in Galway, which is promoted by Ms Lelia Doolin. There was great co-operation with the city council in Galway and though the attempt to get funding together was difficult, I understand the project is going ahead.

Representatives of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann appeared previously at the committee, among other Irish music contributors. They made the point that there was an issue with funding. I raised the point that much of the funding has been reduced, whether that is local authority or VEC funding. The arts bodies in the local authorities often assume that Comhaltas is getting money from the State but it is unfair to Comhaltas to expect it to continue with the kind of funding it is getting. Given that every county has a fleadh, every province has a provincial fleadh and there is an all-Ireland fleadh, and given the great culture brought to places like Cavan and Derry in recent times, it is important that this funding to Comhaltas would continue. I would be interested to know why there is a difference in funding for 2012 and 2013. We must bear in mind there have been reductions at local authority level and even in the small discretionary grants made by VECs and others bodies.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: I thank the Ministers for their presentations. I have two points to make. On subhead A7 with regard to cultural infrastructure development, there is a reduction of approximately 16.9%. This seems a very substantial reduction. I know Comhaltas received money in 2012 and again in 2013. Will the Minister break down the reduction further and comment on what it entails?

On subhead A10, covering the National Museum of Ireland, there is a reduction of approximately 7.3%. I find this quite surprising when we have a decade of commemorations coming upon us. I know there is a commemoration committee but it is very poorly funded and does not have the ability to grant-aid other organisations. Will the Minister comment on this also?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I hope I am not straying into other areas but I wanted to pick up on that very point. I am a member of that commemorative committee. We are getting the most fantastic submissions and we meet relatively regularly. The next ten years will be incredibly important. I would have thought that, in terms of lifting the population and engaging people both at local and national level, we should be seeing that reflected. There was no mention in the Estimate of an amount of money. As I know many things will be funded, I would like to hear the Minister's view in regard to what is likely to happen in the next year.

On the areas that are self-funding, sometimes it is the ones that are not included about which one would ask a question. For example, the role of the chief herald has to be filled from within the National Library of Ireland, yet from what I can see that is likely to be a self-financing post. It strikes me that the embargo should be relaxed for that because it produces a return.

I looked through the Estimates to see if there was an increase in the amount of money available to upgrade technology, for example. I compliment the Department on the work it has done

on its website in terms of the linkages to different sets of records, but there is a good deal of out-of-date technology in the National Archives of Ireland and the National Library of Ireland. It must be quite costly just to maintain microfilm machines and so on but it strikes me there should be some initiative to upgrade the technology to digitise or computerise it, which would be better value for money. The fact that it is not included in the Estimates raises a question. When the 1911 census went live it had 4.5 million “hits” in the first 48 hours. There are real opportunities in this, and some of the areas can be self-funding. We can charge for services, for example. We pay for services already. We pay to get a certificate. The indexes for births, marriages and deaths recently transferred to the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht but the actual records should go live, as they are due to do in Northern Ireland. There is an income to be gained from that. There is a real interest in this, and there is not any resistance on the part of people in terms of paying for the record. They pay for that record already and I do not understand the reason that is not being considered from the point of view of the positive contribution it can make, whether it is this Department or another Department. I would favour it being under the remit of one Department as a one-stop shop, but I am interested to hear if any analysis has been done on any potential income that might be raised from that source.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: I thank the members for the range of questions they have asked, all of which are relevant. I will start with Deputy Ó Fearghail’s questions. As regards the Arts Council funding, the reduction in Arts Council funding was not commensurate with funding in other areas. I deliberately protected the Arts Council funding because of its important contribution to the rest of the country. There is a very good production by the Arts Council which shows the level of grant in 2012 and also the distribution of those grants across the country. I would strongly advise people to look at that because it shows the regional distribution and also the recipients of the grant. Having been involved in organisations that benefited from Arts Council grants in the past I appreciate their relevance and the fact that without Arts Council funding there is no doubt that organisations would go out of existence. For those reasons I deliberately supported additional funding for the Arts Council last year that was not commensurate with the reductions in other areas. Deputy Ó Fearghail will see that reductions in the past two years were considerably less than those in the previous years. That was a deliberate policy on my part.

As regards the governance of centres, we discussed that previously and the Deputy raised it in the Dáil. I agree with him. My officials, having responded to what the Deputy said, are examining ways to bring in, along with the Arts Council, the main recipients of Arts Council funding, especially the centres throughout the country, to examine their governance and determine whether we can provide them with a more sustainable approach. We can also advise them on programme and staffing arrangements and how they can use schemes such as JobBridge to ensure their survival and sustainability for the future. That will happen. I will let the Deputy know when it is on, and he or any other member is welcome to attend.

Regarding the film industry, it is similar to the Arts Council in that I give the money to the Arts Council and the Arts Council spends it. That is the way it should be. It is at arms length from me and I cannot influence it in any way. In that sense, I may have had more influence with the Arts Council before I became a Minister than now, because I cannot even make a recommendation. That is the way it should be. That is the arms-length approach that we copper-fastened in this committee room some time ago when the 2003 Bill was being debated. It is the same principle with regard to the Irish Film Board.

The Deputy asked about the number of productions that were helped over the line because of section 481 and funding from the Film Board also. Projects such as “The Vikings”, a tele-

vision drama series, realised approximately €23.5 million. The series was received very well in America and it is back again for a further series. “Ripper Street” yielded €11 million for Ireland. It was supported by the Irish Film Board and by section 481. The production is back in Ireland, having completed last year’s series. Another series, “Quirke”, was very successful also. It had a smaller budget of €7.3 million overall but was still very successful.

The animation industry is thriving and what is happening in it is very exciting. For example, an investment of €6.6 million was made in series three of “Roy”, which has been very well received. Also, films such as “The Guard”, which was very successful, would not have been made but for support from section 481 and also from the Irish Film Board.

The film board has been quite successful despite the fact that it is on reduced funding. It probably finds it difficult to compete with Northern Ireland because Northern Ireland can put up more capital funding. That was demonstrated by the fact that Northern Ireland won the Dracula project over us despite the fact that there would have been a desire to make it here. At the same time, with the limited funding available to us, we are funding some very good films. One example of a very small film that was made in my part of Ireland was “Pilgrim Hill”, which was about rural isolation. It was made for €5,000. It got additional development funding from the film board of approximately €10,000 and it has realised a considerable amount of money at the box office. It has done very well and has outperformed films that probably had investments of €1 million. The film board is supporting smaller productions also, which is only right.

We are working closely with Limerick City Council towards resolving the problem with the Belltable. I hope we will get a resolution because the Belltable will be very important in Limerick next year when it will be the City of Culture. It would be ironic if one of the City of Culture’s prime attractions remained closed. There are other issues with the Belltable of which members may be aware. For example, there is a noise issue, but it is hoped those matters can be resolved.

Deputy Nash asked a number of questions, including a particular reference to the outturn in 2012 compared to the increase in 2013 under subhead A2, non-pay costs. Actually, the provision for non-pay costs in 2013 is less than the allocation in 2012. I expect to find savings again in 2013, and therefore I expect that the outturn in 2013 will not be higher than the 2012 outturn. In other words, savings were made. This year’s provision was less than last year’s provision but the outturn was lower. We hope to make further savings this year.

Deputy Gerald Nash: What kind of projects are involved under Vote 34, subhead A2, non-pay items? It is not clear and I do not have the details of the Estimates with me.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: Travel and subsistence. Deputy Nash asked about subhead A7 and the contribution to Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. The contribution this year will be €1.59 million which is a reduction of 5% on last year. I recognise that Comhaltas is one of the most important cultural bodies in the country and it yields a considerable return for the investment made. The Fleadh Cheoil is the biggest outdoor event in the country attracting massive numbers which will increase in this very important year as Derry is the European city of culture and the fleadh will attract 300,000 people if not more. Comhaltas operates in every community in the country, including my own community. We set up a Comhaltas branch a few years ago and there are now 60 young children playing music who would not have played only for the presence of Comhaltas. It also operates a programme in the local primary school whereby every youngster from second class upwards can play an instrument while some children in sixth class can play five instruments. This would not have happened without Comhaltas. I have no prob-

lem defending the allocation I make to Comhaltas because of its contribution to Irish society, communities and all the volunteer work these people take on for the love of Irish music, song and dance. It is money which returns a significant multiplier.

I refer to important pieces of art held by the main banks-----

Deputy Gerald Nash: If I may intervene, I asked the Minister what other bodies are funded under subhead A7.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: For example, Music Network, NAPD, National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals, Other Voices, which is Philip King's project. We had a very successful philanthropy scheme last year. The programme for Government gave a commitment to promote philanthropy as much as possible in order to make up for the shortfall in funds. A pilot scheme was introduced last year with €210,000 which yielded almost €1 million. This was a strict evaluation for the arts community. It encouraged people to start looking beyond the Arts Council or the local authority for funding and to instead connect with the business community and to identify people who would be well-disposed towards funding the arts. That philanthropy scheme was successfully funded under subhead A7 and it worked very well overall.

I refer to paintings and other artistic objects held by the banks and which could or should come into public ownership. For example, AIB provided 39 very important and iconic pieces. From memory these included, *Men of the South*, *Men of the West*, *On the Run*, a portrait of Seán Moylan and many more. These iconic pieces are very representative of the period of the War of Independence and afterwards and are the work of some of our greatest artists. AIB has also made available all of its art collection to the Crawford Gallery of Art. These works can be displayed in any part of the country. AIB has been very generous with such valuable works of art. Anglo Irish Bank donated a number of pieces-----

Chairman: Is it the piece called *On the Run*?

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: No. That painting dates back to the War of Independence. The Bank of Ireland donated pieces to IMMA in 2010. We have received a large number of pieces from those three banks. Various artists benefited from the purchase of their work. When the banks were profitable and properly run, they were great supporters of Irish artists. I am trying to encourage other companies and businesses to do something similar by supporting artists and buying pieces from them and there has been a response to that request. They are buying pieces from emerging artists as well as from the big names.

Deputy Kitt mentioned the cultural programme which was very well received. An investment of approximately €3 million funded 400 events in Ireland and all over Europe. A major event was held in Berlin which was attended by 1,200 people and received rave reviews. I attended the opening event of the cultural programme which featured The Gloaming. People were spellbound by the music of The Gloaming, Martin Hayes and Iarla Ó Lionáird. This was a European audience but they were very impressed with the quality of the Irish music and the sean nós singing. Half a million people went to the Eileen Gray exhibition in Paris and there was also great interest in the Francis Bacon exhibition in the Musée des Beaux Arts which I opened. I thank the artists and Culture Ireland, Christine Sisk and all her staff, for organising a very good cultural programme in what are challenging circumstances. The artists benefited from the programme and also the country benefited. The funding of €3 million was a considerable reduction from the funding levels of 2004 but we got very good value for our investment.

Deputy Kitt referred to Solas in Galway. This is proceeding in stages. There is an issue with local funding. I have been in discussion with the local promoters. It is hoped the matter will be resolved in time but there will need to be more of a contribution from the city of Galway because this project costs €8 million and the city will be the main beneficiary. Deputy Sandra McLellan referred to subhead A7 and to capital expenditure in that area. Places such as the Athlone art gallery benefited to the tune of €500,000; Dublin City Council artists' studios; the Garage Theatre received over €500,000 last year. Some funding has been allocated for this year, including to Na Píobairí Uileann. I can provide the Deputy with a list of our contributions. The art and architecture of Ireland project received €100,000. The Theatre Royal in Wexford was allocated €30,000. It is an extensive list, all of which, in my view, represent money well spent. They are important and sustainable projects.

Deputy Catherine Murphy asked about the commemorations programme, in which I am aware she has a great personal interest. It is fair to say that the decade has been marked very comprehensively to date. The failure by large sections of the media to give coverage to those commemorations is a separate issue. We had several events to mark the anniversary of the passing of the Home Rule Bill, in Iveagh House, the House of Commons and Waterford City Library. That issue did receive some coverage; *The Irish Times*, for instance, produced a special supplement on the Home Rule Bill and RTE broadcast a number of relevant programmes.

It is probably true to say that people are more interested in the present than in the past. However, our efforts in this regard are continuing. We are promoting the commemorations programme through the website, Century Ireland, which had received, at last count, more than 100,000 hits. I do not have the up-to-date figure, but it has been a great success in a short space of time. If one wants to know what happened 100 years ago this week, the website will link to articles in various newspapers and to commentaries by recognised historians. It is a very useful resource.

As the Deputy knows, several important anniversaries are fast approaching. In the case of the Dublin Lock-out, for example, there has been a great deal of preparation in conjunction with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, which has included restoration of tenement buildings in Henrietta Street. We also have plans to commemorate the establishment of Cumann na mBan next April and, this coming November, of the Irish Volunteers. I am confident we will commemorate these events properly. There will obviously be a major build-up to 1916. The anniversary of the Easter Rising will be very much a flagship commemoration, with a focus not only on the military event itself, but also the whole cultural movement which inspired that event. Preparations are already under way in this regard. The Department has facilitated interviews - more than 60 thus far - with the descendants of participants in the Rising, which are very revealing. Very few children of those people are still alive, but we have spoken to grandchildren and other family members. We intend to bring all the families together in Dublin Castle in November. Some of the participants in 1916 went their separate ways following the unfortunate split in 1923, but they were all together in the GPO. It is very important that everybody feels part of the commemorations, which is something that can easily be achieved with good will on everybody's side. The Dublin Castle event will be the launching pad for our programme of 1916 commemorations, and members of the 2016 Oireachtas Commemoration Committee will be invited to attend.

Deputy Murphy also asked about efforts in the area of digitisation. As she is probably aware, work is under way on the letters from the leaders of 1916 to family members. Dr. Susan Schreibman, a foremost digital expert based in Trinity College, presented a proposal to

the Department in this regard and we have agreed to provide the modest funding. It is one of several digitisation projects happening at this time. The Deputy's query regarding the Office of the Chief Herald of Ireland will be addressed in legislation I present in the autumn session. We hope to begin preparatory work very shortly on the digitisation of the 1926 census. The difficulty is that there are legal issues regarding the publication of those data, if not for which we would have made more progress. The Central Statistics Office has concerns regarding the implications for census-taking in the present if the data are published. That creates a problem but does not prevent us from taking down the boxes and having the documents digitised. We hope to start the process very soon.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Given the absence, for a variety of reasons, of census data from the 19th century, a reliable census substitute becomes very important. The key resource in this regard is the register of births, marriages and deaths which, although not comprehensive, provides a great deal of information from 1864 onwards. The last Social Welfare Bill provided for the transfer of the indexes, and I understand they are already online on the website of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Has there been any progress in making the actual records available? In Northern Ireland, for instance, the records, which are held at Chichester Street in Belfast, are going online by the end of the year.

The hit rate for the Century Ireland website and the 1901 and 1911 censuses shows there is a huge opportunity and a very decent income to be made from transferring the historical records online. We might follow the example of Britain where a threshold of 100 years was chosen for births, 75 years for marriages and 50 years for deaths. Making those records available as a type of census substitute for the 30 or 40 years in question would be a game changer from a genealogy perspective. I do not understand why there has not been a rush to do it, particularly when a great deal of the work has already been undertaken over several years in Roscommon. The income it could generate would be of great benefit to the Department. People are accustomed to paying to access the records in the Irish Life Centre. We have at our disposal a really decent census substitute and a willingness among the public to pay to access it.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: I take the Deputy's point. I have discussed this with the Minister and we made some progress on the matter. We have made a start in facilitating wider access to this very important source of information. I am hopeful we will continue to make progress. I appreciate that the Deputy has a personal interest in this subject and is very well informed. I am sure we will continue our conversation on the matter.

Chairman: There are a number of headings left to discuss, including heritage, the Irish language, the Gaeltacht and the islands, North-South co-operation and the National Gallery of Ireland.

Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail: I will begin with the heritage heading. I commend the Minister on what is being done by his Department in Westport, Listowel and Youghal. It does, however, raise questions about the network of heritage towns across the country and the level of financial aid the Department is in a position to provide. In the context of the funding that is available, has an assessment been carried out in respect of discovering how effective has been the designation of many of these towns? In my constituency, for example, there are two heritage towns. If one were to poll people on the streets of Kildare, they would say that its inclusion under the heritage towns initiative was a positive. However, if one were to poll those in Athy - which is also a heritage town - I am of the view that one would obtain the opposite reaction. One wonders how we can ensure - in the context of the availability of funding and through the use of the Minister's good offices and those of his Department - that more of the type of work being undertaken in

Westport, Listowel and Youghal can be carried out at other locations throughout the country.

During the years of the Celtic tiger - and also in the preceding decades - there was considerable investment in the great houses of Ireland. However, I am concerned about the huge deterioration of thatched cottages throughout the country. When people come to Ireland - particularly those who have not visited for many years - and travel through the countryside, they are taken aback by the "bungalow bliss" with which they are confronted and also by the very impressive nature of some modern houses. Increasingly, however, we are losing our stock of thatched cottages. We will very much regret their passing when they are gone. I accept that there are practical difficulties involved. For example, the cost of thatching and that which relates to insurance are both prohibitive. In the past five to six years in particular there has been a dreadful decline in the number of thatched cottages. There is a need for active engagement on this matter and the Heritage Council, the Minister's Department and local authorities must develop innovative ways of ensuring the preservation of the properties to which I refer. As the advertisement says, "When they're gone, they're gone". When our thatched cottages disappear, they can never be replaced.

The Department is to be commended on the work it is doing through the National Parks and Wildlife Service. One continually hears positive reports about this work from people throughout the country. I acknowledge that the Minister has minimised the cut in respect of the National Parks and Wildlife Service but will he indicate the level of funding that is available to it? Good work has been done with regard to preserving endangered species. The entire country became engaged in a story relating to the fate of our golden eagles a few years ago. People watched with fascination in order to discover what would happen in the context of the preservation of those magnificent birds. They became angry when it was discovered farmers or other individuals had poisoned or shot some of them. There are other species, such as the red squirrel and the red deer - the latter may not be endangered but the sika deer has come to dominate in some parts of the country - about which I am concerned. In the context of the Revised Estimates before the committee, what level of funding is available for the National Parks and Wildlife Service to allow it to address the matters to which I refer and to continue the very good work it has been doing?

Waterways Ireland is a North-South body which is doing very positive work. As one traverses the country, one can see the benefits of the investment that is taking place. As a result of the awfully inclement weather in recent years, particular problems have arisen in various parts of the country with regard to river maintenance, particularly in the context of weirs. I am aware of cases where the Inland Fisheries Board - which is charged with protecting and increasing fish stocks - became concerned about rivers not having weirs. Farmers do not like weirs which are often - blamed wrongly in my opinion - for causing flooding in particular areas. How are the matters to which I have just referred addressed in the Revised Estimates. There are some issues raised by Deputy Kitt in respect of which I may be obliged to intervene again later.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: On heritage, I wish to comment on the historic towns initiative pilot scheme. I live in Youghal and I have witnessed, at first hand, the value which its designation as a heritage town has added. Youghal is, of course, both a heritage town and a tourist town. Some €240,000 has been allocated in respect of the three towns designated under the historic towns initiative pilot scheme. Will this initiative be extended to other heritage towns in the future? Will there be a second tranche of funding for the towns included under the pilot scheme? Will the Minister indicate if particular projects are going to be put in place in respect of the three towns to which I refer?

There have been some very disproportionate cuts to the funding allocated to the Irish language sector in recent years. There has been a 6.4% reduction in the funding for Gaeltacht support schemes, a 9.4% reduction in the moneys for Irish language support schemes and a 4.4% cut in respect of the islands. As far as I am aware, the Government has not yet implemented the provisions of the Gaeltacht Act 2012 in full. In that context, I understand a number of statutory instruments remain to be put in place. It is clear that there is a lack of resources available in the context of language planning. How does the Minister justify the limited spending in this regard and the reduction in funding in respect of the schemes, etc., to which I refer?

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: Deputies Ó Fearghail and McLellan referred to heritage towns. When they were first designated, heritage towns attracted a huge amount of interest. At the outset, the branding in this regard was very effective and people witnessed the benefits of it. Signs were placed on the outskirts of towns to indicate that they were heritage towns and this led to them attracting a great deal of interest and prestige. The scheme, which came under the remit of Fáilte Ireland - and Bord Fáilte before it - was allowed to lapse and no one took responsibility for it. When the residents of heritage towns and their representatives indicated their disappointment to me in this regard, I decided that we should do something about such towns. I mentioned the matter to one of my officials, Mr. Martin Colreavy, who proceeded to discuss it with Fáilte Ireland. As a result, the latter developed the historic towns initiative pilot scheme in order to revitalise the entire programme. Overall, there are 34 heritage towns throughout the country. For a variety of reasons, Fáilte Ireland chose three of these for the pilot scheme and despite the fact that its budget is extremely tight, the Department provided €240,000 - €80,000 per town. We expected that Fáilte Ireland might provide the same amount of funding but it could not do so as a result of the constraints relating to its budget. It did, however, provide a total of €90,000 - €30,000 per town. We also asked the towns themselves to provide €80,000. I suppose it is a nice pot of money.

We asked the towns to indicate what they would do with the money they received. They each came up with programmes in this regard and these have proven to be very effective. I am delighted Deputy McLellan has seen evidence of this.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: Yes.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: I have also seen evidence of it in my home town. I know that Westport is very well developed in various ways but the local council there will state that the pilot scheme has led to attention being focused on certain weak points that exist in the town. The council has taken action in order to address these. The scheme has been extremely successful but it is only a pilot. I hope that the historic towns initiative will be rolled out to the remainder of the 34 heritage towns, at a rate of three each year. In view of the fact that there is a successful template in place, I am sure it can actually be rolled out to those towns. There are approximately 26 walled towns throughout the country and some of these are also heritage towns. I hope we will be able to put together a package in respect of both heritage towns and walled towns and promote them accordingly. It is a great advantage for towns to have been designated as heritage towns as this designation is given only to towns with local and unique attractions. We must capitalise on that initial designation and this is just the start of it.

I hope the Heritage Council will take responsibility for the heritage towns in the future and we could fund the council accordingly. The council, in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, would promote these towns. Fáilte Ireland is working with my Department and I hope it will work with the Heritage Council. The council has the expertise and can advise on the development work and Fáilte Ireland can promote them. I hope both Kildare and Athy will feature shortly.

When Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil becomes Minister, he will no doubt-----

Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil: The Minister can tell them not to hold their breath.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: This is a good scheme, which is taken very seriously by the councils, the officials in my Department and Fáilte Ireland. It is working well.

On the question of thatched cottages, there is a little thatched house in the village I come from but unfortunately, some time ago the thatch got burned and at present a thatcher is on site restoring it. This little house is in the centre of the village and is a landmark. I agree with the Deputy that people stop to take photographs of it every day. People associate the thatched cottage with Ireland, especially the west. A visiting tourist gets a surprise when he or she sees a thatched house. I see that every day with people stopping to take photographs of the thatched house in my village. At present we provide funding for structures at risk, if a local council proposes funding for a thatched house because of its age and heritage value, that would be considered by the Department. The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government provide a package for thatching houses, as it is expensive to have a house thatched and the insurance is prohibitive. The thatched house in my village is in community ownership but this is the second fire in the cottage. The cost of insurance is becoming more relevant now than previously. The thatched houses are under review and if we had the possibility of funding, we would like to target it at them.

A figure of €110,000 is allocated in the Revised Estimate for the protection of the golden eagle, the red kite and the white-tailed eagle. These projects are going well. The scheme for the red kite in Counties Wicklow and Dublin has been quite successful. The introduction of the golden eagle and the white-tailed eagle in County Donegal has also been quite successful. I agree with the Deputy that these are important schemes and it is very important that we preserve the species that are under threat or in danger of extinction. The white-tailed and golden eagle and the red kite were endangered species. I agree with Deputies that some of the rangers in the National Parks and Wildlife Service have a very difficult job. They are advising people not to cut hedgerows because of nesting, not to burn commonages because of ground nesting birds and not to cut turf in protected bogs, which is forbidden by Irish and European law. Some rangers were threatened on social media and in other ways, which is very unfair on them and on their families. I hope that with the end of the turf cutting season this will stop. I was very concerned by this campaign because the rangers are doing a difficult job protecting nature, which will be beneficial for our country. They are public officials and should be treated with respect.

I referred earlier to the designation of heritage towns and I can now tell Deputy McLellan that as long as I am in this job I will be putting the emphasis on extending this scheme. The scheme has got off to a very good start and we now have the tools to designate other towns and extend the scheme.

I can confirm for Deputy Ó Feargháil that the contribution to Waterways Ireland is more than €25 million and that includes the major maintenance work. Maintenance absorbs most of the money because it is very difficult to maintain the system, which is approximately 1,000 kilometres. Much of the work must be done by people because one cannot get machinery to do that type of work. About 95% of the navigable waterways are available for navigation from April to October. We must constantly examine all of the waterways because obstructions can occur if materials are dumped in the waterways. Remedial work must be undertaken continuously on the 1,000 km of waterways. It is a very important resource and links all the island.

I will now hand over to the Minister of State, Deputy McGinley.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Thank you.

Chairman: Before the Minister of State addresses the committee, may I ask him a question? Conradh na Gaeilge wrote to the committee secretariat, which then wrote to Foras na Gaeilge, about the fact that there is no national Irish-language newspaper. This is a matter of concern. Is the Minister of State concerned about it and will he be raising it with Foras na Gaeilge?

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Yes, I am concerned by the demise of the Irish language newspaper. Since I learned to read there has been an Irish language newspaper. Decades ago there was an Irish language newspaper *Amárach*, which was followed by *Inniú*, then *Lá* and then *Gaelscéal*. It is regrettable that *Gaelscéal* has been discontinued, but it was subsidised by €400,000 per annum and the subsidy on each copy ranged between €6 and €7. It was not economically viable. I know that Foras na Gaeilge is looking at other ways to replace what has gone. *Foinse* is issued weekly as an adjunct to one of the national daily newspapers. There is a vacuum. It is envisaged that a new service will be provided some time in the future. I understand there is an online newspaper available but people like to have a newspaper in their hands.

Deputy McLellan referred to the reduction in funding for Irish language and Gaeltacht activities. Of course, our Department, like every other Department, suffered a reduction in funding. We are no different from those in the health and education sectors. Nevertheless, we are maintaining front-line services for those who use the Irish language, in the Gaeltacht and on the islands. The reduction is more pronounced in the capital budget rather than the current budget from which front-line services to the Gaeltacht are maintained. For instance, this year the Department has a total allocation of €8.223 million for language schemes in the Gaeltacht. This includes current funding of €6.723 million and capital funding of €1.5 million. This funding is to support worthy schemes to support the speaking of the language and its development in Gaeltacht areas and I am glad to state there has been no reduction in any of the schemes. This year the Department is maintaining the schemes it operated last year, including, for instance, scéim na bhfoghlaimoirí Gaeilge, under which approximately 24,000 students from different parts of the country attend Gaeltacht courses on an annual basis and for which €4.2 million has been allocated. In addition, there is the family support scheme which I announced in April 2012, for which €2.5 million is available in 2013. Its purpose is to advance the 20 year strategy on the Irish language. The Department is concentrating not on the infrastructure of the Gaeltacht but on giving priority to schemes that will protect the language and give incentives to parents and young people to have Irish as their first language. For instance, the Department is in touch with parents even before their children attend school. When children are born, parents are given an information package at a cost of approximately €40 - the Department has already distributed approximately 1,500 - outlining the advantages and reasons they should consider having Irish as the child's first language. As I stated, 1,500 such packages have been distributed and it is envisaged that a further 1,000 will be distributed before the end of the year. In addition, funding is available for Irish language support schemes outside the Gaeltacht, for which €4.2 million is available in 2013, comprising current funding of €4.1 million and capital funding of €100,000. Nevertheless, despite the percentages to which the Deputy referred, I am confident that the work will continue and that the Department will continue to support the schemes in place.

Did the Deputy also refer to the islands?

Deputy Sandra McLellan: Yes, I did.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: The Department also has responsibility in this regard. There is a provision of €5.9 million for the islands. The Department wishes to maintain services to the islands, particularly for passengers. A sum of €5.9 million is available for passenger, cargo and air services, as well as transport services on the mainland. The Department is confident that this amount will be maintained. The issue with which it is grappling concerns the ferry services that have been arranged, as well as the cargo and air services to the Aran Islands. Questions arose last year and I am glad that negotiations are under way to continue the service. The current contract expires at the end of August and the Department is confident, as the negotiations are ongoing, that it will continue for a further year after 31 August, with the possibility of it continuing for a further year. The Department is, of course, obliged under European Union regulations to carry out a feasibility study of the need for a continuation of this transport, but I am fairly confident that for next year and probably the year after it will be possible to maintain it. As I stated, the capital moneys available for the islands have been reduced drastically. Nevertheless, €100 million has been spent on capital developments on the islands in the past ten years. While that money is no longer available, most of the islands now have piers and landing facilities and my priority is to maintain these essential services. In that context, I am sure the €5.9 million available will succeed in maintaining them.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: That is good because I had intended to ask the Minister of State to confirm that the Department intended to maintain them. As he has answered that question, I thank him.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Yes.

Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl: Like Deputy Sandra McLellan, I had wondered whether the Minister of State was committing to multi-annual funding because that is what everyone is interested in with regard to the islands. Is he making such a commitment?

Tá dhá cheist eile agam ar an Aire Stáit. Cuirim iad ar son an Teachta Kitt, a bhí annso níos luaithe. Tá €6 milliún curtha ar fáil ins an Meastachán do Údarás na Gaeltachta. Sin ardú 1%, agus fáiltim roimhe sin. Cathain a bheidh an t-Aire Stáit in ann a rá go bhfuil Údarás na Gaeltachta ag feidmiú ar bhealach níos éifeachtaí de bharr gur cuireadh deireadh leis na toghcháin áitiúla agus go bhfuil an córas níos éifeachtaí ná mar a bhíodh sé?

Aithníonn straitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge gur féidir le muintir áit ar bith an teanga a fhorbairt go dtí an pointe gur féidir aitheantas a thabhairt don áit mar Ghaeltacht. Tá sár obair déanta in áiteacha timpeall na tíre. Tá mé ag smaoinemh ar Mhuintir Chrónáin atá timpeall ar Ráth Cúil i gContae Bhaile Átha Cliath, mar shampla. I dtuairim an Aire Stáit, cathain a bhéadh an pointe scroichte ag pobal le go mbeifí in ann Gaeltacht nua a bhunú, ag tabhairt san áireamh an obair atá á dhéanamh ag daoine i dtaobh gaelscoileanna nó i dtaobh a leithéid agus Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, a luaigh an t-Aire níos luaithe? Tá áiteacha ina bhfuil gaelscoileanna, a bhfuil na tuismitheoirí go hiomlán tugtha don Ghaeilge agus do chultúr na Gaeilge agus ina bhfuil craobh de Chomhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann ag feidhmiú, agus mar sin de.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta. Tá Údarás na Gaeltachta ag feidhmiú go han-éifeachtach i láthair na huair. Mar a thuigeann an Teachta, tá ísliú ar bhallaíocht bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta ó 20 ball go dtí 12 ball. Aithníonn daoine go bhfuil coiste dáréag i bhfad níos éifeachtaí ná ceann le 20 ball, nuair ab fhéidir go mbeadh an iomarca cainte agus nach mbeadh an oiread sin gnímh. Déantar níos mó gnímh ag coiste atá níos lú agus níos éifeachtaí. Deirtear go minic nach bhfuil ach ochtar ar bhord General Motors i Meiricea, cé gur comhlucht ilnáisiúnta é. Tá dosaen ar bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta agus tá ionadaithe ag na

ceantair Gaeltachta ar fad ansin.

Tá dhá fhreagracht ar Údarás na Gaeltachta. An chéad cheann ná freagracht fostaíochta. Sílim go bhfuil ag éirí leis an údarás é sin a dhéanamh. Is é an sprioc atá ag an údarás i mbliana ná 400 post a chruthú agus, chomh maith leis sin, 6,500 post atá ag cliantchomhluchtaí de chuid Údarás na Gaeltachta ina na ceantair Gaeltachta a chaomhnú. Má éiríonn leis an údarás é sin a dhéanamh tá mé sásta go bhfuil sé ag déanamh a chuid oibre go héifeachtach. De réir mar a thuigim, tá sé sin ag tarlú.

I mbliana, d'éirigh linn €6 milliún a chur ar fáil mar dheontas caipitil do Údarás na Gaeltachta, an méid céanna a bhí acu anuraidh. Níl sé chomh hard leis an deontas caipitil a bhí aige tá roinnt blianta ó shin, mar a thuigeann an Teachta. Tháinig titim uafásach air, ach tá €6 milliún ag an údarás agus tá acmhainní dá chuid féin aige de €3.6 milliún. Sin €9.6 milliún ar fad agus tá mé dóchasach gur féidir leis an údarás an sprioc fostaíochta a bhaint amach. Tá freagracht eile ar an údarás chomh maith, sin freagracht straitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm. Tá sé sin á dhéanamh. Tá obair ar siúl ansin go laethúil. Tá €3.1 milliún curtha ar fáil don údarás fá choinne an teanga a cur ar aghaidh. Tá sé ag plé leis na pobail Gaeltachta i láthair na huairé ó cheann amháin den tír go dtí an cheann eile agus tá 26 ceantar Gaeltachta aimsithe ag Údarás na Gaeltachta mar cheantair pleanála teanga. Tá an obair ag dul ar aghaidh i gcomhroinn le Roinn s'agam féin.

Maidir leis na ceantair taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht agus na líonraí Gaeltachta, luaigh an Teachta Muintir Chrónáin i gCluain Dolcáin. Thug mé cuairt ar an cheantar sin agus ar cheantair mar é i gContae an Chláir agus i gContae Ceatharlach. Tá ceantair ansin agus tá an Ghaeilge le feiscint iontu. Tá an fhreagracht ar Fhoras na Gaeilge an straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht. Tá Foras na Gaeilge ag díriú isteach ar cheantair cosúil le Cluain Dolcáin, le Ceatharlach, le hInis i gContae an Chláir agus le háiteacha eile ins an tír agus táimid chun cuidiú agus tacaíocht agus comhairle a thabhairt dóibh sin.

Ba mhaith liom, mar Aire Stáit, go mbeadh líonraí Gaeilge, nó líonraí Gaeltachta, ar fud na tíre taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht féin. Bíonn ceangal go minic idir bhaile in Éirinn agus baile sa Fhrainc nó i Meiricea. D'fhéadfaí ceangal a bheith idir cheantar mar sin agus áit éigin sa Ghaeltacht, le mo cheantar féin, mar shampla, nó le ceantar i gConamara, i gCorcaí nó i gCiarraí. Tá Foras na Gaeilge ag díriú ar na ceantair seo atá ag gníomhú.

Tá cupla seachtain ó shin bhí sé de phribhléid agam a bheith ag Glór na nGael anseo i mBaile Átha Cliath agus tugadh aitheantas dos na ceantair seo, ins an Ghaeltacht agus taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht, atá ag cur an teanga chun cinn.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: I have one more question, on subhead D4, Waterways Ireland. There is a promise of stage payments to Waterways Ireland to begin the process of making the opening up of the Ulster Canal a reality. Planning permission to begin the project was sought and is due to be approved at this month's Fermanagh District Council planning meeting and permission has already been approved in County Monaghan. Once the Government releases the funding, the process should move quickly and whatever land purchases are needed will be made. Does the Government intend on doing this and will Waterways Ireland have the adequate funding to undertake the project in 2013-2014?

Chairman: Before I call the Minister for that reply, I want to say that a couple of months ago we set up a sub-committee on the Gaeltacht. It will meet following the recess and we will invite the Minister of State in as, possibly, our first guest. The focus will be looking at jobs in

the Gaeltacht and other issues such as those he discussed with an Teachta Ó Feargháil.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Is the údarás coming in?

Chairman: Yes. We set up the sub-committee approximately two months ago. It has not yet met but will meet following the recess. We will invite the Minister of State to discuss those issues that he discussed with Deputy Ó Feargháil.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I would be delighted.

Chairman: If the Minister wants to address that question on the waterways, we will conclude on that.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: At this stage, the planning permissions have been granted. That, in itself, was a challenge because of environmental and other reasons. The next process will be the CPOs to get the land. In many cases, hopefully, we can acquire the land by agreement. That will be the next challenge.

There is an inter-agency group sitting. It is something I established, where the local authorities and the statutory organisations, North and South, have all come together around a table and are looking for alternative sources of funding too rather than merely funding from the Dublin Government. Originally, the agreement was that this would be funded by Dublin and the funding for it was identified with the sale of property at the time. During the Celtic tiger, the property, down in the docklands, etc., was quite valuable. However, with the collapse of the property market, that potential source of funding was not there to the same extent, although, with the property market now recovering, that property could become valuable again. Hopefully, it will and can contribute to the overall costs.

The next stage would be the acquisition of the land in order to provide the canal and the inter-agency group is looking at possibilities. Also, my counterpart in Northern Ireland, the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, is looking at possible funding for the small portion that is in the North. Funding may be available for that from the Northern Executive and, maybe, Westminster. That, obviously, would help. Wherever we can get funding for this, certainly we will be striving to get it. It will be incremental. We will have to approach it on a staged basis but the important point is to get it started.

It is a good North-South project. It links North and South. There also could be some possibilities under European funding, for example, there was funding available for the Ballyconnell canal and some of that was derived from European funding. We will be looking at every possible source of funding in order to get the project off the ground and to complete it over a period of time. Besides, Waterways Ireland, from its own capital budget, may have some small amount of funding available to initiate the project as well. I will be looking at identifying funding from different sources and, hopefully, over a period of time, we can provide the canal.

Chairman: That concludes the select sub-committee's consideration of the Revised Estimates for Vote 33 - Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Vote 34 - National Gallery of Ireland.

I thank the Minister, Deputy Deenihan, and Minister of State, Deputy McGinley, and their officials, an t-Uasal Ó Donnchú, Ms Killoran, an t-Uasal Ó Raghallaigh, an t-Uasal Ó Coigligh and Mr. Donnelly, for attending today's meeting of the select sub-committee. Gabhaim buíochas leo go léir.

MESSAGE TO DÁIL

Message to Dáil

Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 87, the following message will be sent to the Dáil:

The Select Sub-Committee on Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimates for public services for the year ending 31 December 2013: Vote 33 - Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Vote 34 - National Gallery of Ireland.

In accordance with Standing Order 86(2), this message is deemed to be the report of the committee.

The select sub-committee adjourned at 6.47 p.m. *sine die*.