

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM NITHE A BHAINNEANN LE MÍCHUMAS

JOINT COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY MATTERS

Déardaoin, 12 Bealtaine 2022

Thursday, 12 May 2022

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 9.30 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Pat Buckley,*	Tom Clonan,
Holly Cairns,	Eileen Flynn,
Jennifer Murnane O'Connor.	Erin McGreehan,
	Fiona O'Loughlin.

* In éagmais / In the absence of Deputy Pauline Tully.

Teachta / Deputy Michael Moynihan sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Employment and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Discussion

Chairman: Apologies have been received from Deputies Phelan, Wynne, Higgins and Tully. Deputy Tully is being substituted this morning by Deputy Buckley.

On behalf of the committee, I extend a warm welcome to Ms Helen Doherty, national co-ordinator of Social Farming Ireland; Mr. Brian Smyth, national project manager; and Mr. James McManus, who will be supported by Mr. Niall Cahill. I also welcome Mr. Willem Le Roux, co-ordinator; and Mr. Stephen Coates, Mr. Deante Troy and Mr. Anthony Redmond, who are young adults from the Central Remedial Clinic. They are all very welcome.

I remind members that they are only allowed to participate in this meeting if they are within the precincts of Leinster House. I ask members who are joining us remotely to confirm that they are within the grounds of Leinster House prior to contributing to the meeting. For anyone watching online, some witnesses are accessing the meeting remotely. Due to the unprecedented nature of these circumstances, I ask everyone to bear with us should any technical difficulties arise.

Witnesses are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. I advise witnesses giving evidence from locations outside the parliamentary precincts that the constitutional protection afforded to witnesses attending and giving evidence before the committee may not extend to them. No clear guidance can be provided on the extent to which such evidence is covered by absolute privilege of a statutory nature. If witnesses are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter, they must respect the decision of the Chair.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against any person outside the Houses by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I call on Ms Helen Doherty from Social Farming Ireland to make her opening remarks.

Ms Helen Doherty: Social Farming is an outcome-based placement on ordinary working farms. It is a simple but powerful concept that gives people who have challenges in their lives the opportunity to engage in ordinary everyday activities on ordinary working Irish family farms in their local community. The support is based on the relationship that develops between the people and the farmers, the families on the farm and the wider communities. People avail of the natural environment, connecting with the seasons, nature, plants and animals, which are all hugely beneficial for people with challenges.

There are four main areas of benefit for people in social farming, relating to mental health, skills development, social connections and physical health. On mental health, there is evidence of benefits for people as it gives them purpose and meaning in life, gives them valued social roles, connects them with nature, animals, plants and the landscape and gives them a sense of achievement. Often it is about getting the opportunity to care for somebody or for things such as plants and animals, instead of just being the receiver of care. It builds people's self-esteem, confidence and personal capacity. There are always skills to be learned on a farm, from farming skills to life skills. Building wider social connections is important for people. People build new

relationships and a wider relationship with the community that exists around any farm, creating a wider personal network. There are also physical health benefits for people involved in social farming. In a very natural way, people end up doing a lot more physical activity, even if it is just walking.

The farmers we work with receive extensive training. Farms can be risky environments so we take our farmers through an extensive training process of about 25 or 30 hours. When they have completed that training, we follow up with HSE-approved safeguarding training. We do extensive health and safety training, we vet our farmers and we prepare them for practice. They comply with our standards of practice and reach that minimum standard before we work with them. Our team across the country continues to support the placements as they become active.

This has all been made possible through support and funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Successive Ministers have been very supportive, from the early days with Deputy Coveney, subsequently with Deputy Creed and now with Deputy McConalogue, who was on a farm in Donegal very recently. Our farmers are paid for the time they devote. One of the first things I say to any farmer is that there is no point doing social farming if they do not have time to devote to people. They are giving up that day to spend time with people and there are also additional costs involved in setting a farm up for social farming in a lot of instances, although not always.

Social farming taps into the existing assets in rural Ireland, that is, the farm, the farmer and the community around them. It taps into something that is very valuable. We are responding to the demand for social farming right now. People are exercising their choice to receive care and support in different ways and one of the choices people are opting for right now is social farming. We are experiencing quite significant demand for social farming right across the country. These are local solutions to local problems and people do not have to leave their area. Some people travel some distances to go to farms but generally it is within a 20 km radius. People are becoming more visible as a result of their activity and getting involved in the farm. They will be involved, for example, in going to the local co-op or the mart and in the different activities that go on in the normal run of things on a farm. We are breaking down barriers at community level. That responds to Government policy because we are achieving better outcomes for our citizens and providing good value for money. Social farming is a stepping stone to the workplace. People come to social farming seeking outcomes in their lives and we help them achieve those outcomes. Social farming brings together the natural environment in an enjoyable and ordinary way and delivers significant benefits for lots of people. Who are Social Farming Ireland? Social Farming came from a pilot programme that was run by Leitrim Development Company, which was the rural development partner, University College Dublin, UCD, and Queen's University Belfast. Originally, it was a cross-Border programme. Subsequently, we then got funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and we now offer social farming opportunities to people right across the country.

We have approximately 150 farms on our books at the moment on which people have received training and are ready for practice. We have trained in excess of 600 people across the country. We have delivered 13,500 placement days to 1,400 participants. We expect to deliver roughly 5,000 placement days this year because we are back in full swing again and back to exceeding our 2019 levels. We expect that figure of 1,400 participants to exceed 2,000 participants this year. We have worked with more than 300 health and social care organisations right across the country.

If members would like to hear more about social farming, we have an upcoming conference

in Killashee Hotel on 1 June. That is something that will hopefully be of interest to people. I will hand over to Mr. Smyth now for some more remarks.

Mr. Brian Smyth: Social farming has wide support and supports more than people with disabilities. We have quite an extensive support for people in recovery from mental ill health. We have refugees, people coming out of the justice system and out of prisons, people with addictions, brain injuries etc. People with disabilities have accounted for almost 60% of the participants since we started placements on farms, however, so it is very significant and that is reflected in the European context.

There is no question, therefore, about the need and desire for people to partake in this choice of support across the community. It is a social community support rather than following the medical model. For that reason, it is quite innovative in that it links sectors that do not really naturally link such as agriculture and health and social care in that context. The innovation has been following policy delivery.

In that regard, we have linked with University College Dublin and other institutions, and with projects in the European context, to keep track of researching and reporting the evidence from what happens in Ireland. We deliver on and promote the vision and aims of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD, particularly those in Article 19 on living independently and inclusion in the community, Articles 24 to 27 on education, health, habilitation and rehabilitation and work and employment and Article 30 on participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport.

As I said, we are not providing employment on farms because there is a distinction between this and employment placements or job placements. It is a pre-employment support that progresses people toward their choices in life. Some want to move towards employment, whatever the nature of that may be. Others have different goals when they start out, and, after a number of placements, may move towards employment. It is, therefore, a progressive planned placement that helps people achieve goals. The goals can be very simple in many cases in terms of better physical activity, social interaction, establishing routines of using public transport and getting into a work routine of getting up in the morning and getting lunch. That is how we are delivering for people on the UNCRPD.

We are also delivering for people on key national policies with regard to the Government policy on disability, including the New Directions initiative, getting people into the community and innovating in support. Members will hear an example shortly from Mr. McManus in respect of the Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities report. We have also built additional supports in our local development company. This year, we applied to the social welfare scheme announced by Pobal and we have in place an individual placement support, IPS, worker based on the model of IPS that operates in the mental health service. We have a person working there to work with people who are actively seeking paid employment. We will hear from Mr. McManus later and he will give us an example of that.

Obviously, we have the national disability strategies and particularly the Towards Personalised Budgets for People with a Disability in Ireland report, which was launched in 2018. We have one particular example of a person on a farm in County Wexford who has personal budget support, and he and his family will give their experience at our conference. We are delivering, therefore, and want to deliver on national policy.

The activities associated with social farming and the model of implementation are very

personalised. People choose the goals they want and the plan around each placement works on achieving those goals. The placements are generally time-limited even though we have people now who have been on them for 12 months or two years. The view is always to plan to achieve certain goals and to go forward as opposed to just placing people for the sake of it. It is, therefore, progressive.

We want people to feel like they are valued, independent, active citizens through their placements. We want to take away the labels because farming is farming. It is ordinary; it is part of every community and people can access it. Our view is to make this accessible for people. Because it is an innovation in the health and social care side, it is that bit more difficult to mainstream the accessibility of it to find the funding to cover the cost of placements. We are very grateful to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for the funding in that regard.

There are gaps in the service provision to allow people to innovate and make the choices they really need. Choice is so important. Covid-19 contributed to gaps in service provision, which I am personally aware of because I have a daughter with Down's syndrome who is just about to leave the secondary school system. I am very well aware of the issues with the hit-and-miss nature of service provision and accessibility to service. I was a director of Down Syndrome Ireland for many years.

What we are trying to do is to provide something innovative that is very valuable. We have research and our document on research on the disability side shows the benefits, outcomes and value. It shows how valuable it is for delivering a better life and connecting people in the community with the natural environment and things that really interest them in order that they live a much more fulfilled and better life. There is a discovery process in this. Before the placement, there is a review of the placements and people move on. We are looking to move people towards those ultimate goals they have, with employment being an important part. We are always speaking to the political system and statutory systems to look at increasing the accessibility and sustainability of social farming.

There is a very significant depth of knowledge now in Ireland from our activities with a wide range of services. It is a collaborative project. We work across many different Departments. We have young people coming out of the leaving certificate applied, LCA, programmes, pre-exit from schools, looking at options they may take in the future. We have Ukrainian refugees actually taking part in placements on farms at the minute so it is very responsive to people's needs, no matter what they are.

What we have is a very fragmented funding model for social farming placements. We have very significant funding for this year, thanks to the Minister of State, Deputy Rabbitte, from her disability integration funding, which we received for seven counties. We had to apply numerous times - I think for 14 or 15 counties - and we received grants for seven. We would like to see a national multiannual fund that is some way embedded or mainstreamed in order that we can be certain of support for placements, which are very valuable. That is where I may leave it, as Mr. McManus will now speak.

In that regard, as a disability campaigner as well, I am very interested in seeing the reality of personalised and individualised funding. It has been very slow. We know that was legislated for in 2014 in Northern Ireland when we were working on a cross-Border basis. We see the benefits of that in terms of providing accessibility to social farming for people with disabilities. It is still in the very early stages. It was a key part of New Directions. It has not turned into a reality, although it has for some. There is a pilot process with approximately 120 or 130 people

in the country. We would speak to the committee, as legislators and as people who can move policy into practice, to make sure that becomes a reality for people. It will give people real feeling that the UNCRPD is actually a reality for them in making choices. Mr. McManus will now give us his input.

Mr. James McManus: My name is James McManus. Social farming has helped me a lot over the past few years. When I started going to social farming, I lived with my parents. I did not know where I would live in the future or if I would be able to get a job. After taking part in social farming, I have got better at a lot of things, like using public transport, looking after myself, staying busy and keeping fit and healthy. From social farming I learned more about farming work, how to work with other people and about cooking and healthy eating. Through social farming I made new friends like Tommy Earley and we stayed in touch.

Today, I live in my own house and cook and clean. I also have a dog. Now I have a new job at the mart with Ivan Moffit and Seán-----

(Interruptions).

Mr. James McManus: -----helped me to get this job-----

(Interruptions).

Mr. James McManus: -----with the money I earn from work-----

(Interruptions).

Mr. James McManus: I think I have come a long way-----

(Interruptions).

Senator Eileen Flynn: I could not hear half of that.

Chairman: It is unfortunate. I thank Mr. McManus.

Deputy Holly Cairns: Maybe we could hear the last two minutes again.

Chairman: Yes.

Senator Eileen Flynn: Is that okay, Chairman? It is not fair to the witnesses if we cannot hear half of what they are saying.

Chairman: Yes. Perhaps Mr. McManus could read the last paragraph or two again. I think Niall might be assisting Mr. McManus. Would it be possible for him to give it again? It was powerful testimony.

Mr. James McManus: Sure. Today I live in my own house. I cook and clean and pay bills. I also have a dog. Now I have a new job at the Manorhamilton mart with Ivan and Seán. Social farming helped me get this job and I am really enjoying the work. I am thinking of buying an electric bike with the money I earn from work. I have come a long way since I lived at home. Social farming really made a difference in my life.

Chairman: Thank you very much Mr. McManus, and well done. That is the essence of it. It is powerful testimony. I ask Mr. le Roux to make his contribution.

Mr. Willem Le Roux: Good morning. I work as a co-ordinator at the Central Remedial Clinic, CRC, on the employment plus programme. With me are Anthony Redmond, Deante Troy and Stephen Coates. I will hand over to them shortly. They have some interesting points they want to make.

For me, and on behalf of our small staff team, I just want to say that it is a real privilege to work with all our course participants. Helping someone on their employment journey is one of the most rewarding jobs you could have. Our programme is funded by Pobal. We are grateful for its support and assistance. The need for an employment programme for people with disabilities became evident after many adults completed the ability programmes and achieved their major wards at Quality and Qualifications Ireland, QQI, levels 3 to 5, inclusive. The next step is getting into employment, so our programme aims to increase the labour market participation of people with disabilities, increase employment skills and employability, increase good practices and supportive work places and increase paid work and placements for people with a disability. Through our interventions so far we have one course participant who entered into employment with a private sector company, two adults who secured community employment, CE, scheme places and one adult who is applying for the same. Six adults are actively involved in work experience at present and one adult identified self-employment as his preferred route. We have 20 adults on our programme altogether and everyone can now access the services of a guidance officer as we have partnered with Ballymun Job Centre.

Although the programme focused mainly on employment supports, we found it necessary to introduce other supports relating to mindfulness, well-being, healthy living and stress management. We have had some good results, which gives much hope and optimism. However, we have had some difficulties as well, which highlight some of the barriers people with disabilities face when looking for employment.

One thing I have noticed is that for many of our current course participants, it is their first time meeting up with a guidance counsellor. If you consider the average age profile of our participants, which is between 25 and 30, you might think that this is well overdue. Guidance counsellors can play a vital role in advising young people so that they can make informed choices about their future in relation to employment, education and training. Imagine the progress we could make if this process started early for people with disabilities and where they can develop career management skills early and possess the ability to have an honest and authentic understanding of themselves when leaving school. Unfortunately, access to guidance counselling is not equal for all. In 2019, Indecon published a review on career guidance. It stated:

Special school staff generally, as part of their ongoing work, undertake guidance activities, including planning for the child's future, assessing further education options, training, employment or other placement options subject to the individual's abilities. There are no guidance counsellors allocated to these schools and in Indecon's opinion there is merit in policy providing enhanced provision for career guidance training for teachers in special needs schools, and also in enhancing the access of such schools to wider career guidance supports.

One final word from me on partnerships. During the height of the pandemic, the CRC was fortunate to work with an employer to create a work experience partnership. This relationship has developed over time and is still growing. It took a long time to establish this partnership.

It required staff and our adults to work differently, take on new risks and have new expectations. Partnerships like this could pave the way towards employment in the future. It will be useful to promote and encourage such collaborations with both public and private sector partners.

I will now hand over to Deante, who will share his thoughts on the recruitment process.

Mr. Deante Troy: First up, the jobseeking process can be very tricky. CVs, interviews and dealing with nerves are things most of us find hard to manage. You need a lot of organising skills, IT skills and networking skills. These must be followed up with coping skills and being patient. There is also getting to interviews, which can be in person or online, being against other candidates and also included is Garda vetting, background checking and medicals. This all combines into a huge undertaking for a person with a disability.

The UNCRPD can play a strong role here to make sure disabled people have equal access and their rights to work are helped. Having campaigns to change the way employers think with disability awareness and accessibility training will help. We should celebrate diversity and include everyone. I enjoy being on the CRC employment course because staff are helping me to be more confident, to sell myself, know what to say in interviews and what not to say - the do's and don'ts.

I now hand over to Anthony who will speak about how families can help or not help when it comes to finding employment.

Mr. Anthony Redmond: Hi. I am one of the students on the employment plus programme. I will speak about what is good about family helping with trying to get work and the problems family can cause. It is good to have a family that helps out and deals with situations. Families show the benefits of a work environment and life-changing situations. From childhood onwards family members teach the skills needed in life, the benefits and other steps people with disabilities can take. Sometimes there are little issues such as family illnesses or health problems that stop people from trying to get work because they are worried about their parents. I like to return the help I got from my parents by helping them out as much as I can. Doing this while working causes a lot of pressure. I am working through it the best I can.

Mr. Stephen Coates: Good morning, everyone. I will speak about the rigidity that can be found in the workplace and in schools. When I was in second level education I was not allowed to do the leaving certificate applied or even to do transition year. I was told I was not doing them. When it came to the workplace in one place I did work experience I was asked to go in as a baker but when I arrived nothing was set up. What ended up happening was that I paid out of my own pocket for ingredients and supplies. That was quite difficult on disability payments. Another place I worked on a community employment, CE, scheme had very rigid standards. A CE scheme is supposed to be approximately 19 hours a week. I was working 40 hours a week there. There was no discussion or deliberation. I was told these were my times and to do them. When it came to doing the work sometimes with extra hands we were finished early. This left me, a person with ADHD, sitting around. That is quite unhealthy for us. We need to be moving. In my case if I am left sitting still I go completely mental.

Now that I have been introduced to the CRC I have found a new career path. Mr. Le Roux mentioned one student who wants to be self-employed. That is me. After the experiences I had in various workplaces I decided I want to have my own place where I can run a little bakery and avoid the mistakes I have suffered in the past. I want to have a bakery where everyone is welcome, whether they are disabled, blind, have Down's syndrome or are in a wheelchair.

People could come in and do some work and learn the fun of baking. That is what I enjoy. It is therapeutic for me. Thanks to working with the CRC I have begun to work on a logo and copy-righting and trademarking names. I am learning the business side of what I need to do. Thanks to Mr. Le Roux I have found a self-employment course in TU Dublin for which I have applied.

Chairman: I thank all of our guests for their contributions. They have been powerful and thought-provoking.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I thank the witnesses for coming before the committee. Their contributions on employment have been very interesting. I am interested to hear about how these schemes can empower disabled people to have choices and control over their own lives and the work they want to do after their experiences on the farms or taking part in the schemes. How have disabled people been able to secure paid jobs as a result of participating in these schemes? What percentage of people who participate in the schemes go on to paid employment compared with those who do not? What impact does it have on their chances of long-term employment and advancing their careers.

I will be extremely honest, and my comments are not personal. How people are treated in employment is something very close to my heart. To the best of my knowledge, and I know people who work in social farming, it is not a paid role. I am interested to hear more from the witnesses about how we could make it a paid role. How can we get support so that disabled people working on farms would be able to be supported financially? Ireland has the lowest rate of employment for disabled people in the EU. How can schemes such as those of the witnesses bring about systematic change for people with all types of impairment and disability? My questions are very general. I am really here to find out more about unpaid labour on farms.

Mr. Brian Smyth: I will speak about paid versus unpaid roles. There is a long history in Ireland, and we speak about that history, of people being taken advantage of. In the past, people in mental hospitals worked for free on the farms. People were sent out to work on farms. There were more recent episodes in sheltered workshops where people did not have redundancy rights or get the minimum wage. There is a very clear distinction between support and employment. We are very clear in social farming that it is a support placement. We have turned some placements into paid employment. The relationship changes immediately on that happening because people get all of the rights associated with employment, including the right to be paid the minimum wage and redundancy rights. We have a clear line.

There are people who have started work on some farms but other farms look for people for unpaid work. This is why we have a very clear process of informing farmers and participants what is involved. These farmers provide support to people who are very distant in many cases. The progression from social farming places to employment is at a low level at present. Mr. McManus is one instance. He started engaging with us in 2017 and started work at the beginning of this year. We made several attempts to seek paid employment during that time. Mr. McManus moved to employment during his placement. People need an awful lot of support to move along this journey to employment. Since the end of 2021 we have employed someone under the Pobal programme, which Mr. Le Roux spoke about. He is solely focused on bringing people into employment and is working with a cohort of people we have on the books in Leitrim and who are in social farming placements. We also have two individual placement support workers on the mental health side in our company. People require a level of support and time. Investing in people is the best way of doing that consistently, not short-----

Senator Eileen Flynn: Do the farmers get money for having people?

Mr. Brian Smyth: Yes.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I was fascinated listening to Mr. McManus speaking about how his experience on the farm progressed his life. It is remarkable what the farm can do, but there is something badly wrong with our system when the farmers get paid instead of the people who are doing the jobs. This is not an attack on Social Farming Ireland, and I thank its representatives for appearing before us, but people need to be aware of this.

Mr. Brian Smyth: People get a great deal of support. I do not want to go into the issue of value for money or the outcomes for people in institutional care settings that have been in this country for a long time. We have to innovate with people to give them choices in the supports that are valuable to them. Regarding the difference between the value of what is done with and alongside people versus the cost of that, Mr. McManus could not access a disability service provider at the time he was referred to Social Farming Ireland. He interacted with two farms. He has said that that support helped him – we know that – to move into independence. He learned to cook on one of those farms. The farms are focused on producing food and the participants on the farm in question learned to cook their own food.

The farmer is not getting paid for having labour on the farm. Rather, this is a support placement, which is very different. These supports are provided in a natural environment on an ordinary-----

Senator Eileen Flynn: I am sorry, but I want to be clear. Does the farmer get paid for having the person on the farm, yes or no?

Mr. Brian Smyth: The farmer is paid to provide support.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I thank Mr. Smyth.

Mr. Brian Smyth: Rather than being in a disability service where the desired outcomes may or may not be achieved, the person chooses the farm as the place to get the support he or she needs to move along with his or her life.

Senator Eileen Flynn: What percentage of the people who participate in the schemes go on to paid employment?

Ms Helen Doherty: May I clarify something? Social farming is in that space. The people who go out to social farms are not ready for the workplace. It is not a work placement.

Senator Eileen Flynn: Who says that they are not ready for the workplace?

Ms Helen Doherty: The people who support them, for example, Mr. Cahill, who was Mr. McManus's social worker at the time. People come to us supported by various organisations. Our placements are time defined, reviewed at the end and outcome-focused. We prepare a support plan for every individual who comes to the farm. Outcomes are identified for that person and the farmer works to achieve that outcome. He or she devotes that day and his or her farm to-----

Senator Eileen Flynn: I am sorry, but my time is up. What percentage of people who participate in the scheme go on to full-time employment? Would the witnesses be able to answer that question?

Ms Helen Doherty: We do not have statistics on that. We do not track people once they exit

the programme because they revert to the services that support them. However, a good number have gone on to full-time employment.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I thank Ms Doherty.

Mr. Brian Smyth: Mr. McManus accessed an employment support service, but it was unable to find a placement for him before he was referred to Social Farming Ireland.

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: I thank the witnesses. It has been an interesting discussion and I take on board the points that Senator Flynn made, but I want to place a value on the work that has been happening. I know Val and Una Cross in Drumshree, Rathangan, who are wonderful ambassadors for the concept of social farming. It was the first time I had heard of it. As hosts, they have gained a great deal. They have run open days and brought members of the community to their farm. Similar to Mr. McManus, those who have participated have gained a great deal through empowerment, learning skills and being part of the community.

While Senator Flynn was asking questions, I was trying to think of my own experience. I did social farming once in my early 20s. It was in Israel on a kibbutz. We were paid 1 shekel per week, or the equivalent of 50 pence, but what I learned and what I experienced over the few months I was there – obviously, it was a different situation – was phenomenal. It empowered me in many different ways.

I was delighted when the Minister of State, Deputy Rabbitte, made so much more money available for social farming within the seven counties. That was important. The model is important and could be applied across other sectors as a stepping stone to employment in a similar way to the Oireachtas Work Learning, OWL, system that we have in the Oireachtas, through which participants from KARE and WALK have the opportunity to be in a workplace. They are not paid in a similar way to others, but more than 50% of them have gone on to full-time employment, three of them in Leinster House.

It was great to hear Mr. McManus's testimony and about how the skills he learned through social farming helped him to achieve his dream of living independently and doing so much for himself. That is very important. Perhaps he might tell us more about what he feels he gained from being on the social farm.

I thank the witnesses from the Central Remedial Clinic, including Mr. Le Roux. One of the issues that he mentioned was career guidance. I could not agree more. It is shocking that there is no career guidance in special schools. It is wrong that we are effectively denying young people the opportunity to discuss what they would like to do when they leave school. Mr. Le Roux also mentioned partnerships. We must consider how to engender and support partnerships for the young people we serve. He might comment on this.

I wish to ask a general question about the key changes that the witnesses feel are needed to increase participation in employment by people with disabilities. What policy changes do we need to put in place?

Chairman: If Mr. McManus wishes to reply first, we will then take Ms Doherty, Mr. Smyth or Mr. Le Roux.

Mr. James McManus: I believe in myself, I have made new friends, I live in my own house and I have a job.

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: I thank Mr. McManus.

Mr. Brian Smyth: Collaboration is key. Mr. Le Roux referred to it as well. We collaborate with the families, advocates, service providers, the HSE, the Brothers of Charity, the National Learning Network, NLN, and farmers, but at the centre of it all are the participants themselves. They are directing what happens within their placements and go where they want to. We do not just place people on farms and leave them indefinitely. There is a goal, and we measure whether it has been achieved and move people along. There is value in all of the supports, elements and collaborators. No service or system is all bad. That is part of the innovation in delivering policy and change. It would be great if someone wanted to rewrite the programmes and systems, but it is not possible to do, so people have to collaborate to bring about change. That is the key. Innovating is what we live to do in that field, as well as to use the assets there. These farmers provide real value. The distinction here is that it is not employment, though some are taking people on to employment. Farming is under pressure and many farms we have are small scale and would not employ people anyway. However, they can provide valuable support that is absent for many people in, particularly, rural communities, or those people have to get on a bus and travel for an hour to a service and come back in the evening. They can access farms close by in the community and be included and seen as valuable members of the community. There is real value in that. As has been said, the people we have providing that support are in the community and have experience of the difficulties in various sectors. Many families have people working in the services or have experience in the mental health or disability service from their family circumstances and can provide inclusion in that regard.

The cost and value can be measured in any service, whether disability, mental health or other, and we believe in the cost-value of this service. Part of the reason we are having this conversation on 1 June is to look at a cost-benefit analysis of the support provided on farms.

Chairman: Mr. Le Roux has his hand raised and we will come to him but I am trying to get members in because we are under time constraints. I call Deputy Buckley. He is deputising for Deputy Tully, who has apologised for being unable to attend this public session.

Deputy Pat Buckley: Good morning to everyone and well done on the testimonies. We need the truth to be put on the table and the witnesses did that. Listening to the speakers, the first thing that struck me and that has been mentioned a number of times concerns mental health and disabilities. Supports seem to be practically non-existent for people, especially in the disabilities service, who need extra supports. It was also mentioned that funding is legislated more in the Six Counties. I remember in the previous Dáil working with Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin on disabilities. Again, it is about information. We learned there was a specialist centre in Middletown, County Armagh that covered the Thirty-two Counties and was funded by both Ireland's and England's education sectors. Witnesses are talking about funding, and looking at it on an all-Ireland basis might be more beneficial.

I want to go back to some of the lads' testimonies. It excites me when people are being given chances. It is something I am passionate about. A number of years ago a lady in my town started a summer school for people with autism or any kind of disability. I think it started 27 years ago with about 30 people. She has over 140 people per year for the summer camp and maybe 300 volunteers who come on board to assist these people. The witnesses are right in saying we learn from one another. It changed my children's lives because they stopped taking things for granted.

My biggest worry here is the gap relating the opportunity to get upskilled to gain employ-

ment. On the downside of that, many people will be restricted when it comes to hours, so the ability to make a living wage becomes a problem. If you go into part-time work, does that affect your social welfare payments or is there something we can do to offset that for people and make it more attractive? Unfortunately, the way things work is that if you go into a CE scheme or something, the lads here will not get paid. If they go into part-time work and get paid, do they lose some of their social welfare payments? That does not encourage anybody.

I love what Mr. Coates said about being self-employed. He grabbed the bull by the horns and said he would not take it anymore and would do it for himself. That should be an inspiration to anybody. If you are not happy with the way life is going, the only person who can change that is you.

The issue about employment and the property trap is significant, but the word “disability” is at the crux for me. Witnesses mentioned the UNCRPD on rights and a rights-based approach. It must be nine years ago that we did a streetscape in our town with the town council and brought in all the service users in the town, including people with disability. That section of the streetscape won a European mobility award because everybody was listened to. It is a two-way track here. We have to listen to the witnesses and also to take on board how we can assist them. If Mr. Le Roux, Mr. Smyth and Ms Doherty each had one wish that in three months’ time, through legislation, something would change rapidly and be of huge benefit to everybody in the meeting, what would that be?

Mr. Willem Le Roux: I thank the Deputy for that. If there is one wish from me, it is for greater flexibility when it comes to people with disabilities. When we started our programme four or five months ago, everybody came in on the first day saying they would only consider part-time positions, a full-time job was not for them at that point and they wanted to hold on to some of the allowances they received from the State. There should be encouragement to dream a little bit more, to be more daring and not to be limited right from the set-off. Flexibility and understanding are needed.

The partnerships we could have with employers are important. Much more could be done in terms of the recruitment process where some existing practices could be adapted, including practical things like the interview process, how people advertise jobs or the job description, to be more understanding of what people with disabilities encounter in their lives when it comes to literacy issues. Using plain language in advertisements is another example. We could do practical things. On our programme, we try to make people as adaptable as possible but there are limits to that. There can be adaptability from the other side, that is, from employers and maybe even Government providers.

Disability awareness training should be mandatory for most employers. There should be somebody in a company or business with knowledge of working with people with disabilities. I would love to see that being promoted.

I think social farming is an innovative service. During the height of Covid we had to be very creative in our service delivery and do things differently. Social farming has been going for a long time but it is innovative and creative. That is what we need to connect with so I am a big supporter of that.

Partnerships would be a key change I would like to see.

Mr. Stephen Coates: Towards what Mr. Le Roux said about the one wish thing, the risk of

losing disability payments is very high. For example, if you earn more than €400 in one week, you lose your disability payments for two years. That is a scary thing for someone with disabilities.

On what Mr. Le Roux said about partnerships, my hope is, once I get my business started, to come back to the CRC and offer partnerships. I will be someone who is giving back to the course. I do not know if that is good or bad, but it is just something I hope to do.

Deputy Pat Buckley: That is excellent. It is daunting to have something like that hanging over anybody's head. The possibility of losing one's payments for two years because of trying to better oneself and contribute to society is very worrying. We must look at this situation and look at it fast.

Mr. Anthony Redmond: Regarding losing your money and those sorts of things, after the age of 18, for some reason, the payment of disability money gets cut. This is the situation for me. It is then necessary to fight for your money and benefits. I would like to see that changing. When people have been getting money to live independently and to start their lives, it takes a long process to get back to where they were after the money is cut. This is one point I am thinking of.

Chairman: I will come back to Mr. Smyth and Ms Doherty and they will then be able to pick up on the points made by Deputy Buckley. I call Deputy Cairns.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I thank everybody for coming in and for sharing their insights with us. As Senator Flynn mentioned, Ireland is the country in the EU with the lowest employment rate for people with disabilities. This is a disgrace and it is essential we address this situation by removing barriers and ensuring people, especially young people, can develop their skills and confidence to gain meaningful employment and independent living. To help us make recommendations, we must understand the issues involved and this session has been helpful in that regard.

As a farmer and someone who grew up on a farm and then worked for a long time in disability support services, I am especially delighted to hear from the representatives of Social Farming Ireland today. Agriculture can be an incredibly rewarding and empowering career, if people are supported in getting involved.

I have a few questions, and I will start with the witnesses from the Central Remedial Clinic. Mr. Troy spoke about the challenges encountered in finding work and in the recruitment process. Will he discuss the idea of having a campaign to change the way employers think about people with disabilities? Mr. Coates talked about his experience on a community employment, CE, scheme and how it was not beneficial. It is such a pity to hear that. Community employment schemes can be very positive for people. Without going into specifics, I would love to hear what suggestions Mr. Coates might have regarding improvements that could be made to the scheme. I ask Mr. Le Roux to share his insights into community employment schemes with us as well, if there is time. Several measures and changes were referred to that could help to increase the rate of participation in employment among people with disabilities. Are there any other changes and concrete measures this committee should know about?

The representatives from Social Farming Ireland have explained how the organisation helps people to be active, independent, valuable and visible. Could they give us more of a sense of the importance of this experience as an empowering process for the participants and as a learn-

ing opportunity for the wider community? I thank Mr. McManus for sharing his experience of working on a farm. Will he tell us in more detail how that worked and how the work helped him to feel more confident and to learn new skills? Also highlighted by the representatives of Social Farming Ireland was the importance of personalised budgets as a tool to allow people to make their own choices, supported by their own budgets. Could that aspect be elaborated on some more in respect of the importance of such personalised budgets and how they facilitate a more equitable and accessible approach in social farming? The point being made by Senator Flynn was this same point about financial independence. We are all working towards the same goal. It is good as well, and this was another of the points made by Senator Flynn, for all of us to challenge ourselves. It is particularly important for us as members of this committee to challenge a potentially ableist view or culture. This committee focuses on the rights of people with disabilities and the ratification of the UNCRPD, but as far as we are aware, none of the members of the committee has a disability him or herself. Therefore, it is important we challenge ourselves in the context of these views.

The point being made in this regard is something Mr. Coates and Mr. Redmond touched on, as well as Deputy Buckley. I refer to there being a rights-based approach and people having the right to employment and to financial independence. It is not up to organisations like Social Farming Ireland, Down Syndrome Ireland or any other group to act in this regard. It is the State that must ensure people can exercise the rights they should have under the UNCRPD, and that they would have if we ratified the optional protocol. Those rights will include the right to employment, to live independently and to financial independence. It has been highlighted, in an inadvertent way, that this is something we need to push for more. People should have the ability to realise those rights, but they do not now. Mr. Coates and Mr. Redmond touched on this aspect as well. When people try to seek more employment or more financial independence, then their payments are cut. This is what must really be addressed to ensure people's rights to financial independence and employment are vindicated.

Chairman: We will start with comments from Mr. Coates and Mr. Redmond, and then we hear from Ms Doherty and Mr. Smyth. I call Mr. Coates to comment briefly on Deputy Cairns's contribution.

Mr. Stephen Coates: I thank Deputy Cairns. She spoke from the heart and I love that. Regarding the community employment schemes, the problematic one for me was flexibility. When I was working on that scheme, one staff member was doing everything and it took that person the full eight hours. I can fully understand that part. When it became the two of us working on the scheme, however, it was a much lighter workload. Everything was done within six hours, including the final clean-up. That left us basically twiddling our thumbs for two hours, which was tortuous for someone like me who has ADHD.

Another aspect I wish to mention concerns applying for jobs. I have applied for jobs online in the past. I know this is going to sound stupid, but the computer systems in some places will check CVs sent in online. If any problem words are detected, such as "disability", for example, a rejection letter is automatically sent out to that applicant. One rejection letter I got stated the company concerned did not have the supports to facilitate someone like me. In my CV as well, however, I had also mentioned that I do not require any additional supports. I do not need someone standing and looking over my shoulder. That was a big red flag in respect of annoyance for me.

Mr. Deante Troy: Do the people who work in businesses have the training to allow them to talk to people with disabilities? I went into one interview and the staff member looked at me

and then asked what age I was. I felt uncomfortable. I think people in these positions should be doing the training we do for our course. Managers should have their teams doing training courses to enable them to learn from us. If we go for a job and we have anything wrong, then the staff in the company would be able to know that a person with a disability was coming in and there could be a means of support in place. If we were to feel nervous or that something was wrong, then we would have someone to lean on. I did one job for a day, and I felt so uncomfortable that I said I would not be back. I got so nervous and I felt the appropriate supports were not in place. I went back to my college and said that job was not for me. Therefore, there should be people in companies with a background to allow them to provide support for people to lean on.

Chairman: Would Mr. Redmond like to comment on the points made by Deputy Cairns?

Mr. Anthony Redmond: I am sorry, I could not hear the Deputy. What were her points?

Chairman: The main point mentioned, and this has been coming across strongly during this meeting, concerned the barriers to employment and the fear and dread of losing entitlements and benefits. Perhaps Mr. Redmond would comment on those aspects.

Mr. Anthony Redmond: If people with disabilities do full-time work, they lose half their disability allowance payment. In some regards, it is true that people get more from the experience, but the problem is we lose the benefits. This is not all about the money. Also important are the additional benefits and entitlements in this regard. I refer to a person with a disability going into full-time employment and losing his or her entitlements. That is why I do not want full-time employment. The problem lies in trying to find part-time work these days. It is harder to do now more than ever. In addition, if someone's family has illnesses and so on, that person has to look after them independently in addition to himself or herself. The life change is more emotional for people when they are trying to find a job. If they find a job, they do not know if the hours will be the best or the work environment will be suited to their needs and so on.

Ms Helen Doherty: There are many issues in what people have been saying. I would love to debate this all day. Two words that come up probably every day in my job, in conversation or when I speak to my staff are "person centred". Everything we do is person centred and in response to what a person actually needs. When it comes to legislation, we are talking about personal budgets. That enables people to make choices about the support they receive. This is not just about social farming. I totally support what Mr. Le Roux said about flexibility being key. We have become too systemic and too rigid about our responses to people. All of those things can be solved by people having access to their own budget and being able to make choices, with people who know them best and who support and advocate for people, supporting them to make good choices in their lives. That comes with access to a budget. We use that word every week and almost every day.

It is also about allowing and supporting businesses and communities to create opportunities for people and to value the people who are in their own communities. Finding valued social roles is also very important in social farming because we see it a lot. People grow and develop into various roles, not just employment, but often valued roles in their community. Again, it is about that response to what the person wants. If the person wants paid employment, he or she should be supported to pursue and achieve that, but those supports can be difficult to find.

Those working in the system need to be educated. We get involved in talks with third level colleges in Ireland. We go in, inform people about social farming and explain how we can de-

liver on policy and what they want to achieve in their careers for the people they are supporting. Those are just some of the things we do.

Mr. Brian Smyth: To address Deputy Buckley's question, flexibility in the systems is one issue. Personalised budgets certainly give people choice in advance of employment, but it also about flexibility in the systems, such as community employment, CE. In the past, people could get their disability payment and CE payment together. That ended with the crash. Those kinds of things were there but have changed over time.

It is about focusing and investing in people and allowing flexibility. All our lives change. We need to front-load more investment for people with disabilities when they are in the education system and when they transition after school into training, further education and employment. If we have a happy, fulfilled citizen for the vast majority of his or her life, and that individual may need more supports later in life, as we all will, that person becomes independent and an active, contributing citizen. People with disabilities have rights. The rights-based approach Deputy Cairns mentioned is absolutely the way to go, but a person cannot have a right unless there is flexibility in the budgets to make those choices to give an individual those rights. That is what the system has been finding it difficult to do.

When innovation comes along, we have found we are up against it. A lot of money, some €80 million, is going into disability service provision but the cost and value of what that delivers is key. We know when people get choice, they make good choices for themselves. These are not always perfect choices but they make choices that are good for them. We still do not have access to that in the way we should. That flexibility relates to the systemic arrangements for social welfare payments, electronic data systems, and rehabilitative training, RT, placements. People have no choice but to take the RT placement they are given, especially in rural areas where there is limited or maybe no provision. When somebody gets a choice, that person is very innovative. We believe in flexibility, both in the current systems and in innovation, and allowing people to come in to look at the real value of rights-based approaches, if there is proofing on the delivery for an individual and investing in people.

We have documented the empowering process that happens in social farming. We have a number of these reports on our website that relate to the mental health service, people with disabilities and young people. We can see and are reporting and researching how individuals change in the way they view life, the choices they will make and how the system can support them with innovation. There is a significant empowering process when people are seen as citizens as opposed to different. That is certainly happening on farms.

Chairman: We are under severe time constraints. I will share the next slot with Senator McGreehan and then go to our witnesses.

Senator Erin McGreehan: Our guests are very welcome. It is great to have them here. They might be familiar with my surname because my brother, Matthew McGreehan, is a very proud social farmer. Our family has been very committed to social farming for many years now. I am a major advocate for it. I heard Senator Flynn speak about dressing it up as unpaid labour, but social farming is so much more than the work done on a farm. It is about inclusion into a family and community. It is also a complementary therapy. So much learning and education goes on in social farming, from learning to bake bread, growing your own food and interacting with people you might not know. My brother spent yesterday at the agricultural show in Balmoral in the North with his social farmers. He brought them up there for the day to show it to them. To be included in that is, in itself, a learning experience and a therapy. I am

a major advocate for it. As Ms Doherty said, it is about that personalised budget. It is about people being able to say this is the social prescribing they want to do, that they do not want to be in a day centre today but out on the farm, that they do not want to sit but want to be an advocate for themselves, and that they want to be able to social prescribe and be on a farm today. Maybe they want to be on a guided walk on another day or do art. Social farming is about that concept of social prescribing and complementary therapy. It is not about unpaid labour. It is about so much more.

Following on from that, is there a further step we can take so it can be more like a CE or FÁS scheme? Based on the experience of the witnesses, can we add that on so that people with disabilities are empowered and raised up? We know that people come on. I have seen them grow, not just people with disabilities but those suffering from drug addiction and mental health difficulties, when they work on the farm. They grow, change, develop and become the people they are and want to be. After personalised budgets and that right to choose, what is the next step we can take to advance towards that employment on a bigger farm? Many of the social farmers are on smaller, family farms, which are pretty much on the edge of their seats when it comes to making ends meet. How do we move it on to the next stage?

Chairman: We have had various discussions and what is coming across very powerfully from members and Social Farming Ireland is the inflexibility in the schemes. I believe in social farming. I farm on a social basis at the weekend to take myself back to reality. I have two kids who would be on the farm morning, noon and night if they could, no matter what they are doing. There is a significant benefit to be had from it and I have seen many people benefit. Every member raised the disability allowance and the inflexibility of the scheme. Everybody is trying to advance the system. I have spoken with people from different services in the past couple of weeks and with the Department of Social Protection. A rural social scheme was developed 20 years ago for people on low-income farms that did not receive farm assist so that they could get jobs with local development companies and with communities. That did significant good for the women on the farms. If a farmer had a low income, a member of the family could participate in the rural social scheme. It transformed lives. I could name people who had been working in the home who got out to work. It transformed their lives. The flexibility in that scheme allowed that to happen.

We need to develop a disability social scheme or some new mechanism. We have had rigid systems for the past number of years. We understand that systems will be rigid, but, in the end, many farmers and communities are wondering what has happened with the social farming model. Mr. McManus's point about the benefit is powerful. It has enormous potential. We have to consider budgets and accessibility. Flexibility was raised repeatedly by both us and the witnesses. How do we ensure flexibility in the system? One person involved in social farming and community development asked about looking at the rural social scheme. That related to farming, but why can we not examine that scheme and tailor it for people with disabilities who can continue to work and derive both a therapeutic value and a sense of commitment to society from their work?

Deputy Murnane O'Connor has joined us. We are under serious time constraints.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: Apologies, I was at another meeting.

Chairman: That is okay. I understand everybody is bilocated on Thursday mornings. Will the witnesses respond? We have work to do to advance flexibility and access to budgets.

Mr. Brian Smyth: In response to Senator McGreehan, we see the value of social farming every day of the week. We know from more than ten years involved in the practice that it works. As one of the 46 Irish Local Development Network companies, we implement the rural social scheme in County Leitrim. We have 130 participants. They are farm family members who access what is effectively a labour market intervention. There are certainly opportunities to look at how people with disabilities could access a similar programme. Some of the farmers who provide support could overlay that scheme. We want to avoid segregation and differentiating people with disabilities. They need to be part of everyday life and seen as just citizens who have particular needs. They need to partake in the mainstream, rather than setting up separate schemes.

It is worth looking at how the farming asset can be unlocked to support people with disabilities. We have shown what is achievable in the social farming that is happening across Ireland, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in a number of projects. The Chairman referred to connecting people. There is no doubt about a disconnection across all sectors of society between the natural environment and its rhythms, which can ground people. There is a disconnection from food. People increasingly do not realise where their food comes from. Engaging in farm activity brings that back to basics. When there is a breakdown in people's lives due to unemployment, disability, addiction, prison or whatever it may be, they can reconnect with people, the environment, the natural rhythms and the rhythms of getting up, getting out and engaging other people. That is the value that any natural setting like farming can provide.

We would like conversations with the Department of Social Protection. I recently contributed to a European network of employment services on social farming and what it means for employment services. Community employment certainly has a place. Many people on disability payments do not access community employment because they would lose their payment and they are not eligible for community employment. Do we want to create a scheme just for people with disabilities and segregate them yet again? I do not think so, if we want to take a rights-based approach. Some people who have disabilities participate in the rural social scheme, but the main scheme they access is farm assist with a payment based on farm income. There are eligibility issues.

We innovated with social farming and we are adding to and complementing that with the individual placement support programme, funded by Pobal. These approaches can be modified. We are doing in a rural setting what Mr. Le Roux is doing in an urban setting. That provides experience with social farming. It happens around the country. We have an individual placement and support, IPS, worker working with 25 people this year. It is just a one-year programme. That kind of programme could be run out and linked properly to projects such as our own and others to support people like those here today to move to self-employment. That is where flexibility comes in. We designed the IPS programme with Mr. Mark Willis, who is in the post at the minute, based on our experience of supporting people with disabilities in County Leitrim and with social farming. Our plan is to have 12 people with disabilities employed in Leitrim who were not employed this time last year. That kind of collaboration and innovation will be key. The same can happen with the rural social scheme, the Tús programme and others that we implement as local development companies around the country.

Chairman: I ask Mr. Coates and Mr. Le Roux to make a brief comment to conclude because I would like to hear their thoughts.

Mr. Stephen Coates: I realised something when I was listening. When one thinks of au-

tism, one always thinks of people we see in the news who are termed as “high-functioning autistics”. I cannot think of the appropriate term. They are more mute than vocal. It would be handy if one could get employers to meet the person so that they can see that this person is not like the character from a very famous film involving a person with autism, and actually more like a real person with whom they could actually work.

Mr. Willem Le Roux: On the social farming model and the enormous power of good it can do, even in our current context when prices are rising there are sustainability and environmental issues and what a great initiative to get involved in.

Let us not forget about students at a very early age in special needs schools. Let us get them to start thinking about their careers at a very early age. I was involved in a pilot project where we worked with 14-year-olds. One can see results very quickly when one gets people thinking about careers at an early stage rather than leaving that consideration until the age of 20 or 25. I think we can do better there.

Our programme is funded until the end of the year and it would be lovely to see continuation of some of the work we have done there.

Mr. Brian Smyth: I just want to address the point of free labour or work on farms. Many of the placements that we do onto farms never work on the farm. Others get involved in the activities and that includes work activities, but such activities are part of the process of supporting them as opposed to working and being productive in that regard. It is about the support that this provides. For instance, we have a number of people who are transitioning out from a disability service in the north west under the decongregation plan. Part of the process was that these people would go to the farm before leaving the institutional setting, during the process of moving into their own homes, and after. Most people had spent a generation in that congregated setting. They were on the farm for a period of time. Some of the people have issues with sight difficulties and most are in wheelchairs. They had a really good experience, including the smells they had not encountered for many years. The smells on a farm are very important; it is a sensory experience. They were involved in a variety of activities but they were not working on the farm. There was no question of them being taken advantage of. I want to clarify that this is not a work scheme. People are not working on farms. They are there and engage in the activities on a working farm, including going to the Balmoral show and attending vintage events. There is a multitude of things that happen. I just wanted to clarify that.

Chairman: Yes. It is hugely beneficial for the participants and we should never lose sight of that.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O’Connor: It is about quality of life.

Chairman: Yes, it is about quality of life. I feel embarrassed that we must cut this conversation short this morning. There is a powerful amount of work that we need to do to advance this issue. I thank all the witnesses in this morning’s meeting for their genuineness and sense of purpose. We have an awfully long journey to go on to make sure we have it fit for purpose for our participants and our farmers. I thank you one and all for your participation this morning. I also thank members for their engagement, as always, and to our team for keeping us all on the straight and narrow

The joint committee adjourned at 11.03 a.m. until 9.45 a.m. on Thursday, 19 May 2022.