

The Joint Committee met at 13:00

MEMBERS PRESENT:

  Deputy James Bannon,	  Senator Fidelma Healy Eames,
  Deputy Ray Butler,	  Senator Marie Moloney,
  Deputy Jim Daly,	  Senator Mary Moran,
  Deputy Brendan Griffin,	  Senator Averil Power.
  Deputy Derek Keating,	
  Deputy Charlie McConalogue,	
  Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin,	
  Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh,	
  Deputy Jonathan O'Brien,	

In attendance: Deputies Seamus Healy and Maureen O'Sullivan, and Senators Fiach Mac Conghail and Marie-Louise O'Donnell.

  DEPUTY JOANNA TUFFY IN THE CHAIR.

The joint committee met in private session until 1.20 p.m.

Junior Certificate History Curriculum: Discussion

Chairman:   The subject of today's discussion is changes to the junior certificate curriculum with particular reference to history. A delegation from the History Teachers' Association of Ireland is present to make a presentation on this matter. The delegation includes Mr. Gerard Hanlon, president, Ms Granú Dwyer, Ms Niamh Crowley, Mr. Diarmaid Ferriter and Ms Catriona Crowe. I also welcome officials from the Department of Education and Skills who will advise further on this issue. They are Ms Breda Naughton, principal officer, Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha, assistant chief inspector in the Department, and Mr. Kevin McCarthy, senior inspector. I draw our guests' attention to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(f) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to this committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. Witnesses are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise nor make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. The opening statements the witnesses have submitted will be published on the committee's website after the meeting. Members of the committee are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that I have just outlined. I invite Mr. Hanlon to make his opening remarks on behalf of the History Teachers' Association of Ireland.

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: I thank the Chairman for extending this invitation to the History Teachers' Association of Ireland, HTAI. Those initials in documents refer to the association. We are very grateful for this opportunity to make our case to the committee.

From the moment the Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle document was published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA, this association became gravely concerned about what we considered to be dire implications for history as a subject in the junior certificate. To that end we began a campaign. Members might be wondering why Catriona Crowe and Diarmaid Ferriter are part of the delegation from the History Teachers' Association of Ireland. They are part of the delegation because this is not just a sectoral issue. It has a broader impact and there are broader implications. From when we began our campaign, both Diarmaid Ferriter and Catriona Crowe have been intimately involved with the association in supporting it. They feel there is a large issue here for public discourse.

We made a submission to the committee. It should be said that we support the overall thrust, aims and philosophy in the framework document and I believe the Minister is sincere when he says he believes in the value of history as a subject in the junior cycle, as have all the party leaders. However, we also believe there is an entitlement to history, which this document does not give. In that context we made our submissions. We had an executive summary which had five points, and I will ask the public relations officer of HTAI, Niamh Crowley, to go through that executive summary.

Ms Niamh Crowley: Our opening statement is based on the summary which we submitted last Friday. I sent a PowerPoint presentation but people did not think it was possible to upload it, so I have supplied members with documents from that presentation. They highlight the key areas we will be discussing. Members also have a portfolio of other material which is referenced in our summary. It is on the members' internal website.

The first point is the issue of entitlement. Here in the Oireachtas it is most appropriate to speak about what we believe is the entitlement of every young person to a historical education. We believe it is essential to our cultural heritage, even more crucially because most people no longer speak our native language in daily life. It is essential also to empower people in a functioning democracy. It is not just the History Teachers' Association of Ireland that believes this. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Education and Skills believe it, and the European Assembly in 1996 issued a recommendation, No. 1283, on the learning of history in Europe, in which it said historical awareness should be an essential part of the education of all young people. I will not quote it in full as members have it in the PowerPoint presentation. This is the reason the history teachers have been campaigning since summer 2011 for history to remain as a core subject in the junior cycle curriculum.

I will briefly mention an argument that has sometimes been made to us, that history is not at present a core subject in all schools. Traditionally, it was not a core subject in vocational schools, which were set up in 1930 to provide vocational training. The rules for secondary schools, which provide for a broad general education, included history and geography for all students. Now, all schools strive to provide a general education for everybody, so this should not be used as an argument to remove history from the core.

We are also aware that in the changing school climate, many single sex secondary schools are amalgamating and are coming under the governance of the vocational education committee, VEC, and therefore governed by VEC rules. However, that is an unintended

consequence and not part of educational policy, so we do not believe that should be used to argue in favour of the removal of history from the core.

Our second point is that to provide this entitlement, history must be taught and learned as a full subject and not relegated to a short course or a learning experience. We have outlined three reasons for this. I will mention them briefly, but they are in the detailed documentation sent to the committee. First, we believe history is a discipline and to benefit from that, it must be taught as a full subject. Second, the nature of the study in primary school is necessarily limited by the capacity and understanding of the young people, who really do not achieve the ability to understand abstract concepts until they enter young adulthood. Third, in secondary schools history is taught by specialist teachers. For those three reasons it is essential that it be taught in the junior cycle curriculum. At present, history is usually allocated approximately three periods per week. All that we ask is that it be given this provision in the core for the three years of the junior cycle.

Our third point relates to the practical implications of the framework document. As Gerard Hanlon said, we agree with the aims of reforming junior cycle education. We are historians, not Luddites, and we are not opposed to any type of change. However, at the heart of the framework document is the idea that junior cycle education should be informed by 24 statements of learning. Having pursued those 24 statements of learning, the framework only allows for three core subjects to implement them. Number eight is the statement which would apply in particular to history. Statement No. 8 states that students should value local, national and international heritage, understand the importance of the relationship between past and present events and the forces that drive change. Yet, when one looks at the appendix at the back of the framework document, one finds that eight different subjects, starting with Chinese, are listed as fulfilling this statement of learning. There are at least six other statements of learning that could apply to history, but in each case in the appendix at the back there is no requirement that history be chosen as a core subject.

A final illustration of this comes from the Department's own PowerPoint information for principals. The last slide shows an example of a hypothetical student No. 2, which is slide No. 15 in the PowerPoint presentation.

[Ms Niamh Crowley:] In the case of student No. 2, the core subjects are down as English, Irish, mathematics and science while history appears in one option band. Some schools may choose it and the students will have an entitlement to history but in other schools it may not be provided or, even if it is provided, students may not use it at age 12 when they enter secondary school and make that decision. It might be said that we are speculating about the negative implications for history but our point is the reality of what happens to history when it becomes a choice rather than a core subject. We can look at the neighbouring island to see what is happening in England. England is often cited, along with Albania, as the only European country where history is not part of the core up to the age of 15 or 16 years of age. History is part of the core until 14 years of age but it is a choice subject for GCSE. The Historical Association and numerous articles and surveys have reported and highlighted the disturbing class divide that emerges where, in middle-class areas and independent schools, history is well represented while in more working-class areas and schools it has been squeezed out for what are deemed to be more useful and easier subjects. In Ireland in the current climate of financial restraint and cutbacks, there may be further reasons history will be squeezed or reduced to a short course.

While all of the foregoing points are universal, we conclude with the historic decade in which we find ourselves. Last June, the Taoiseach stated: "As we move into the decade of commemorations that stretch before us, from the 100th anniversary of the Third Home Rule Bill, the Ulster League and Covenant, the foundation of the Ulster and Irish Volunteers, the Dublin lockout, 1916, the Somme, and beyond it is imperative that the social, cultural, economic, administrative and political environments that shaped these events be understood." It would be an unfortunate legacy of the decade of commemorations if, at its end, a coherent study of the discipline of history in schools was not the entitlement of every one of our young people.

Chairman:   I invite Mr. Naughton to speak on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills.

Ms Breda Naughton: Before commencing my presentation, I acknowledge that almost 67,500 students are about to sit the junior certificate or leaving certificate this afternoon. I wish them well.

Ms Niamh Crowley: It is the history examination.

Ms Breda Naughton: Yes, they are starting at 2 p.m. I take it the committee members have read the submission so I will highlight key points from the submission. In October 2012, the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Quinn, published the framework for the junior cycle. Today the Department, at the committee's request, wishes to concentrate on the impact the implementation of the framework for junior cycle will have on the learning and teaching of history. Through comparing education internationally, it has been found that in high performing education systems such as New Zealand, Queensland and Finland, schools have been given greater autonomy and flexibility in the programmes they offer. When schools in Ireland are implementing the new junior cycle, they too will have the autonomy and flexibility to design programmes within the parameters of the framework, mindful in particular of the needs of their students and their teaching resources.

Currently, only 52% of post-primary schools - the voluntary secondary schools to which Ms Crowley referred - are obliged to provide history and geography as core subjects yet over 90% of the students who sit the junior certificate examination enter the examination for history. There are currently more than 5,500 students who do not present for history in the junior certificate examination. Schools across all sectors offer history because they have sufficient numbers of qualified teaching personnel in this area and sufficient interest from students. History teachers attract students to their subject through their love and passion for history and by engaging the natural curiosity of their students in, for example, the lives of people, the origins of the modern world and objects and documents from the past. History is the fifth most popular subject in the junior certificate examination.

The framework will be implemented on a phased basis from September 2014. For the first time, from September 2017, history will be established as a discrete subject. It is currently linked to geography, as outlined in the rules and programme for secondary schools. New specifications for history will be developed by the NCCA and will involve consultation with the key stakeholders and the public. It is hoped the new specifications will facilitate the development of skills, including critically interpreting a range of texts, communicating, working with others, critical thinking and managing information, particularly through the use of digital technology.

As they are designing the new junior cycle programmes, schools will have to be mindful not only of the principles and key skills but also of the 24 statements of learning specified. These statements describe what students should know, understand, value and be able to do at the end of junior cycle. The key statement for history is that every student values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change. For schools, their teachers and their students, the reality of the statement will mean a study of history predominantly as a subject and, for some, they may have the option of studying a short course. In larger schools, some classes could have history as a full subject for certification and some could have short courses, perhaps for certification but also for non-certification purposes.

The minimum time allocated for subjects such as history will be 200 hours or the equivalent of three 40-minute periods per week over three years. For many schools, this will lead to an increased time provision for history and will allow not only for a deepening of a student's historical knowledge but also of his or her ability to analyse, interpret, write and develop historical skills more thoroughly. It will also allow for a greater understanding of how historians work. Short courses, on the other hand, will be designed for 100 hours and will provide an alternative option for other students, perhaps for the equivalent of the 5,500 students who do not study history currently. Short courses could address local history, aspects of women's history, industrial history or the particular interest at the moment in the decade of centenaries.

A number of attempts have been made to modernise the 1989 junior cycle history syllabus. In 1996, the syllabus was revised and there was a significant reduction in content. In the mid-2000s, a further revision was considered but not implemented due to the prioritisation of the overhaul of the junior cycle programme itself. This overhaul led to the publication of the framework last October. None of the revisions to date have gone as far as many teachers and other subject experts would like. In many respects, more modernisation has been achieved in leaving certificate history than at junior cycle. A revised leaving certificate syllabus, first examined in 2006, has placed greater emphasis on source handling, key concepts, personalities and case studies, on social, economic and scientific developments, as well as on matters political and military, student choice and independent research.

The implementation of the framework presents an opportunity to recast junior cycle history as a vibrant, student-centred and valuable subject with significant emphasis on the relevance of past experiences to our lives today. New approaches are likely to provide a host of new opportunities, in history and elsewhere, for students to carry out group or individual project work, including designing tasks, making oral presentations, undertaking field trips, using ICT for research and presenting reports. The new approach is about quality learning, teaching and assessment and will not, I hope, be based on quantitative learning. It will be about learning to learn and learning to think. It will highlight the role of assessment for learning throughout the three years. Assessment for certification will be at a common level. The differentiation will be evident in the learning experiences and in the aspirations and expectations for students. The bar will be raised as the highest grade of achievement with distinction will require a mark greater than 90% , compared with the current 85% for an A grade. This does not mean a dumbing down of content. On the contrary, it is about giving our young people the knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to understand and appreciate history and historians. There will be a dedicated programme of continuing professional development provided to history teachers to enhance their skills and confidence. That CPD will commence in autumn 2016, a year before the new specifications are implemented.

The implementation of the framework provides a new opportunity to recast history as a vibrant, student-centred and valuable subject with significant emphasis on the relevance of past experiences on our lives today and into the future. It is expected that students' experiences of the new junior cycle history will provide an excellent base for students considering taking history at senior cycle and impact positively in the future on the take-up of history at senior cycle.

[Ms Breda Naughten:] The role of history in the new junior cycle will be balanced against the contribution of the other subjects, the new short courses and other learning experiences in enabling students to engage with a broad and enriched junior cycle programme that meets the requirements of the 24 statements of learning. It is the totality of the three-year junior cycle experience that each young person receives that will be important as they progress through junior cycle and continue on to senior cycle and thereafter.

Chairman: We will now move on to questions. As there are many Members here who are not members of the committee, I will outline the agreed procedure. The order will be as follows: Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, Technical Group and Government spokespersons and Deputies and Senators in the order they raise their hands with preference given to committee members. I will stick to that, if it is okay. I will ask everyone to keep to a maximum of four minutes to allow everyone to speak. We can come back to people, if we have the time.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I join with the Chairman in welcoming the representatives of the History Teachers' Association of Ireland and the Department. As a former history student at university level, I welcome a former tutor of mine, Professor Diarmaid Ferriter. I have a very strong respect for the role history can play in one's education and I have a love for it.

I refer to the framework for the junior certificate so far and how it is developed. There are many issues with it in terms of the consultation undertaken with teachers in putting it together. It is still vague in many ways in terms of what will be delivered at the end of it. Ms Breda Naughten spoke about what will be in place if the plans go ahead as they are and it sounds very promising. She spoke about field trips and more IT but schools and teachers are not being given the resources or funding to achieve that. There is a real risk in terms of how it will play out at school level. It depends on the background of the school and the quality of education in it.

Ms Niamh Crowley referred to the experience in Britain where history has suffered in disadvantaged schools and the take-up has not been what it could be. How many students continue to study history at leaving certificate level? Is there a concern there? Does it inform learning? If we are to give students the choice at junior certificate level, how many will decide to study history?

Fianna Fáil welcomes the reform of the junior certificate and believes there are many things which can be improved in the curriculum. However, we need to consider more carefully the impact of each of the decisions we make. That has not happened in regard to history, in particular, and we need more engagement.

Will the Department outline further what level of consultation took place with teachers before the framework document was put in place? We should not be in the situation where the

document has been published and we are only now giving some in-depth consideration to its impact.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien:   I welcome the delegations. The HTAI has put its case very well. We also have a concern about this. The association mentioned the class divide in terms of how things have developed in England. The one thing which was not mentioned but which is in the submission is the Department's focus on literacy and numeracy and the importance of history and geography in developing them. There are real concerns about the number of students who will not take history. If it is a short course and is an option, the numbers will fall off. We have only to look at what has happened to history and geography in England.

We are not focusing on the impact it could have on the higher education sector because if people are not studying history as a core subject at junior certificate level and at leaving certificate level, the numbers studying it at higher level will decline and it will have a detrimental impact on the area. We should not look at junior certificate reform in isolation because there will be an impact beyond that if this goes ahead. Do the delegates have any figures or research on the impact in England in terms of people going on to higher education and studying history or courses involving history? Ms Breda Naughten said 67,500 students were sitting the history examination today. If this goes ahead, fewer students will take history next year and in subsequent years. We will continue to see a drop in the numbers studying history.

Much of what was contained in her presentation reads well and in theory sounds good but in practice, I do not think it will work. I do not think a short course is sufficient to provide the background students need in terms of their ability to study history. There is an old saying that if one does not learn from the past, history will repeat itself but if this goes ahead, we may not even know if history is repeating itself because people will not know what was the history. The Department is getting it wrong and is over-stating the capacity of short courses to maintain history as a principal subject. Has the HTAI or the Department figures on how it will impact beyond junior certificate level to leaving certificate level and higher education level?

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   I welcome the delegations. It is great they are here making this very strong pitch for history. Given the fast moving world in which our youngsters live, there is a real danger that they are looking at everything in the here and now and that they are losing the context of our past and present which will inform the future.

Does the HTAI see merit in the statements of learning produced by the Department? I like them but I wonder how they will be assessed. There are 24 statements of learning and the association is right to say that at least eight of those could include history. I put that question to Ms Breda Naughten also. Is the Department open to at least the eight statements of learning, which the HTAI pointed out, including history as a means to achieve those statements of learning? It states, ".....creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts". Immediately one thinks of English and Gaeilge but it could be an historical text or an historical piece of writing. If that is the case, who will correct that? Has the Department thought this through?

(Speaker Continuing)

[Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:  ] In terms of the achievement of these 24 statements of

learning, how is the Department investing in the teachers and training them and the correctors to correct? If the Department is going back to the subject-based format, I do not know if that will work. The Department will have to change everything if it is moving to this new paradigm or construct of statements of learning. That question is for both sides.

My second question is for the history teachers. Many children lose out with history if it is taught as a set of dates and events. Nothing can match an enthusiastic teacher who really brings history to life. I attended one secondary school and then went to a different one for the last four years of my schooling. Without any grinds, nine of us in my class got A's in our leaving certificate history because we had the most amazing teacher who was full of enthusiasm, believed in the subject and did not expect anyone not to like it, while not pushing it on us. One could hardly see him coming in the door with the pile of books he brought with him for us to read, to broaden the context of the set textbook. Do the teachers have a fear that the downgrading of the subject, as they call it, will lead to fewer students wanting to go on to teach history? Do they fear a lesser investment by the Department in the upskilling of teachers?

I return to Ms Naughten. How is the Department going to train the teachers, if they are teaching to statements of learning?

Chairman:   Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin is next but before going on to him I will ask the panel to respond to the issues raised so far.

Mr Gerard Hanlon: I will answer the first few questions, if I may. In a sense, we have gone ahead of ourselves with some of the questions. By that, I mean that the substantive issue is that history may not even be taught at all. Students may not actually have the opportunity to experience history. I will read statement No. 8 again because it is the one that most obviously dovetails into history. It says the student: "values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change". Anyone who has studied history would presume that history will be used to fulfil or meet that statement of learning. However, the Department's own document says students may achieve this by looking at Chinese, classics, CSPE, geography, Jewish studies, religious education or science. I quote those subjects without prejudice. There is nothing wrong with those subjects but a school principal, who has 24 statements of learning that must be fulfilled in his or her school, might decide that Chinese will meet statement No. 8 and schedule a short course in Chinese. History may never be offered as a subject. In the context of Senator Healy Eames's remarks about the history teacher who enthused her, future students may never actually have such a teacher. That, for us, is the substantive issue.

On the Department's document, we are probably 98% in agreement with everything that the Department has included in its executive summary. A lot of it is aspirational, however, as some of the questioners have pointed out. I do not know how it will be fulfilled but we must go back to basics. History may not be offered to students. It does not have to be offered under these statements of learning because the Department, in its own document, has given other options to schools to fulfil these statements of learning.

Chairman:   Does anyone else from the association wish to contribute?

Ms Niamh Crowley: Senator Healy Eames ---

Chairman: I apologise for interrupting but I must ask that mobile phones be switched off because they interfere with the broadcasting equipment.

Mr Gerard Hanlon: If I may interject for a moment and ask that the higher-level question be directed to Professor Ferriter.

Ms Niamh Crowley: The Senator referred to the merit in the 24 statements. I agree that they read excellently but they can only be implemented if they are followed through with a broad curriculum. There are 24 statements while the core is only three subjects, although sometimes when the Minister speaks he includes science. Science is not officially one of the core subjects but the Minister seems to be unofficially including it. If there are 24 statements and only a core of four subjects, that does not follow through, logically, to us. That is where we would find fault with the document.

At the moment, the vast majority of students in the junior cycle are taking history. Therefore, they all have the opportunity to select it for senior cycle and to go on to study it at third level. However, if one narrows the base, there will be a smaller pool from which students will be able to choose history. That has been shown in Britain. If students do not have history as an option at GSCE level, they cannot go on to study it at higher levels later on.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames: It makes the teachers less relevant too.

Ms Niamh Crowley: Yes. In fact, in Britain at the moment they are discussing the possibility of making history and geography compulsory again for students up to age 16. However, one of the problems they have identified with that is that there are not enough teachers in the system anymore. The number of teachers in the system fell when these subjects were removed from the core curriculum in the United Kingdom. They now have an infrastructural difficulty in trying to reintroduce history and geography as core subjects.

Professor Diarmaid Ferriter: For those of us teaching history at third level, the issue of students coming into third level, having studied history at second level is not just a question of numbers. It is not just a question of the numbers who want to pursue the subject at third level. There is always going to be a big intake into arts programmes with history being one of the options. However, it would impact on the amount of people who would feel confident taking history at third level because they might feel that they did not have the necessary skills that come with studying the subject at second level. That, for me, is a more important issue than the numbers issue.

The skills that students of history at second level can amass and the confidence it gives them are critical, particularly the areas of analysis, methodology, evidence and proof. Having a sense of these and a sense of the broad sweep of history is essential. One of the difficulties at the moment, for which there is evidence in the UK, is that short courses lead to fragmentation. Students are looking at often unconnected fragments of history. That too would impact on their ability and confidence to take on the subject at third level. We need to be really conscious of what students who study history at junior certificate and leaving certificate level are getting and give them the opportunity to build on those skills at third level. My great fear is that if they lose the foundation block at second level, they simply will not feel remotely equipped to pursue the subject to degree level. That will cut them off from pursuing it even further.

I wish to link this issue to what Mr. Hogan said at the outset about the broader implications. I am glad the third level question has been raised. I do not teach history in a secondary school but I am concerned about the broader implications of what is being proposed, including for third level. It is important to reflect on this carefully. Reference was made to the fact that this is an issue for our public discourse and the greater impact that it will have, beyond the question of secondary students going on to third level. If it is fair to say that the present preoccupations of younger people are a fair barometer of future societal attitudes, then taking history away from them, as I feel will be the inevitable result of these proposals, will leave us in a very worrying situation in the future. This is not just about second and third level education. There is a broader societal impact.

There is also the question of whether future students will be equipped to effectively analyse the present. Reference was made to the importance of history in developing an understanding and greater awareness of public affairs, which is an issue of citizenship and of empowerment. Those questions are also connected to the themes of social and class divides. The issue is one of history being squeezed but also of who is getting access to the subject and who is not. The implications are hugely relevant across the sector.

We must also consider the question of who history is for.

[Prof. Diarmaid Ferriter:] It could ironically be said that I am here today because I believe history is far too important to be left to historians. I say that because that is another danger in these proposals, that history will become the preserve of an elite. There is a great sense of public ownership of history in this country and I do not accept the argument that curiosity is always natural. It often must be nurtured and encouraged. That is why the study of history is crucial and that everyone must have access to it. It is too important to be left to an elite, particularly an academic elite. I would also link it to the bigger questions that have been briefly touched on. I have been invited as a historian to join a Government appointed advisory group on commemorations and I am happy to accept the invitation. It seems to be a particularly cruel irony that at the same time as those sorts of initiatives, and all sorts of assertions of how seriously commemoration is being taken, that we would then have this proposal in front of us on what I consider the downgrading of history during that very commemoration period. The issue is then one of who steps in the breach. This is where people must be empowered with the knowledge of the history of the country. If they do not have that, others will step into the breach to use and abuse and distort history for their own ends.

I come back to the question of entitlement and empowerment. It is of particular relevance at present and I link that to the wider issue of heritage. We cannot compartmentalise these issues. I have been vocal in the past about some of the proposals for cultural institutions. All of these are connected so we do not think in terms of either third level or second level, we must think of the connections between these areas.

Ms Breda Naughton: There was a question about a lack of consultation. Significant consultation was carried out when the NCCA was developing its framework on the junior cycle. When the framework was sent to the Department, the Minister looked at it and felt it did not go quite far enough. That was where he changed the assessment, in particular, but the remainder stayed the same. I know the History Teachers Association had meetings with the Minister and in the NCCA framework document it said they would only study a minimum of eight subjects and a significant plea was made to increase that to ten subjects. That was taken on board.

There are 21 subjects in the junior cycle and they will be implemented on a phased basis. The best way to describe how consultation will happen is to have a look at the NCCA website and it has the specifications for English, so the viewer can see how the consultation process goes ahead. It will be similar for all the other subjects. There will be experts from the History Teachers Association and third level involved in the development of the specifications.

There is a commitment to provide funding for the training of teachers in this area of €10 million per year. There are adverts out at present to get the team together for the junior cycle CPD team, which will be led by Dr. Pádraig Kirk. It is interesting at the moment that history is not a compulsory subject for 50% of schools but 90% of young people take history in the junior cycle. That equates to 53,161 last year. When we go to leaving certificate, however, the numbers drop dramatically, with 11,746 taking history last year. The drop is already there and we want to make the new specification for history attractive so young people can see it as a realistic option, rather than learning, as some of us did, dates by heart and not analysing and understanding the relevance of what is going on.

We have a significant cohort of history teachers in the system and the teachers themselves have high expectations and aspirations. They realise the importance of their responsibility for encouraging young people to move on from history at junior cycle to leaving certificate level.

Mr. Kevin McCarthy: We managed to modernise the leaving certificate syllabus during the 2000s and everyone who has taught it or seen it in action has been very pleased with that work. Many people in this room did huge work to support that. One of the challenges we face is that the junior certificate syllabus is not in line with that. A consequence of that is a significant drop off of students from junior to senior cycle. Deputy McConalogue asked earlier about the statistics on uptake. It is hard to track year on year but in 2012, some 53,000 students did junior certificate history but only 11,700 students did it at leaving certificate level. There is no one in this room more passionate about history than me but look at the comparison with geography. Some 54,000 students did junior certificate geography in 2012 and 25,700 students did it at leaving certificate level. That is not the fault of the history teachers. It is not even the fault of the Department. The syllabus is overladen with content. Teachers and students do not know where to start and where to stop. That is part of the reason that when we revised the syllabus in 1989 it had to be revised again by 1996 and we then tried again during the 2000s. It is vital we take some of the content and increase some of the links between junior and senior cycle history. That is where areas like key skills and other factors in the framework should help us to link junior to senior cycle in a more meaningful way. We are teaching some leaving certificate students skills in fifth year because there is often not the time to teach the same skills in junior cycle, especially if the timetable is restricted to two or three periods per week. That is the battle that is being fought. We must look at the framework as an opportunity to link junior cycle history more to the senior cycle.

Bearing in mind the rules and programme only compel 52% of schools to teach history, I have often fought the battle in schools where history is not offered at all to students. Unfortunately these are often students who are disadvantaged. I intend to use statement 8 and other statements to my benefit in the future when trying to push that all students must have access to meaningful history.

The lack of skills at third level may be the case, although that is not for me to say. The whole shape of the framework is to enforce the development of literacy, numeracy and other analytic skills in a meaningful way, hopefully by taking some of the content out and increasing the time

provision for students who study history. Right now the maximum I would see in provision for junior cycle history is 200 hours. That is three 40 minute periods per week over three years. It will be the minimum in the new stipulation and I must look at that as a really important reinforcement for time to develop the skills that may well be lacking according to the previous speaker.

The irony that we may be lessening the importance of history just as we commemorate the decade of centenaries. Right now, the existing junior certificate syllabus provides for a fairly cursory glance, "an overview" is the phrase that is used, of the period from 1912 to 1923. I do not know if anyone could claim that we are giving students a meaningful understanding or that we can give students a meaningful understanding of that decade in the time available to teachers.

Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha: I will respond to questions raised by Senators Healy Eames and Mac Conghail on the vagueness of the framework and the extent to which the statements of learning can be assessed. I will also look at the question of continuous professional development, CPD.

The key difference in the new junior cycle is that schools will develop programmes of learning that will meet the requirements of the 24 statements of learning. The new core of the junior cycle will be the 24 statements of learning. The 24 statements of learning will be delivered through the programme that schools will develop. That programme will consist of subjects, short courses and other learning experiences either for the purposes of certification or otherwise. The reason for this is to ensure the school can develop a programme that will meet the needs of the students in the individual school, and also in accordance with the resources that the school has available. Therefore, it is not the statements of learning that will be assessed as such; they will be assessed through assessment of the short courses, the subjects and the other learning experiences that form part of the school's programme of learning. That will be the experience of the students.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   Is the objective to achieve the statement of learning?

Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha: The objective is to provide a programme that is based on the 24 statements of learning and to ensure the students get the opportunity to engage with the learning envisaged in the 24 statements.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   Chairman, I must clarify this.

Chairman:   The Senator will have an opportunity to come in later

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   Can Mr. Mac Fhlannchadha see that if history is not offered, neither a student nor a school would try to achieve a particular statement of learning through history?

Chairman:   Senator, that is a statement. Does Mr. Mac Fhlannchadha wish to comment on that?

Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha: It will be difficult for schools. It will be very difficult to see how a school can meet the requirements of statement of learning No. 8, particularly when one

looks at the elaboration of that statement, which states that using the different types of evidence and materials the student look at the lives of both famous and ordinary people in the past and can see how local, national and international communities change over time, how people act to bring about change and how these changes may be connected with each other and with current events and developments. It continues by specifying that the student will be aware that he or she inherits the values, beliefs and traditions that go to make up his or her culture and of the importance of respecting the cultures of others. It is very difficult to see how that statement of learning can be made without giving students the opportunity to engage in historical study. I know that other subjects are meant there, but it is very clear that this is directly linked to history.

A comprehensive programme of continuous professional development will be implemented to support the implementation of the junior cycle, which will commence with English in September 2013. There is a commitment of €10 million per year for the continuous professional development of teachers, deputy principals, principals and others during the roll-out of the new junior cycle. Each subject teacher will receive the equivalent of three days' continuous professional development, which will be either on-site or off-site.

Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin:   I am in the interesting position of facing a former lecturer and a former school inspector of my own school. I will have to hedge my bets a bit.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   There is a history in the making.

Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin:   It is very useful to have people from both sides of the debate to discuss the issues, because I think everybody present is extremely passionate about the subject of history. Is there any evidence as to why the class divide in England became more pronounced in the choice of history as a subject than in any other subject? I suppose part of the debate concerns compulsion versus opportunity in terms of the provision of history in a school. It is interesting that only 50% of schools require students to take history as a junior certificate subject; the assumption that history is compulsory does not stack up. The statistics provided by Mr. Kevin McCarthy are fascinating; some 54,000 students take junior certificate history and geography, but twice as many students take geography as history at level certificate level. There seems to be a problem with history that must be addressed in some way. We are obviously discussing whether these proposals provide an answer. Is there a sense that the history examination at leaving certificate is too onerous? It is at least 20 years since I was in the school system - sometimes, in fairness to politicians, one is trying to comment on the system from memory - but I remember that in the leaving certificate the history exam was a writing race, more necessary than the exam. Does the history examination have a reputational problem at leaving certificate level? People have spoken about enthusiastic teachers, but fundamentally one needs enthusiastic students. One is trying to find a balance in giving the students the opportunity to learn something, but what if they have no interest in the subject?

We see what has happened to the Irish language. I am a great believer in the language and I have a degree in Irish, but the major policy failure of the education system, going back to the 1920s, is the teaching of Irish. It has worked for some people but it has not worked for the vast bulk of people.

There is a suggestion that Chinese might be offered instead of history. How many schools

offer Chinese? Is that a choice that is not necessarily fair. Will the vast bulk of schools not find it easier to provide history as a subject choice at junior certificate level than Chinese, classics or Jewish studies? Is that not the reality on the ground because of the number of people who have the capability to teach history? There is a great opportunity, certainly now that a second year of study is being rolled out for the higher diploma in education.

The decade of commemorations was mentioned. I can remember every land Act from 1870 to the Wyndham Act of 1903. However, I did not know very much about social history until I went to Dr. Ferriter's class and learned about TB and the housing crisis in the 1940s. The linear history of Ireland and the national struggle has a history of overtaking the history syllabus. I want to comment on the depth of our study of the social problems and tensions behind history rather than the dates.

Senator Marie Moloney:   I thank the witnesses for coming before the joint committee. Mr. Hanlon stated his worries that students may not pick history. It is a case of history repeating itself, because I went to a technical college and neither history nor geography was on the curriculum, more moons ago than when Deputy Ó Ríordáin was at school. We never had an opportunity to study history. I have spent my life playing catch-up in history and geography. When I left second-level school I did not know a river or a mountain because we did not learn them. To this day, if I go to a table quiz I tell the team that I am weak on history and geography. One will carry what one learns in history and geography right through life. History does not change. Once one has learned it and it is in one's head, it is there for the rest of one's life. It affects one's life if one does not have knowledge.

The report on the reform of the junior cycle states clearly that students are happy with history and it is one of the most popular subjects. I wonder if the witnesses are worrying too much and underestimating the choices students will make Why are the witnesses worried that students will not select history and geography as subjects?

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: May I answer that question immediately?

Chairman:   Yes.

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: For that to happen, history has to be offered as a choice to students. Our point is that school managers may decide, in fulfilling these statements of learning, not to offer history. It may not be put on the curriculum.

Senator Marie Moloney:   Is that not a school management problem?

Ms Breda Naughton: They are fulfilling the statements of learning. They have options and do not have to offer history.

Senator Marie Moloney:   Perhaps we should also meet representatives of school management.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   As I am not a member of the joint committee, I appreciate the courtesy shown by the Chairman in offering me an opportunity to speak on an issue on which I hold passionate views. I have not been taught, instructed or examined by any of the witnesses - maybe I was in the bold class. I will make a couple of points before asking a

couple of questions.

A fascinating and positive aspect of this debate, particularly in the context of the framework for junior cycle, is that there appears to be an issue with the teaching of history, whether it is related to the framework cycle or the current position of teaching history. I ask for all sides to comment on this from a philosophical perspective. Perhaps we all agree on the issue while disagreeing on whether the framework for the junior cycle is a genuine response to the issue. As someone who is paranoid, I believe the teaching of history has an impact on political culture, political participation and ideological viewpoints. The majority of students in the leaving certificate history class of 1982 in the school I attended voted for parties on the extreme left in both elections that year because of a fantastic teacher we had, a guy called Tony Gregory, who taught us for seven years. Deputy Ó Snodaigh may agree with me on that. Mr. Gregory had a profound impact on us through his teaching. I expect Professor Ferriter and Mr. McCarthy will agree with me on the powerful impact the teaching of history can have on one's political outlook.

As we water down the teaching of history and move towards adopting extreme Orwellian language, such as the description of history as a "discrete subject", we will end up in a position where history is not taught and becomes fragmented. As Professor Ferriter stated, we will lack adequate tools to analyse the present. I am concerned about this, although I accept that a certain amount of paranoia is at work in this regard. If one considers how we celebrated, acknowledged or commemorated the Easter Rising in 1966 and 1991 and how it is proposed to commemorate the centenary in 2016, we see there has been a different emphasis in each case and that the education system backed this up, depending on what the State apparatus wanted. For example, on historical figure, Pádraig Pearse, moved from veneration to invisibility in my life cycle. Neither position is correct and I am not suggesting our esteemed guests would suggest otherwise. I am deeply concerned about the way in which history is perceived.

If one works backwards from Professor Ferriter's comment on the anxiety students may have about taking history at third level, the problem lies not at junior certificate level but at senior cycle. Neither of my daughters, both of whom attended a VEC school, was offered history for the leaving certificate despite taking the subject in the junior cycle. There is something wrong with the leaving certificate syllabus when children doing the leaving certificate next year in a progressive school with a diverse socio-economic profile do not know the names of half the Cabinet. The reason is not a lack of interest in politics, but a failure to sufficiently enthuse or prepare them to analyse or listen to history.

Mr. McCarthy put the matter starkly when he noted the sharp decline in the number who take history for the leaving certificate when compared to those who take the subject in the junior certificate. Surely there is a much more sophisticated or nuanced analysis than ascribing this fall to a decline in interest. While it may be that history examinations are essentially a writing race, we must have a much more sophisticated analysis of the issue. This debate on the junior certificate framework is an important aspect of such an analysis. I ask the witnesses to comment. I am concerned that this should not undermine potential citizenship or the legacy of the decade of centenaries that is taking place.

I understood from the comments of Ms Naughton and Ms Crowley that the same number of teaching hours is available in the proposed new syllabus for the junior certificate as in the current syllabus. I may have misheard the details of the proposals in the current framework. I ask them to clarify if that is the case.

Ms Breda Naughton: I will make an admission; I was a geography teacher a long time ago. When I was teaching, history and geography were like Siamese twins. We used to fight about whether they were the majority or minority subjects and whether they would be allocated two or three lessons per week. In the new scenario geography and history will both be stand-alone subjects, rather than tied to one another.

Chinese is currently provided in transition year in a small number of schools. When we discuss the framework and its implementation with schools, we emphasise to them the importance of using the teaching resources available, namely, history teachers. It is the responsibility of history teachers to encourage an interest in history among young people as they move from junior cycle to senior cycle. As Mr. McCarthy stated, the history syllabus at junior cycle is extremely long and difficult, whereas the senior cycle syllabus reflects to a much greater degree the way we want to go.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   Assuming both history and geography have a certain type of attraction, are statistics available on the number of schools in which history is being offered at leaving certificate in comparison to geography?

Ms Breda Naughton: We could obtain that figure. What we have today are the numbers which take history and geography at junior cycle and the number-----

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   Does Ms Naughton agree that those figures do not paint a picture?

Ms Breda Naughton: I can get the figures the Senator seeks. As I stated, only 50% of schools are obliged, under the rules and regulations, to provide history.

Mr. Kevin McCarthy: To address the other point Senator Mac Conghail raised, there is no issue with the teaching of history. I have stated that view on record for the past 12 years and it has not changed. The subject has been transformed substantially by history teachers. Previous speakers referred to the years they attended college. I am much too old to have been taught by Professor Ferriter but I was taught at college in the 1970s by fantastic historians, including Professor Joe Lee and Professor John A. Murphy. I do not have any memory of studying documents or examining issues such as bias, objectivity, subjectivity and so forth. That is the type of transformation that has been built into the junior certificate to a certain extent. However, we are still struggling as a result of content overload.

I would be happy if the teachers of history present commented on the leaving certificate. My gut feeling from the response I have had from many teachers is that they are much happier with the current leaving certificate syllabus. We are not dumbing down leaving certificate history. While it is still a serious challenge in terms of the writing required, it is a much more doable and a more positive experience for students than the old syllabus. Instead of having to leave the examination room after 3 hours and 20 minutes of writing down everything one knows about five topics, students must now answer three essay-style questions, engage with one documents topic requiring some short answers and do a research study outside the examination setting. While no one denies there is still pressure, there is much less of it in terms of the race against time one had previously. Perhaps members should sit in on a few history lessons to observe the transformation that has been brought about by many of those present - I am not engaging in plámás - in terms of the use of information and communications

technology, engagement with primary sources and so forth. We have to turn the junior cycle syllabus for history into a greater opportunity for this to happen when the specifications are drawn up.

Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha: Deputy Ó Ríordáin referred to the reason there was a lower take-up at leaving certificate level despite the relatively high take-up at junior cycle level.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha:] It all comes down to the teaching and the students' experience of history at junior cycle. We are aware that the current syllabus is overloaded. The new specification, when it comes online, will provide the opportunity to revise and update the current syllabus and ensure that the skills and competences relevant to the study of history will be fully incorporated. As with all other subjects it provides an opportunity to make it a vibrant learning experience for the students. There will be an opportunity for introducing projects, field trips, and the opportunity for students to deliver presentations, both written and oral, as part of assessment arrangements and designing tasks. There is great potential to develop not only the knowledge but the skills which are key to the subject.

Mr Gerard Hanlon: The numbers has been raised, those who take it to junior certificate level and then to leaving certificate level. Pardon the pun, history is involved here, it is the history of the system. For many years most voluntary secondary schools in Ireland were run by one religious denomination or other. As the voluntary secondary schools have to certain extent collapsed, meaning they have gone into amalgamation situations, the governance of those schools has changed but frequently tradition may have continued. The rules and regulations of the Department of Education and Skills require voluntary secondary schools it to teach history. Those schools that still operate under the rule must offer history. That is the reason so many students study history at junior cycle. When one comes to senior cycle the range of subjects is much greater. Compared to when I completed the leaving certificate the range of subjects on offer is vastly inflated. One takes one's place in the marketplace.

There is a perception problem with history. History is seen as difficult and literate. We no longer live in a literate culture so it is viewed as difficult and there is a literacy element. The reason those who opt for it, having gone through the junior certificate examination, is because that interest has been fostered. Senator Marie Moloney mentioned that when she went to her vocational school, history or geography was not offered. That is already the situation in schools in Ireland at present. I know of one school, not far from where I teach, where history and geography are being offered as a choice in first year. As it is not a voluntary secondary school it does not have to offer history and geography. That is the position at present.

The voluntary secondary schools are collapsing, down to 52%. Five years ago the figure stood at perhaps 70% and ten years ago there may have been 80%. They had to offer history and geography. As they collapse and as they do not have to follow the rules and regulations of the Department of Education and Skills the syllabus is essentially open-ended. They are now offering history and geography. This framework document would allow that across the board. Why might history not be offered? We are all aware of the harsh economic climate. As a history teacher retires in a school there may not be a replacement.

Redeployment is an issue for many schools. The resources may not be available as principals

juggle with timetables. That is part of our concern. We accept the bona fides of the Department but are concerned about the practical implications of this document as we move forward as opposed to speculation on what might happen.

Chairman:   Okay.

Mr Gerard Hanlon: I may have missed some questions. Ms Caitriona Crowe wanted to get in on one point.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   May I get clarification on the question of the hours and whether there is a disparity between HTAI and the Department on the number of hours per week offered?

Ms Catriona Crowe: It is a privilege for me to be here today. I am pleased to note so much interest on the part of Members of the Oireachtas on this very important subject. I am privileged to be present to support the History Teacher' Association of Ireland who are some of the most passionate people in defence of a very important subject that I have ever had the honour to meet.

I shall commence with an old cliché. It is a quote from George Santayana, the philosopher, who said: "Those who forget their past are destined to repeat it". We have heard it a thousand times but it is one of the fundamental statements about the value of history. We are now in that phase of this discussion where we are looking at the value of history as a subject as something that pervades the values of a society. For example, if the inhabitants of the former Yugoslavia had been taught proper history during the period after the Second World War it is not impossible that what happened when the state fell apart would have been different. If they had been taught about the complex differences between the different kinds of people who inhabited that territory during that time, they may have had time to come to terms with the dreadful things that would happen to them, instead of something festering underneath and bursting out into a series of shocking atrocities which none of us will forget. We also have to remember that violence is very much a part of the 20th century, which was a spectacularly violent century and of this country's own history, not least during the decade of what I would prefer to call centenaries rather than commemorations on which we have now embarked, where we need to reflect very seriously on what happened, why it happened and whether other things could have happened instead.

The elephant in the corner is the question why are subjects compulsory in curricula? It is for two reasons. Society has decided that those subjects are what we call core subjects that are necessary for the fundamental and basic education of any student. I know that when I studied at secondary school in the distant past if, at the age of 12, I had been offered the opportunity not to study any further mathematics I would have grasped it with both hands. I hated and was no good at it. I was lucky to have good teachers. I scraped a pass in the leaving certificate and, as a result, I can read bank statements and back a few horses every now and again. If I have to and I can manipulate numbers. If I had that choice at the age of 12 I would certainly not have taken mathematics. That is why it is compulsory. Everybody must have a basic mathematical education. I would imagine that quite a number of students today, sadly, would not rush to study the Irish language at the age of 12. I am devoted to the Irish language as are many members of the committee but sadly, students may not take it as a subject they would wish to pursue if given the choice.

English is the language that we speak in this country. It has got a fantastic literature behind it, as does Irish. Is it possible that people might decide that Shakespeare is not for them? Why have we decided that the discipline that relates to the complicated, interesting, joyful, savage past that this and other countries have experienced is something that is disposable when those basic subjects are not seen as disposable? That is a fundamental question. I imagine that geographers could ask the same question and with a great deal of justice. These are the subjects that deal with time and space - two of the things that every human being has a right to know about. It seems to me to be a fundamental category error to exclude them from a compulsory regime. We have heard much about the terrible reduction in numbers studying history, from 53,000 in the junior certificate down to 11,000 in the leaving certificate if I heard Ms Breda Naughton correctly.

History is a discursive subject, it requires reading and writing. It is not necessarily something that fits naturally into the modern age of instant information, although many teachers spend much of their time trying to track the Wikipedia cut and paste that has emerged in the essays of their students and advising them not to follow that route. My business is primary sources. Mr. Kevin McCarthy was very eloquent on the fact that primary sources have only recently come into view not only at second level but at third level. Professor Diarmaid Ferriter would have been one of the pioneers of ensuring that documents are available to people in a popular format. In order that I do not go on for too long I will give two examples of what they can do for students. One of the most interesting museums in Ireland is Strokestown House museum which investigates the Great Famine in that area. It has an outstanding display on the assassination of Major Denis Mahon, the landlord who lived in Strokestown at the time. It appears to be universally agreed that he was a bad landlord, being cruel to his tenants and carrying out major evictions. The museum has a series of documents which gives one completely different perspectives on his murder, some Major Mahon's family, some from his tenants, some from the police, all giving a different shade of opinion, none of which is conclusive.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Ms Catriona Crowe:] One of the great virtues of studying the primary sources of history, which is what it comes down to and which is hugely foregrounded in the new leaving certificate curriculum, is that one learns to evaluate different kinds of evidence, something that is altogether necessary in an era when we are getting vast amounts of information coming at us, often from deliberately poorly-informed sources, including the tabloid press and the dreadful material on the Internet. There is not much quality material coming at people in a way they can grasp. This is the opportunity for people, before they lose the chance to do it at all, to learn how to evaluate that material in some way or another and to seek better material if they need to.

I had the privilege of putting the 1901 and 1911 censuses online free of charge. I plead that if there is any request to start charging for that resource then we should resist it. This is one of the great things we have in our country now. It is available to the entire population and it overcomes many of the class issues that we have discussed at length today. Secondary school students are using that resource all the time to examine their local areas, the main streets in their towns and not only their family history but the extended history of neighbours and so on in any given area. They are developing all the basic skills that one needs to be a historian. These come from reading that rather simple but nevertheless interesting primary source. The resource is teaching them things about, for example, compassion. When one

examines the census records for Dublin city in 1911 one sees vast levels of child mortality. Women bore 13 children but only six survived. This gives one empathy with people in the past which is difficult to come by any other way. I am Pollyanna-ish enough to believe and hope that it affects people's ideas about poverty in the present as well. That would be a good outcome. It also teaches them that there are not always answers to the questions that we ask of the past. There is no seamless narrative that follows its way through. History is a bumpy ride. There are sources for some things and not others.

Mr. McCarthy referred to the difference between political history, sets of dates and so on and social history, which has blossomed greatly in this country in the past 30 years. It deals with the interior experience of what it is like to be alive at a particular time. We get much more through memoirs and novels and so on than we do through history, but history is a significant part of giving us that information. Do we really want to live in a country where many children over the age of 12 years know nothing about history? If they know anything about Michael Collins and Éamon de Valera it is because they might have seen, by chance, Neil Jordan's bad movie on television. Is that good enough? We still have serious interrogation to do in this country on our history. Not all the primary sources are available but we hope this decade will lead to a great improvement in this regard and that we will be able to interrogate and reflect properly. Let us not shut off the opportunity. It should not be a choice. It should be an opportunity for our young people to learn about their past and to benefit from the experience of it. Let us not repeat slavishly the mistakes made by our next-door neighbours just as they are learning to remedy them. They are about to put history back on the curriculum in Britain as a compulsory subject and we are about to take it out. What is that about?

Chairman:   I call Senator O'Donnell and then Deputy Ó Snodaigh.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   My thanks to the History Teachers Association of Ireland. I would know little about theatre, nothing about literature and I would know less about the poetry and drama of this country had it not been for history. I see it as a remarkable part of our lives. It should nearly be a compulsory subject, but I cannot really go that far. It should be available as a core subject to every child in the country. If I was to define it with my small sense of definition I would say it is the only way left to explain ourselves. Many other ways do not have its truth. It is literally the only way back and the only way to explain ourselves, who we are, what we are and how we are. To take it out of the curriculum or confine it to discrete or short courses is not enough. I have worked in university all my life and I know that even at a mature level short courses are not always the way to go, even with mature minds. I do not believe they are the way to go with young minds.

Let us consider this document, A Framework for Junior Cycle. Numeracy and literacy are at the core of it but the Department has left out the third part of the trinity, that is, oracy, which is not even mentioned in this document, nor are the arts or any of the defined arts. It seems to have become learning in the same manner as taking television meals. I fully agree with Senator Fidelma Healy Eames, who I rarely agree with in the Seanad. Let us consider terms such as "appreciate", "respect", "value", "create", "critically interpret", "understand", "describe", "illustrate", "observe" and "evaluate". I wonder whether we are talking about the Seanad when I think of these words. Anyway, the Department of Education and Skills has made these terms into a convenient veil to lay over everything. Subjects such as history and English have a right to have a reason for their existence under that veil and independent of that veil. That is the major problem. They are remarkably important subjects and great subjects with explanations of who, what and how we are. To put them in any other category is to take them out of the

definition of education and I am totally against that. I believe the Department should reassess this document because in many respects it smacks of what may be termed "television meals education".

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:   I was one of those characters who qualified as a teacher of history and geography. I never taught because even in 1986 when I qualified there seemed to be a move away from it. There were few opportunities in Dublin to teach both subjects. I was expected to move to some of the voluntary schools outside Dublin and at that stage my political career dictated that I would stay in Dublin. Perhaps it was a good thing.

I was a product of Tony Gregory's teaching. He sparked a great interest in history in people who otherwise would not have had an interest. He used to hold a double class on a Friday during the leaving certificate years. We never spoke about history or the curriculum but he managed to link what was happening in politics and with his career at the time, with Dublin and with Ireland to history in a way that most of us did not understand back then. It was a joy that we appreciated afterwards. I can guarantee that no one in that class or the other classes he taught failed at history. Unknown to themselves the students were learning the true value of history and how it is vital for society.

History is one of those subjects that creates the citizen not the consumer. As people in a republic we should remember that much when we are formulating an education system. There are certain core subjects which set out our values. If many people had their way there would only be two core subjects, that is, English and mathematics. Irish would have been jettisoned many years ago to one of those small topics to which one could dip in. The attitude is that if one wants to look at Irish one goes to the museum. It was only as a result of people fighting the attitudes that prevailed that we have made progress. The argument was that the approach was failing and that compulsion does not work. However, compulsion does not work if the resources are not matching or if the teachers are not enthused about it. In such cases it becomes nothing but a chore for young people. The same could be said of any of the subjects in the junior certificate cycle. I often say that if it is not broken then we should not fix it but there is no point in fixing it if it will not work. In this case I firmly believe that this proposal is detrimental to the teaching of history at leaving certificate level in future and at university level as well. We need to reconsider it.

Ms Naughton remarked that we should look at the model for English being developed at the moment.

Ms Breda Naughton: We should consider science as well.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:   The problem with examining English is that it is a core subject. Therefore, one cannot look at something that will have a higher standing in future in the junior certificate to see where the history syllabus or the teaching of history will be. I believe the Department representatives should reconsider that. There are problems with history in the junior cycle. There are problems in many subjects in the junior cycle and they have nothing to do with the teachers or pupils. They are to do with the fact that there is a pupil-teacher ratio which is increasing and there are fewer resources.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:  ] Even in this day and age not every school is computerised so cannot fully use the tools that are now available, whether Wikipedia or all of the original documentation that is online and can be interrogated. Major moves and investments have been made in this direction over the years but not on the scale required. If we want to build a society that is well grounded in education that should be done across a range of subjects rather than concentrate on three or four to the detriment of others. People have said of Ireland that it is great to see pupils who do the leaving certificate having a range of subjects and not concentrating on three or four or fewer subjects as happens in other jurisdictions. That stands the test of time. I am an advocate of a greater range and more core subjects. The core subjects in the past were history, geography, Irish, English and maths. Civics as it was in the past has disappeared but has come back in a different form and we ensure that people are healthy and fit. Without a healthy body one will not have a healthy mind. I urge the Department to reconsider this immediately before the damage is done because once we start this we will end up with the situation that exists in Britain and elsewhere that will take generations to undo because there will not be the people to teach the subject.

On another subject, Senator Mac Conghail mentioned schools offering history, and others have mentioned the difference between geography and history but one of the reasons is the alternative to history in the leaving certificate course. That choice is often made by management but if it is tied to French, for example, and French is a requirement for college, people are going to opt for that. In other cases it is not offered at all. My son is doing his junior certificate today and the other son is in fifth year and history is not even offered as a subject to him. I am lucky enough that I have encouraged him to take it and he is willing to do that but he has said that he will drop one of the other subjects that he is doing in school as a compromise. It is crazy in this day and age that in the school in question it is not offered in any of the three final years. It is the school that Senator Mac Conghail mentioned. It is sad and a bad reflection on the school. I am enthusiastic about history and can go on and on about it. I am not going to and I am not even going to tie it to the decade of centenaries. That is not why we need history now. We need it because it defines who we are and in future it will be more important as the world changes that we have our own identity and understand where that came from.

Deputy Brendan Griffin:   I welcome everyone here today and thank them for their contributions which were very interesting. I may be the youngest person in the room. This day 14 years ago I would have been starting into my special topic with everything flying everywhere - that was a major operation. At the time we were a relatively small class doing leaving certificate history, but not because of the teacher. On the contrary, we had a model teacher who brought history to life in the classroom and instilled in all of us a great enthusiasm for it, a fantastic teacher. The feeling at the beginning of fourth year, as it was in our school, was that it was too difficult to get points in history for the amount of time we would have to put into it. I welcome the fact that the exam has become less onerous since I did it in 1999. The exam was a race against time. One had a special topic and four essays to complete in a ridiculously short space of time. It is a vicious circle because when I was in second year at NUI Galway many students who had an interest in history and were thinking of becoming teachers did not take history for second and third year because they felt that the teaching positions were not there as too few students were taking it at leaving certificate level. The saddest point is that I recall sitting in Professor Gearoid O'Tuathaigh's classes and seeing people who were not taking history in second and third year coming in to sit at the back of the lecture hall. They very much enjoyed the lectures but were not part of the class. Usually it is the other way around, people do not show up at all.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   A bit like here.

Deputy Brendan Griffin:   These were guys who might not have been going to their regular lectures but they were showing up at ones that were not on their course.

We need to examine the drop off in numbers between junior and leaving certificate. The perception remains that it is too difficult to get points. If there is to be further debate on this issue we should get the perspectives of younger people, those who are sitting the exams or are in the system and find out why there is not a bigger take-up or an enthusiasm to go with history where it is being provided. To what extent was that done in the preparation of this document?

Ms Crowe's reference to the teaching of history under Tito in the former Yugoslavia and the disaster in the post-Tito period was very interesting. We probably do not need to go that far to see an example of the same pattern. There are many in this country whose knowledge of the period between 1913 and 1923 was the romanticised version they heard in primary school. They had no further education on that period. Perhaps events would have been different on this island if more people had learned the skills of analysis and had a more comprehensive history of our own affairs. In formulating policy and the discussion here about the future junior certificate course, maybe we have to learn from our own history too. We need to have further debate on this.

The concerns of the history teachers need to be taken very seriously because we have seen time and again that where history is not learned, remembered or is systematically changed there can be disastrous consequences, for example, what is happening now in the UK. There are so many other examples. When we were building high rise buildings, high density accommodation here in the 1960s the UK had stopped doing that because it saw that was the wrong way to go. When railway preservation societies were relaying tracks in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s we were ripping them up here. This is an area in which it is far too serious to make a similar mistake. I would call for a rethink of this, further analysis and discussion. If there has not been widespread consultation with the students who are using the system that should happen too. Let us learn from them. Let us find out why there is a fall off and lack of interest and try to address that too.

Chairman:   I was going to ask a question too. With regard to Professor Ferriter's point about the importance of knowing the historical context of decisions we make now, Deputies Ó Snodaigh and Ó Ríordáin and Senator Mac Conghail and I were at the Constitutional Convention. When people talk about PR-STV they tend to present it as if it was the odd and eccentric choice.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Chairman:  ] I read Proinsias Mac Aonghusa's book before the weekend. It was a radical choice at the time to pick PR-STV. It is good to know the context of the decision and how it has helped to bring minorities into politics.

On subject choices, school timetabling is a big factor. When I was in school three decades ago, if one wanted to study chemistry one could not study history. I did not study history because my parents wanted me to study science at leaving certificate level, and rightly so. By

studying history for my degree, I defied expectations. Is there any compromise on this issue with the History Teachers' Association of Ireland in regard to what the Department and National Curriculum Council have decided?

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   The Chairman started where I wish to continue. We have a dilemma. The history teachers of Ireland seem to want one thing. Could the Department say what it has achieved from this session in terms of how we can marry the different concerns?

I refer to the statements of learning. Can we broaden the number of statements through which history can be achieved? Who decides that? Is it the principal or the Department? It will be critical. If we cannot offer history to as a means to fulfil statements of learning, principals will not set up classes, as it will not be practical.

Deputies Ó Snodaigh and Griffin are correct. It depends on subject what subject history is being offered against, such as French. A science subject is now almost mandatory at junior certificate level. Given where the jobs are, it is also understood that is the case at leaving certificate level. I want to hear from the Department.

Have history teachers worked with the primary sector? There is a very exciting revised curriculum at primary level. The understanding of history is being communicated through documents, newspapers and the census. I compliment Ms Crowe; I did not know she was responsible for making the census accessible. It is not just students but ordinary citizens who are finding history exciting and learning about their ancestry.

Are we working with primary teachers? Unless the Department is a little more flexible in taking concerns on board, we will have to do a massive sales and marketing job on history. It is a subject that is about defining who we are. As Senator O'Donnell said, it explains who we are to ourselves. We will lose all of that. That is the value of citizenship. Let us not have that as our legacy.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   I have a question for the representatives of the Department of Education and Skills. We are arguing the point in regard to its document. If it argues that history is not a core, cohesive and central subject, we have nowhere to go. One has to argue it as a core, great, centralised, cohesive, extraordinary and major thought process in the education of young minds. If one argues that it is outside that, then we are only arguing about whether it should compete with other subjects. That cannot be the argument, because it brings us somewhere else. It has to be brought back to the centrality of what it is cohesively, internally and expertly. One cannot argue it with a veil of appreciation and a value system that one could throw over any subject. One has to bring it back in centrally. If that is not done, there will be a piecemeal approach, and it may be done in front of the television as a short course, which I am against for young people.

Ms Niamh Crowley: I wish to come back on a number of points. We are arguing that this framework document will break the cycle. Even though only 52% of schools legally have to do history, many are amalgamated secondary schools which had history and geography as a core part of their culture. That is why large numbers are still doing it at junior certificate level. The framework document is breaking that cycle and creating a *tabula rasa*. Senior cycle students take seven subjects for the leaving certificate, with English, Irish, maths, and a

modern language at the core. They have to choose three subjects from a vast range. At 15 or 16 years of age students are moving into different interest areas, such as science or business studies. They only have three optional subjects and the fact that there is a large drop in the number studying history is not surprising. We take the point that history is not seen as being as popular as geography. More students achieve very high grades, such as A grades, in history, but geography is perceived as being easier to pass or to get a C at higher level because it does not involve a lot of reading. Although the junior certificate curriculum is very interesting, it is overloaded. History teachers participated in a reform document about ten years ago but it is sitting on a shelf, ironically, because of the new framework document. We could be teaching a better junior certificate today but it was shelved several years ago. It was proposed that the course be shortened to incorporate more skills. Deputy Ó Ríordáin will be interested to know that junior certificate students learn about TB in Ireland in the 1940s. Pádraig Pearse has not been eclipsed in the junior certificate syllabus. For students who did not have the benefit, unlike Deputy Griffin, of Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh's teaching in Galway, people might be interested to know that there is an excellent lecture by him on why history matters on our website. The committee might enjoy it; there is a clip in the PowerPoint presentation we submitted. The 24 statements ensure that everybody has to have some element of history, but it will not necessarily be a full subject. It could be a short course. In articles he has written, the Minister said students in Wexford could study the 1798 rebellion and Battle of Vinegar Hill and students in Meath could study the Norman invasion and Trim Castle. That is not a full historical education. A learning experience could be involved, such as a heritage week or fortnight in a school or a museum visit. Schools could say they are fulfilling the statement of learning by having a learning experience or a short course, but it may not be a full subject. As people said, it could be offered as a full subject or a short course but students might not choose it. The flexibility of the document is the problem. We could have brilliant history courses in some schools, but it allows for some students not to have that opportunity or not to choose the opportunity. The consultation with young people found that they enjoyed learning history but they only knew that because they had had the opportunity to do so. If they were not studying it they would not know they enjoyed it. I return to our first point on entitlement. Every young person Ireland is entitled to an historical education.

Ms Breda Naughton: I wish to go back a little bit because I want to answer previous questions. Senator O'Donnell was worried about arts and creativity in the framework document. I would like to bring to her attention to the fact that there are eight principles in the framework, one of which is creativity and innovation, and eight key skills in the framework, one of which is being creative. I assure her that there is a significant emphasis on creativity.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   I was talking about subject matter.

Ms Breda Naughton: I am talking about the content and a skill that will be in every specification, not just the arts.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   I take Ms Naughton's point with absolute respect, but her answer is an absolute obfuscation.

Ms Breda Naughton: We will agree to disagree.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Ms Breda Naughton:] We are trying to push it. The consultation process in English marks the start of consultation processes on all subjects and they will each be given the same importance as those on the subjects being developed. What is happening in the case of English is an example of what will happen in the future. I will ask Mr. MacFhlannchadha to talk about the role of teaching history into the future.

Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha: It is important to put in context the reason we are introducing the new junior cycle programme. We are introducing it because we know that the current programme for students is not fit for purpose. Many students disengage from learning even as early as second year. Many have their options cut out. We are talking about ensuring students have a broad and balanced learning experience. Many students do not study science and there are a number of who do not experience the arts during junior cycle. As matters stand, some might not even have the opportunity to study a modern language. It is not only history that is in question but other disciplines also, as referred to by Mr. Hanlon and Mr. Ferriter. It is important that in the new junior cycle programme there be an opportunity to develop the skills necessary for further study, for learning now and in the future, and developing lifeskills. As Ms Naughton pointed out, literacy, numeracy and the other key skills underpin the new junior cycle programme, skills such as managing oneself, staying well, communicating, being creative, working with others, managing information and thinking.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   Excuse me-----

Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha: Let me continue. Schools now have the opportunity to design programmes that will meet the needs of their students and ensure they will have that broad and balanced learning experience.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   It is at the will of the school.

Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha: The statements of learning encompass all of the key aspects of learning - the aesthetic; the cognitive, in all its forms; the effective and physical dimensions. It was pointed out that oracy was not mentioned. If members read the draft specification for English available on the NCCA website as part of the consultative process, they will note that oracy is very much a key part of the specification. They will note also that all key aspects of language learning are captured in terms of communication, in all its form; using language, in all its forms; and the functional aspects of language. It is a very robust programme of learning, even though it has not yet been finalised and it represents an advancement on the current syllabus. The same will apply to the other subject areas as the syllabuses are revised. There will be greater clarity about learning outcomes and an opportunity to introduce new modes of learning and assessment. Members can rest assured that the specifications create great confidence that the core aspects of the different disciplines will be addressed.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   Can we address the subject at issue - history?

Mr. Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha: I am putting the matter in context.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   I understand the broader curriculum.

Ms Breda Naughton: We are answering on topics brought up by members.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   I was not talking about that but about orality as a subject matter. I was not talking about it as something one engendered through other subjects. It is as important as numeracy and literacy. Ours guests missed my point, but not to worry.

Ms Breda Naughton: Orality is captured in the new English specification.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   It is not.

Ms Breda Naughton: I invite the Senator to read it on the NCCA's website.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   I have read it.

Chairman:   Before I bring in Ms Naughton again, I will bring in Mr. Ferriter and then go back to the representatives of the Department.

Mr. Diarmaid Ferriter: I want to address the Chairman's contribution. The point she made about context in terms of the Constitutional Convention must be the starting point for our understanding of so much. If we consider what we have been getting to grips with in this country in recent times, all of the reports and revelations we have had and all of the debates we are going to continue to have, there must be substantial historical knowledge available to people to understand and contextualise these debates. We have heard very interesting contributions here by a number of Senators. If we are going to talk about Seanad reform or the future of the Seanad, we need to know from where it came.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   We should keep the S-word out of this discussion.

Mr. Diarmaid Ferriter: We need to know how it evolved historically. It is true of all of these pressing issues that we debate, whether it be political reform or confronting difficult aspects of the past. The point the Chairman made in that context is very important.

The other issue the Chairman raised was the question of compromise. I have crossed swords publicly with the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Ruairí Quinn, on this issue and have no doubt about his personal interest in history, but he reassured me and others that as a result of this framework document - to use his words - "history will be embedded in the very heart of the curriculum." I have not heard anything today that leads me to believe that statement that history will be embedded in the very heart of the curriculum. I have heard a lot the words "could", "hopefully" and "is expected". When we talk about a possible compromise, we need to know what could there be a compromise because it seems as if there is no clarity as to what this will be in practice. That, for me, is a huge concern because it could result ultimately in there being vagueness such that there will not be the possibility for history to breathe as a subject.

Chairman:   Did Ms Naughton want to bring in Mr. McCarthy?

Ms Breda Naughton: Yes.

Mr. Kevin McCarthy: Many issues and questions were raised and I do not know if I can deal with all of them, but I will do my best to deal with the few that stuck in my mind.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh asked a question about the senior cycle options. I agree with him. If history is put up against the only foreign language on offer which is needed for matriculation purposes, it is not good. Every history inspector in Ireland would say this. We encourage offering an open choice to students and as much guidance and flexibility as possible, even though the latter may be considered a dirty word in some contexts at times. It is not good for history to form part of a tied option against the only foreign language on offer. I am also concerned when I see it up against some of the other subjects on offer. It may end up being the case that students with more third level ambition will move in a certain direction, depending on the subject. We strongly advocate offering an open choice to students and not linking history particularly with a subject that forms a requirement for third level.

The second point that struck me was the reference to history which Ms Crowley has answered better than I can. There is a sense that history is too difficult at senior cycle level and that it is too hard a subject in which to get high points, but the statistics do not bear this out. If one compares the results of the performance of students in leaving certificate history with that in other subjects - I will not mention a subject as I do not want to be shot down by others - the percentage of A1s, A2s and even B1s stands in comparison with that for any other subject. That is a tribute to the students, the teachers and the leaving certificate syllabus to a certain extent.

Regarding the issue of the statements, as a historian, I prefer to use concrete words such as "happened in the past" rather than "what might happen", but we have to be a little circumspect in that the development of a history specification will not start for a while. I cannot say what exactly will happen. If we look at the framework and the statements of learning and what links with what, the heading is subjects, short courses and other learning experiences that could contribute. That is the Department's wording.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   Who will decide? Will it be the principal or the Department?

Mr. Kevin McCarthy: No. It will not be the principal and it will not be the Department directly, rather it will be the committee that will be established.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   What committee?

Mr. Kevin McCarthy: A special committee will be established for each subject, as has happened in the case of English and will happen very shortly in the case of Irish, business studies and science and the year after in the case of other subjects. A committee will sit and identify the core statements of learning that link with history. Obviously, I imagine that would include statement 8 which has been quoted and I hope several others. I could make an argument to have others included, but that must be done by a committee which will include teachers-----

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   I hope today's discussion will form part of the work of that committee because unless history is included to match further statements of learning, it is on its way out.

Ms Breda Naughton: It will be related to statements 3, 6, 7, 9 and 16.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   Ms Naughton only mentioned statement 8.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:   There are quite a number of others.

Ms Breda Naughton: There are others, but they are only examples. Therefore, it can be linked with a lot of others.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Ms Breda Naughton:] They are just examples of ones so it can be linked in with a lot.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:   There are quite a lot of other ones that are not on the list.

Ms Breda Naughton: Could I say-----

Chairman:   I wish to say something before Ms Naughton makes her point. We will have to conclude soon. If any other member wishes to speak, he or she should do so now and then the witnesses will conclude.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   I accept what the history teachers are saying, that in principle more than 90% of them agree with the junior certificate framework model. I do not wish to put words in their mouth but I believe Ms Crowley said that, and that the issue is how all these statements undermine the teaching of history as opposed to endorsing it. It could be a case of dealing with the matter subject by subject. I accept we are just dealing with history. I am still not convinced by a one-size-fits-all approach to history. This session has not convinced me otherwise.

I am not a committee member but I wish to make a modest proposal that we invite someone involved with the curriculum in the United Kingdom which now seems to be endorsing it as more of a core subject in the curriculum to see what the experience is there because that information might be of help to the Minister in assessing how history is situated within the curriculum.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   We can learn from that. I would be happy to make a formal proposal in that regard.

Chairman:   We will put it on our agenda. One of the difficulties is that the committee cannot pay for travel and accommodation expenses but we will consider the matter and put it on the agenda for next week.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   Has the history committee been formed or is it about to be formed?

Ms Breda Naughton: Could I bring the committee back in history? I used to work in the NCCA and years ago Ms Niamh Crowley was the education officer for history on a committee that was representative of the ASTI, the TUI, the JMB, the third level colleges and the history teachers association. That is the type of board of studies, which is what it is called now, that will be brought together. Much consultation goes on. A paper will be produced before the process starts setting out what they consider history to be. That will be taken on board by the

expert group and out of that will come another document. The draft format of the new specification will go out for consultation and finally the document will be prepared. There will be at least two if not three points during which the specification will be prepared on which people will impact. There is a lot of opportunity for people to participate.

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: I wish to briefly comment. Some opaque language is being used. I refer to the reference to the committee and the specifications and consultation. Essentially, that is about curriculum. It is not about the subject history. The consultation will be on the specifications of the curriculum. It is back to this opaque, obfuscatory language.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   Obfuscating verbs. Verbs and more verbs.

Ms Breda Naughton: We are talking about the specifications.

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: I did not interrupt Ms Naughton. It is about whether we will have Daniel O'Connell or if we will teach Parnell, the First World War or the Lock-out.

Ms Niamh Crowley: It is not whether it will be in the core.

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: It will not be in the core. I view this issue as being confused.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   If it is not at the core then there is no argument.

Ms Breda Naughton: It could be a brilliant syllabus.

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: It could be. The consultation will be on the syllabus. Specification here means syllabus. One actually has to engage in translating what the language means. That is what specification means in this case.

I speak with all due respect to my colleagues on my left. I refer to a Department of Education and Skills presentation for the information of principals and schools. It was an in-service the Department gave in the spring of this year. The final slide, as to how one would implement the new framework document said that one would have to have the three core subjects – English, Irish and maths – and it suggested that science should be core. In terms of the knowledge economy I can see science being a core subject and then it gave the options. One could have history, French or business. If one requires a modern language for university entrance then the parent of a first-year student will say he or she must take French. Someone else could say that business is important. We are also up against the utilitarian nature of education, that subjects will be seen as useful. Deputy Ó Snodaigh referred to education for citizenship as opposed to for use or for being a consumer. The Department in one of its own presentations to school principals and deputy principals has offered the example that history could be put against French or business. For me in a nutshell, that is the problem with the new document.

Ms Breda Naughton: May I come in here?

Chairman:   Yes, Ms Naughton may come in.

Ms Breda Naughton: I was one of the presenters of the presentation to principals and deputy principals and it was the very last slide which we did or did not put up. When we spoke to

principals they said their No. 1 concern was timetabling. I immediately said that I would show them the slide but I would take it down immediately because we did not want anyone to present what was shown as a sample example. It was very much shown in that context. That was the way it was presented.

Ms Niamh Crowley: It is on the website and it is a sample example.

Ms Breda Naughton: I am just saying that was the way it was presented.

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: The document here suggests it could be a reality. Ms Naughton suggested that could be a reality for the future. History would be an optional subject along with French or business and for me that would spell the death knell for history.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   It could easily be a reality. The truth is that history must go up against something unless it can stand alone.

Ms Breda Naughton: It has to go up against 21 other subjects.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   Unless it is stand alone.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:   Unless it is a core subject.

Ms Breda Naughton: Or should everything else be core?

Chairman:   It has been a very good debate but speakers must speak through the Chair.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   Deputy Tuffy is such a nice Chair.

Chairman:   Members have a final chance to contribute.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   As a member of the committee I wish to make a formal proposal in support of Senator Mac Conghail that because we are learning from our past and our comparators we should explore how we could bring in somebody from the UK and consider the experience there and why they are doing a U-turn.

Chairman:   We will explore the option.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   With the help of the History Teachers' Association of Ireland, and others, we will find a means to fund such a visit. Perhaps the person would be willing to come without funding.

Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin:   We could speak to them through a video link or get someone to come from Northern Ireland.

Chairman:   That is another possibility. It is a good idea.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:   I will be very brief. I have argued that history should be a core subject and the retort was that one must make a decision as there are 21 subjects. I do

not think anybody in this committee or in the real world would suggest that Chinese would be a core subject in Ireland. There is a range of subjects that one could whittle down into core subjects and secondary subjects for the junior certificate and then society would have to take a decision on which should be core subjects. The decision should be taken by society rather than the Department on where we want to go as a country in the future. The argument was whether one wants citizens or consumers. We have not had the debate, yet we are being forced by changes within the curriculum to accept that is what will happen anyway. The Minister must be asked to reflect again on the issue and to consider having a bigger range of core subjects for the junior certificate. My view is that the same should be true of the leaving certificate as well but that discussion is for another day. At the very least there should be a grounding across as broad a range of core subjects as possible and then one could dip in and out to give a flavour of different subjects so that one could encourage children to expand on their interests because they will have different options once they go to university.

Deputy Brendan Griffin:   I formally second the proposal made by Senator Healy Eames on the suggestion by Senator Mac Conghail. I propose that the committee should write to the Minister with a copy of the minutes of the meeting and to outline our concerns on the issue. We should ask him to re-examine the situation. There seems to be unanimous concern among committee members and that should be conveyed to the Minister.

Chairman:   We can send a copy of the transcript of the meeting to the Minister and ask for his comments. That would be a standard approach for the committee to take in that situation. I will take final comments from the witnesses.

Mr. Kevin McCarthy: I would make two comments. First, the committee is entitled to invite a visitor from the United Kingdom, but there are different systems depending on whether one is in Scotland or England, and it will get a very different viewpoint on the way history should be structured. That is just a matter of information.

Second, by way of explanation, when I refer to statements of learning, I am not trying to be vague in any way. They are the things around which the specific history syllabus will be built. Nobody is telling the committee that history will be a core subject for every student. That cannot happen in the framework as it is constructed, but it is tremendously important that those statements of learning are factored into the development of the history specifications. I do not know the reason the syllabus is no longer being used either, but it is tremendously important that as many as possible of the significant statements of learning are factored into history because it is a wide-ranging, all-embracing and valuable subject, and that must be reinforced by the statements of learning. They may not necessarily be the ones in the framework because it was only a tentative suggestion that was made.

Ms Breda Naughton: Can I wrap up on behalf of the Department? We have very good history teachers in the system. It has to be acknowledged that 90% of the students are taking history at junior cycle. However, the international experience has shown us that it is important that we give schools the autonomy and the flexibility to choose the programmes most relevant to their young people. It would be very difficult for schools not to teach history to the majority of their students because, first, they have these hugely passionate history teachers but, second, it is embedded in the statements of learning. However, because of the statements of learning, it will be a requirement now of all schools to provide a history experience and we hope, and I am sorry to use the word "hope", that the majority of schools will take history as a subject. From a schools perspective, they have to make decisions based on the identification of the needs of

their young people and also the teaching resources available for them.

Ms Catriona Crowe: To add to the welcome suggestion that we might have some input from the United Kingdom, Mr. McCarthy is right that it is a different system but the fundamental questions we are asking here today are being asked in Britain. I would suggest that someone like Tristram Hunt, who is both an MP and a historian and who chaired the Ofsted committee of inquiry into this precise subject in 2011, would be a useful person to invite. We will certainly talk to the History Teachers Association of Ireland and find a way to get him here. I think that would be very helpful.

Senator Fidelma Healy Eames:   Fantastic.

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: Ms Naughton has just outlined our concerns for us. She used the word "hope". Our *raison d'être* is that history will not have to be offered as an experience for a 12 year old entering the secondary school system. I agree with the sentiments expressed from the other side of the room. There is a touch of cultural vandalism in this in terms of our own history. I am not fluent in our native language. My father was but I am not. We use history in this country to construct our identity. It gives us the apparatus of understanding who and why we are. We are unique in that we have lost our linguistic identity. In terms of reference to best practice internationally, we have researched that. Every system in Europe, with the exception of Albania and England, requires their students to take history to 15 years of age at least. We have spoken a great deal in recent years about the Finnish education system. In its upper education second level curriculum, their students must take history to 18 years of age. It is compulsory in Finland. We are talking about international best practice but it strikes me that we are seeking to deviate from international best practice. I want to express, on behalf of my association, our thanks to the committee for inviting us to come before it. The debate has been very interesting. My feeling from this meeting is that the Senators and the Deputies are more supportive of our position than that of the Department. I would be behind the committee in whatever it can do in this issue. If it can propose a Seanad debate, while there is still a Seanad, please do. If it can propose a Dáil debate, please do. We would ask the members, as we are asking the witnesses from the Department, to revisit this document. It must be revisited. In terms of the various statements of learning, it strikes me that several subjects could be put into a core which could meet those statements of learning. I thank the committee. We are passionate about this issue. As Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh stated, this is about citizenship and what it is to be Irish. We believe it is the birthright of every Irish citizen to experience a study of history as they go through the school system.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   It is also a major educational debate.

Ms Breda Naughton: I thought I said that through the framework everybody would study history. As I said, the majority of them study the full subject and that the 5,500 that currently do not do it would have the opportunity to do it through a short course. We want it, and it is in the statement-----

(Interruptions).

Ms Breda Naughton: I said for the 5,500, the ones that are not doing it now.

Ms Niamh Crowley: Ms Naughton is breaking the cycle.

Ms Breda Naughton: The cycle currently means that only 50% have to do it.

Ms Niamh Crowley: But the culture is there. Ms Naughton is breaking the cycle.

Chairman:   I thank the representatives from the History Teachers Association of Ireland and from the Department of Education and Skills for debating this issue with the committee. We will examine it further, as they suggested. The debate has been very informative and lively. I thank the Senators and Deputies also.

Mr. Gerard Hanlon: I thank the committee for inviting us here. We appreciate it.

The joint committee adjourned at 3.40 p.m. until 1 p.m. on Wednesday, 19 June 2013.