

Junior Cycle Reform: Motion

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   I move:

That Seanad Éireann-----

notes the proposals developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in "Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle - Innovation and Identity", and "A Framework for Junior Cycle" subsequently published by the Department of Education and Skills, and calls on the Minister for Education and Skills to give his assurance that history will be reinstated as a core subject for the Junior Certificate.

I will not call for a quorum on this very important subject, although I have that right. What do we need to know? That is the real question.

Does it matter that we do not have a quorum?

Acting Chairman (Senator Imelda Henry):   The sitting can continue without a quorum but if the Senator wishes to call one she may do so.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   I think I will call a quorum, yes.

Notice taken that 12 members were not present; House counted and 12 Members being present,

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   The real question surrounding this Private Members' motion is what do we or, in particular, what young people need to know in order to understand how the world became what we perceive it to be today. They will not learn this through technology or the "X Factor". One of the most radical and extraordinary thinkers in education was Neil Postman. He believed that for education to be meaningful, young people, their parents and teachers must have a common narrative. The question I put to those Senators who have turned up for this debate is "Do we have a common narrative?" If we do, how could the Department of Education and Skills, when the History Teachers Association disagrees so vehemently, change history from a core subject to a discrete subject in the junior cycle? There are many false gods of modern education lurking around and trying to get attention. One of them is economic utility. Others include consumerism; technology - a type of plug-in messiah wiring schools for personal computers; multiculturalism, when we should be talking about diversity; and a list of aspirational verbs when we should be talking about the "how" of great teaching and training. There are many other bogus objectives but few "hows" in all of these pamphlets.

We have not for a long time had a conversation in this country on the types of subject or knowledge that are fundamental to a quality of life and others which are not. If we did have a real conversation about this, history would not be becoming a discrete subject, music would be compulsory up to 18 years, the arts would be examinable, formed and standardised and not a parallel of the television, and dance would probably be a core subject. Most of all, as we are a talking people and speech is our greatest need and means of communication, aurality would be an independent subject with the foundation of human and vocal communication and engagement. Amidst all of this, the National Council for Curriculum Assessment has created the most outstanding and, might I say, incredible statements of learning for the new changed

junior cycle. These statements arise out of a core concept of innovation and identity within that cycle. The statements of learning include words like "communicates", "reaches", "creates", "appreciates", "critically interprets", "recognises", "uses", "describes", "illustrates", "predicts", "improves", "values", "learns", "understands", "makes" and "takes". There are 24 statements of learning in all. Two verbs have been omitted, namely, "imagines" and "feels". Imagination has its own rewards and to feel we have to be able to think. I believe "feel" and "imagine" should have been given an airing. Some subjects will lock into some of these aspirations and others will lock easily into others. However, great subjects do them all. The study of history does not involve just one, two, three or four of the aspirational verbs, values and recognitions but all of them. How it is possible to justify art forms or core fundamental knowledge to this formula? It is not possible to get knowledge to fit a formula regardless of how aspirational the formulaic the verbs. Knowledge is its own reward. The NCCA should have argued the brilliance of subjects and the "why" and "how" of them.

In the midst of all this aspiration and valuing innovation and identity, history is to become a discrete subject, a short course choice. Short courses do not work for young minds. Young minds need joined-up education. That is how their minds are engaged. They only work at mature and postgraduate level, as anybody who knows anything about teaching knows. The only areas the students at DCU learned were their core modules, the ones that lasted for two years. The short courses became a kind of entertainment. Young minds need a broad sweep of history and a defined and lengthy foundation block to encourage the study of the subject later or it will become the preserve of the elite. According to Diarmuid Ferriter, all children have a public ownership of history and a public ownership of their own history. It can never become the right of the elite.

The Department of Education and Skills is in my opinion re-aligning, repositioning, downgrading, cupboarding and cloaking history behind what it calls a discrete subject. *Discretus* means separated or set apart - the very educational concept we are supposed to be trying to avoid. I will elaborate on why this is completely wrong specifically, and fundamentally wrong generally. At a meeting of the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection, Mr. Gerard Hanlon, president of the History Teachers Association of Ireland, Catriona Crowe and Diarmuid Ferriter, who must have some clue about what they are talking about, said that every child has an entitlement to history, not as a dip-in and out facility. History education is the entitlement of every child. The Department of Education and Skills cannot say that young people will get this entitlement from a short course: they will not. History is more important than most subjects. It is our heritage. It explains ourselves to us in that it tells us who we are, what we are, how we are and why we are. As pointed out by Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, it creates citizens not consumers. That is all we need to know about it. That is all the justification we need, not 24 statements of learning.

Why did the NCCA not argue on that basis? History is a discipline not an entertainment. It is a skill, a crafted knowledge, a form, a learning, a thought process, a language, a memory, a fact, an evidence, an interpretation and a culture. It is our lives, a life, the local, the national, the international. It is our place. It is the reason we live the way we do. It is beyond essential for all young adults beginning life in the middle school cycle. In addition, history is taught by specialist teachers. What happens when it becomes a short course, short module or a choice rather than a core subject? It becomes less coherent. It becomes more represented in the middle class areas and less represented in working class areas where subjects considered more useful and easier will take its place thereby becoming the preserve of the elite. History as a short course in the junior cycle will not be studied at leaving certificate level or at

university or third leaving, thus the numbers of teachers in the system will fall. They fell considerably when the subject was removed from the core curriculum in the UK. Discussion is now taking place in the UK on how to bring it back.

We are so busy copying New Zealand, Queensland and Finland. Why do we not lead the way? If one wants to reform the junior cycle there are many other changes that can be made. I am not against change. However, this change has not been thought out. If change is what is required, music should become compulsory for every child. Then we would have a skill, love, passion, creative activity, maths, history, sound, score and melody all in one. Imagine that? Therein are statements of learning. The Irish Chamber Orchestra is doing this in Limerick. Why do we not copy what it is doing? That would be something worth copying. Why are we applauding fragments of knowledge? That is what short courses are. We do not need short courses, we need educational revolution and an educational rethink. If the history syllabus is over-laden with content and that is the greatest reason for the decline in the number of pupils taking history between junior and leaving certificate level, then throw it into fresh combinations, use imagination, creativity and do not relegate it to choice and short courses. Re-examine the subject and hold it as a core. Ms Catriona Crowe called all of this what it is, "the greatest elephant in the room." She asked why we bother having core subjects at all. Why do we bother regarding some subjects as essential and fundamental to the rights to knowledge for all young people? Why not teach the *Beano*?

Some knowledges must be compulsory. Maths, English, the arts and languages are not disposable and cannot be disposed of or shortened. Why does it accepted that history can be? Is it because it is difficult or hard? Perhaps, it takes up too much time and requires reading, writing, study and memory and we cannot have that. It is the very thing we need now more than ever. History is not cut and paste. It is not Internet, 500 channels, Facebook, Twitter and all that other nonsense of the great technological revolution information highway, the tablets of Moses turned Apple. Technology may be the mechanics of the brain but history is the mind. It is evidence and informed thought. It is outside the garbage of the information highway, the antithesis of the lies on the Internet, the tabloid press, the glut and garbage of saturated information. It is the counteraction against immediacy. It is evaluation, real resource and reasoning. It is primary sources, arduous debate, politics, democracy and lack of it. Unlike the Internet garbage information glut, it teaches that there are no easy answers. Catriona Crowe asked if we really wanted to live in a country where many children over the age of 12 know nothing of their history? Are they to know about De Valera and Collins through film? As I said earlier, just as we are about to remove history as a core subject, the UK is putting it back on its curriculum as a core subject.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:  ] There is a craziness in that proposition. If we argue that history is not a core subject, it is not based on an educational argument. Why argue that one subject should compete against other subjects? To do this is to argue that core knowledge in any one area is of greater significance than in another area, which is not true. This brings us back to the question as to why we should not teach the *Beano*. The Minister, for whom I have the utmost respect, needs more advice. Above all, he should invite some of the directors of the curriculum in England here to explain the reasons they decided to reinstate history as a core subject.

History must continue to be held in its rightful place. If we are supposed to make young

people more intelligent and smarter, the big question is how we can counteract technologies which are defining our progress and who we are, as human beings. Do we ever question the effects of technology, technological innovation, millions of televisions, the Internet, the information highway and the interactive everything? Do these things improve us? No, we are lonelier and more isolated than ever. Technology may be able to tell us how things work but can it tell us how to live? Human progress does not necessarily mean technological progress. What does more information to more people in more diverse forms solve?

We stake so much of human advancement on technological advancement while failing to raise enough educational questions about it. Do we believe the Internet and the digital economy amount to liberation? We have international pornography, the adultification of children, a glut of meaningless information and advertising and information as garbage. We view the Internet as the centre of the world to which we turn for everything. We are surrendering our culture to it and we are about to surrender education to it. In doing so, we will also surrender history to it. This is where history finds its force.

As a result of technology, we have a decline in literacy, socialisation and politics. We are dependent on our schools to counteract these trends. This cannot be achieved through short courses. An outcry is needed about this from all teachers, not only history teachers. The media have altered social responsibility, psychic habits and political processes. We are dependent on subjects such as history to counteract incoherent meaninglessness. We need it for perspective, to prepare students for what is ahead and to show them what has been. The world's history is the world's judgment and without the former, young people will not have the latter.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   I second the motion.

I welcome the Minister of State to the Chamber. I am proud to support the motion and I commend my colleague, Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell, on her passionate speech. This issue presents us with a serious philosophical challenge. Much of the framework document for junior cycle is to be applauded and commended. It is a radical, innovative and creative approach to learning, which offers flexibility and begins to see the student or pupil in terms of a process of lifelong learning that will not only empower young people, but could also create a dynamic model of citizenship. The opportunity afforded schools and local communities to engage with the statements of learning could also have a profound impact.

Earlier today, as director of the Abbey Theatre, I met first-year students from Larkin Community College, the theatre's neighbour. Of the 15 students I met, none had visited the Abbey Theatre previously. We were humbled. The theatre is working with the college on a pilot short course called "Theatre and Citizenship". Over the next six or seven weeks, both organisations will become richer in experience and connectivity because of the amazing young people who are engaging with us on their right to access the national theatre. I am, therefore, one of the beneficiaries of innovation and identity in developing the new junior cycle.

As with any change, we need to strike a balance between theory, on the one hand, and practice and the Irish experience, on the other. The motion is not about making anything compulsory. On the issue of compulsory Irish, I blame the syllabus rather than compulsion for the bad experience many people had when learning the language. The purpose of the motion is to enhance and celebrate the syllabus. There is much that is wrong and worrying

about the way in which history is currently taught in secondary schools. It is not perfect, nor is it a compulsory subject.

In 2013, 53,000 students did the junior certificate history examination, whereas only slightly more than 11,000 students did the leaving certificate history examination. It is possible that the syllabus is over-laden with content. Only 50% of schools currently require students to take history as a junior certificate subject. The purpose of the motion is to acknowledge the need to develop a bespoke model of education that attempts to engage with the current context. Not having history as a core subject will, over time, diminish the status of the subject and, ultimately, its psychological relevance to students. We are, as Fintan O'Toole observed, in the golden age for the study of Irish history. The amazing coincidence is that we are also in an age in which there is a dearth of new vision, ideas and ideology.

The Minister took a positive step to encourage greater success in mathematics. We need a similar imaginative response to the teaching of history. We must sow the seeds of an enlightened citizenship based on understanding the present through a knowledge of history. This is what the poets of 1916 took from 1798 - history as a way of interpreting rather than knowing the past. I commend the motion to the House.

Senator Averil Power:   I welcome the Minister of State to the House and thank the Independent Senators and Taoiseach's nominees for tabling the motion. As previous speakers noted, history is an extremely important subject, not only in terms of understanding the past but also in terms of the generic skills it provides, which are useful across the curriculum. The Minister places great emphasis on literacy. History, as a content heavy subject, involves a great deal of reading, analysis, writing and argumentation, all of which are key skills that are essential if students are to grasp other subjects at school, third level and through lifelong learning. It is vital, therefore, that students study history.

As noted in the Government amendment, history is not currently compulsory. That 90% of students take the subject at junior certificate level is an indication that students are voting to study history and schools want to offer the subject. However, a problem arises at leaving certificate level. As Senator Mac Conghail pointed out, the take-up at leaving certificate is much lower than at junior certificate level. During a discussion in the joint committee it emerged that one of the reasons for this decline is that some schools do not offer history as a leaving certificate subject, which is a shame. As we seek to reform the second level experience as a whole, we must ensure that subjects are offered. This may require collaboration with other schools or other innovative approaches. It should not be the case that students are unable to take a subject as important as history in fifth and sixth year. There is, therefore, a bigger picture to consider.

The Fianna Fáil Party welcomes junior certificate reform, having initiated the reform process while in government. I appreciate the position in which the Minister finds himself in that all of us are in favour of students at junior cycle being given an opportunity to experiment with a wider range of subjects in order that they can decide which subjects they wish to choose for the leaving certificate. While it is my view that all students should study history in the junior cycle, I have argued previously that they should also study science, modern languages and technology. We must also ensure young people do much more physical exercise in school. If we place the school system under such pressure, clearly something will have to give. I appreciate that it would be inconsistent to argue in favour of junior certificate reform, while demanding that all current subjects be studied for the entire

three-year junior cycle programme. I would be concerned, however, if the only choice available to students were between a short course and a full subject because the gap between the two is significant. It would be a shame if we were to end up in a position where schools no longer offer history at junior certificate level or it is only offered as a short course or 50:50 subject. Such a scenario would be a great loss, especially as 90% of students currently take history at junior certificate level. We should aim to ensure that 90% of pupils continue to take history as a full subject, although I accept we may need to shave some time off the current three-year period to make space for other subjects on the curriculum.

I ask the Minister to review the matter. History is a special case and must, like science subjects, have space on the curriculum. Short courses are not an alternative to offering a full subject.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Senator Averil Power: 🗣️ 🗣️] For that reason while stressing how important history is and while greatly supporting the motion that has been tabled, we have discussed it as a group and will be abstaining on it because we do not want to vote against it tonight. However, we ask the Minister to look at it again. We will table such a motion again in a few months if there is no movement on it. We understand the genuine concern raised by the Senators who have spoken this evening and from the History Teachers Association of Ireland and others. There may be room for more engagement and I know the Minister is willing to listen. That is our perspective. I very much welcome that the Taoiseach's nominees group has tabled the motion.

Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú: 🗣️ 🗣️ Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire. It is not surprising that this subject would be debated in this House. I hope the Minister will find something helpful for his future decision making. Many people are surprised that even though they are committed to the fairly radical reform of the junior certificate curriculum, they are disappointed that history is to become a casualty of that. History is a living subject that is relevant and central to every aspect of our lives. That is underlined by every programme I hear on the radio or watch on television on which someone such as Professor Diarmaid Ferriter is brought in to give a perspective. So it is clear that it is not a cold subject existing in isolation. We always regarded history as allowing us to learn from and be inspired by the past, and also be deterred from making mistakes that were made in the past. Given that it has been so central to society, not having it would deprive young people of having knowledge of the past and in a way being prepared for the present at the same time.

It is quite clear that it is not just educators and legislators who are debating history not being a core subject in the junior certificate curriculum, but parents and even young people are also doing so. In this decade of commemorations of events, including those in 1913 and 1916, it would be very surprising to suggest that the teaching of history in schools might be diminished. Millions of people are accessing the 1911 census and will hopefully be able to access the 1926 census in the very near future. That is also history because it is not just a matter of knowing about their roots; they are also giving a context to an environment and an era. History is all around us. If people think that history is less important - I will not mention the other subjects that are more important - that has to be debated.

Further to what Senator Power said, I would like to think that the Minister having come to this august assembly today, might be able to go back to the drawing board with his officials in the realisation that there are helpful and strong opinions on the subject that Ireland would

the poorer for it and young people would be deprived if that subject is not given the appropriate status. As the Minister is a reforming Minister, he will realise that reforming does not necessarily mean sidelining something that is important to our lives. I hope he will take that on board.

Senator Jim D'Arcy:   I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “That Seanad Éireann” and substitute the following:
“notes that:

- the framework for a new Junior Cycle includes English, Irish and Mathematics as compulsory subjects for all students, due to the importance of those subjects in developing literacy and numeracy skills;
- contrary to recent commentary, History is not currently a compulsory subject for all students at Junior Cycle level. Despite this, over 90% of students continue to study History at this level;
- data from the Post-Primary Longitudinal Study, carried out by the ESRI, found that a greater degree of subject choice led to greater student engagement at Junior Cycle level;
- the new framework for Junior Cycle gives flexibility and autonomy to schools, who are best placed to identify the needs of their students; and
- the importance, within that framework, of the mandatory statements of learning which must be achieved by all students, including that each student ‘understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change’ and ‘understands the origins and impacts of social, economic, and environmental aspects of the world around her/him’;
- and

Is confident that the position of History as a subject is secure, and that History will continue to be studied by the vast majority of students at Junior Cycle level.”

I congratulate the Independent Senators and particularly Senator O'Donnell on bringing this important motion to the Seanad on the position of history in the new junior certificate syllabus. I believe history is a core in the new junior cycle and therefore I have proposed our amendment which I hope can be supported by everybody.

This morning I spoke to Dr. Pádraig Kirk and wished him well in his new position in charge of the implementation of the new junior cycle programme. Dr. Kirk is the former CEO of County Louth VEC and is a person of immense qualities and an excellent choice for this task. I have no doubt he will be a big success. During our conversation we discussed the position of history in the new junior cycle and he referred to the 24 statements of learning that are at the core of the new programme, in particular the one included as part of the amendment. These statements provide the basis for schools to plan for, design and evaluate their junior cycle programme.

The school syllabus must ensure that all statements of learning feature in the programme for all junior cycle students. Therefore, if the statements of learning are at the core of the junior

cycle programme, *a fortiori* history is already at the core and does not need to be reinstated. To quote from Flann O'Brien's *At Swim Two Birds*, "the conclusion of your syllogism... is fallacious, being based upon licensed premises."

There seems to be a gene in our psyche that wants us to make things compulsory in the belief that a specific object will be achieved by these means. It is, I believe, very much a socio-religious, psychosomatic construct and historical in origin. It is a top-down approach to learning and culture, which is more about control than learning. In this context many of us can remember the raiméis that passed for history which was taught in our schools for many years and which was clearly biased in favour of the dominant ideology of the time. I would rather watch a film about Eamon de Valera and Michael Collins than listen to the fanatical, declamatory cosmology of a Christian Brother of years gone by.

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):   Dorothy Macardle comes to mind.

Senator Jim D'Arcy:   Dorothy Macardle was a Dundalk girl of course. To quote Yeats:

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?

I am not suggesting for a moment that the proposers of the motion are in this category. Nevertheless, I believe, as my grandmother used to say, that forced prayer is no devotion. The most important thing about history as a subject in secondary schools is not whether it is compulsory, but the quality and content of the programme, -----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   And teaching.

Senator Jim D'Arcy:   ----- and the quality of teaching and learning. Thankfully history as a subject in our schools at the moment has a reputation for excellent delivery and I have no doubt but that this will continue to be the case.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Senator Jim D'Arcy:  ] I welcome the motion tabled by the Independent Senators. It offers a timely opportunity to debate a most important topic, namely, the teaching of history at junior cycle level. However, as the statement of learning on the matter makes clear, it is already a core part of the junior cycle syllabus. The next step would be to make compulsory history as an examination subject and we have had too much compulsion in Ireland. For this reason, notwithstanding the excellence of the motion and the impassioned and excellent delivery of my colleague, Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell, I ask that the amendment be accepted.

Senator Mary Moran:   I also welcome the Minister to the House. As a Senator, teacher and lifelong student, I can appreciate the motion tabled by the Taoiseach's Independent nominees and I commend Senator O'Donnell and her colleagues. All Members will agree that history is as crucial to a student's understanding of the world as are maths, English or Irish, which at present are, and on foot of the junior cycle reform will continue to be, the only compulsory subjects.

As a teacher who taught music for many years in a secondary school, I will speak for a moment on the experience I have had of teaching the subject. In one school in which I taught, music was compulsory up to the junior certificate. All students in the school were obliged to study it until that point, after which it became an optional subject for the leaving certificate. Ten years ago, the position changed whereby music became a subject of choice in the first year. The numbers taking music to leaving certificate level did not change at all, which is a valid point to make in this debate. If one provides students with a choice, they can make up their own minds and by the time they come to leaving certificate level, they are well capable of so doing.

I am delighted to note that at present, 91% of students take history to junior certificate level. However, 11,000 students take history to leaving certificate level and this may suggest a need to examine the core curriculum and syllabus of history. As I have stated previously many times, students often choose subjects at leaving certificate level based on the national average grade of As or on the demands of the subject.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   Hear, hear.

Senator Mary Moran:   Moreover, from my previous experience of supervising State leaving certificate examinations, I can recall a situation that was changed a few years ago in which English examinations took place in the morning and the students had a three-hour writing marathon, followed by a history examination in the afternoon of three hours and 20 minutes. I recall watching students shaking their hands every ten minutes because they could not get down on paper fast enough what they wished to express. At a time like the present, when things are so competitive at third level, unfortunately factors like this have crept into subjects and this has become a key concern of students and a reason for them to choose subjects for the leaving certificate examination. I read an important and interesting article by Tom Collins in this morning's edition of *The Irish Times*, in which he wrote the single most important attribute a young person should have acquired by the end of the junior certificate cycle is a love for learning. That is very important and were one to make something compulsory, as was seen when Irish was made a compulsory subject, one would be in danger of losing all that. Compulsion of any sort is likely to diminish this possibility.

This does not take away from the importance of history on which I completely agree. However, a considerable amount of cross-communication and cross-learning takes place between subjects in schools even as it is and this point has not been referred to in today's debate. As for my own subject, when teaching Irish music I also teach the history because what was going on at a particular time is highly pertinent to the history of music in question, be it in Ireland or in European countries. One can understand the music and culture much better if one understands the underlying history. Consequently, history is being taught in other subjects and I have lobbied for greater correspondence in this regard for many years. I believe the reform of the junior cycle will encourage greater communication between subjects and will encourage people who are learning Irish, for example, to learn the history. Similarly, when students are learning music or English, the subject will be incorporated and there will be cross-subject and cross-curricular teaching in this regard.

As for short courses, I refer to the consideration of one's own town and the new junior cycle reform will offer far greater scope than was the case previously to local people to examine local areas in the first instance. The 12-year olds who come into secondary schools often do not know the history or significance of, for example, the castle standing at the bottom of the

school or are not familiar with the graveyard or its contents and do not know its underlying significance. Consequently, this proposal has provided the ideal opportunity to examine what is in one's own area. It also depends on the individual teacher. I have complete faith that schools are sensible enough to know what they must put on the curriculum. Teachers are sensible enough to know what they want to teach and to feed that passion into it. I respect and understand where Senator O'Donnell is coming from and acknowledge this issue must be reconsidered and the numbers ascertained in a few years' time. While there must be reviews and one must keep looking at it, the advantage of the reform is one can do so. As the Senator noted, one must look and learn about the hardships and as Senator Ó Murchú stated, one must learn from one's mistakes and to learn to move forward. Nevertheless, I have great confidence in the Minister's words and in his decision that history will not lose out during the junior cycle reform.

Senator Jillian van Turnhout: [🗣️] I also wish to support my colleagues, Senators O'Donnell and Mac Conghail in the tabling of this motion, which I fully support. I do not wish to get tied up in knots about terms like "core" or "compulsory" because I welcome the junior certificate reform. My own background is in youth work and much of what we practice in non-formal education is being brought into the classroom and the formal education sector, all of which is to be welcomed. My colleague, Senator Mac Conghail, spoke about the balance between theory and practice and in both my current role and my previous job, I have visited the transition year students of many schools. In this context, there is a great difference from school to school on how transition year is implemented. I refer to that capacity and the capability within a school and within individual teachers as to whether they harness the potential of a transition year student year. There is a similar fluidity to the new junior certificate reform and perhaps that is where part of my hesitancy lies about history not having as central a role as I would wish. While my colleagues have referred to the statements of learning, I can understand the reason, at the joint committee meeting of 12 June last to which my colleague, Senator O'Donnell, made reference, many eminent people expressed fears about history and whether the students would be ready and prepared. It can be taught as a subject or a short course and if the latter, comprising 100 hours of learning. Will that prepare someone to take it at leaving certificate level? Will it prepare them for university to go further in those subjects? How could a short course even get one in? Anyone who loves history will understand the depths and knowledge it has. Senator Moran mentioned students making choices and I have met many students, some very close to home, who have based their choices both for the junior certificate and as they enter into the leaving certificate cycle, on the points. It is purely about points and I understand this drive whereby this is what one needs to do to get the college course one seeks.

This point brings me to the amendment to the motion, which refers to the compulsory subjects, the importance of literacy and numeracy skills and of the development thereof, with which everyone agrees.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Senator Jillian van Turnhout: [🗣️]] All the work I have done on literacy and numeracy, however, tells me one does this in many different ways, not just through particular core subjects such as English. Literacy can mean a parent in a supermarket telling a child to pick up a can of peas, spelling out the word.

I am a little concerned about us jumping to the next thing when we pick literacy. People may have forgotten that in 2008, the Department of Education and Skills and the Council of Europe produced an excellent report on language education policy profile concerning modern languages and their importance, but it was dropped because we are doing literacy and numeracy. I do not say one approach is more important than the other but many of the people being recruited - we are told it is all about growth and jobs - are coming from outside Ireland because we do not have the required modern language skills. Part of my concern in respect of history is the same as that which applies to the placing of modern languages and issues such as how we prepare students for life. Yesterday, I attended a very impressive seminar which looked at the work-readiness of students. Young people are approaching work very differently now. A person from Accenture told us that after a person begins to work, he or she will want to take a sabbatical to go back to further education or to travel and will afterwards return to work. The idea of being in a job for life is changing and we must prepare our young people for this changing environment.

I have a difficulty. In this discussion we may all be on the same side, but when I drill down, I find I do not have confidence that under the junior certificate reforms we will have consistent delivery of the junior cycle in each school, which would be detrimental to students. There might be a teacher who is visionary and able to encompass this new way of learning but there may be difficulties with some who are traditional and not ready for the change. The current sixth class will be the first to be tested in this regard. Will we have consistency throughout the country and will we prepare for it? I believe we need a little more structure. In my view, there are certain essential subjects. History and modern languages are the ones I would like to throw into that pot. That is where my hesitancy lies and if I try to understand it, I find I do not have the confidence I would like to have. I do not want children to be guinea pigs.

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):   I thank everybody for allowing this debate to take place and, in particular, Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell and the Independent group of Taoiseach's nominees. Before I address the topic in detail, there are a couple of aspects of recent commentary on this matter I would like to clarify. First, it has been suggested that history is currently a compulsory subject in all schools at junior cycle level. I do not accuse anybody of saying this but that has been the commentary. I looked in at the committee debate where one would certainly have got that impression from the protagonists addressing the committee. Nobody attempted to correct it. To reiterate, this is not the case. Second, it has been argued that the new junior cycle will see a dumbing down of the teaching of history. Again, this is not the case.

The point of abolishing the junior certificate and reforming junior cycle education is simply to liberate our students in order that they can learn. In October 2012, I published "A Framework for Junior Cycle". The framework builds on the NCCA document called "Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle" which was agreed by all the education partners. It sets out the principles, skills and statements of learning for the new junior cycle. The framework also highlights the need for fundamental changes in our approach to learning, teaching, assessment and curricular planning to improve the quality of the learning experiences of all our students.

The new junior cycle aims to give flexibility to schools by allowing them the chance to design their own curriculum to meet the needs of their students. It is about placing increased trust in schools by giving them more autonomy and allowing for a decentralisation of power

in regard to the curriculum. We know that the best performing education systems in the world give schools greater autonomy. That is not an opinion only but, in terms of measuring the results in international terms, is the consequence of giving schools autonomy. Those schools believe, correctly in my view, that schools are in the best position to know what is right for them. As we have already heard, this is a radical change in Irish education because we have always been inclined to set rules and issue directives from the centre.

Why not have compulsion? In an article about the junior cycle, in the *The Irish Times* today, Professor Tom Collins quoted from Pádraig Pearse's famous essay, *The Murder Machine*, as I will do:

I would urge that the Irish school system of the future should give freedom - freedom to the individual school, freedom to the individual teacher, freedom as far as may be to the individual pupil. Without freedom there can be no right growth, and education is properly the fostering of the right growth of a personality.

Pearse was a practising teacher, radical in his day, and he set up St. Enda's school.

In this century, the junior cycle reforms are about this stance. The more subjects that are made core, the less choice there is for students. Subject choice is an important motivator in encouraging students to remain in school and to take an interest in what they are studying. Several years ago, the ESRI carried out a longitudinal study of post-primary students. That study provides us with immensely relevant data in respect of the factors that will energise - or deflate - the engagement of our young people with school and with learning. The report emphasised the importance of providing some subject choice for students, in particular offering access to more practically oriented subjects. Overall, the ESRI findings were particularly clear in regard to lower performing and working class students, especially male working class students. These are the exact cohorts that we know disengage from the current junior certificate.

Today, we are talking specifically about history as a subject. There are demands that history should be a core subject for the junior cycle which, as I noted at the outset, is not the case at present. Tomorrow, the other subjects waiting in the wings will have similar demands made for them, including science, geography, modern foreign languages, the arts and so on. I believe all of these subjects are important but do not believe that they should be compulsory core subjects. The framework outlines mandatory statements of learning which every student must achieve. As the counter motion states, these include: "understand[ing] the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change". It is clear that over the course of the junior cycle, students will need to acquire historical knowledge, awareness and skills. What is not specified in the new cycle is how these skills are to be acquired. We believe, following the advice of the NCCA, that this is clearly a matter for schools to determine.

What are we trying to do? The focus of the educational experience for our students must be on the quality of learning throughout the three years of junior cycle. Looking beyond our shores, we can see that in high performing education systems such as those in Finland, New Zealand, and Queensland, schools have been given greater freedom in deciding and creating

the programmes they offer. When schools in Ireland are implementing the new junior cycle, they too will have the autonomy and flexibility to design their own programmes within the parameters of the framework. Schools will be able to decide what combination of subjects, short courses or other learning experiences will be provided in their three year programme. The decisions made by schools will be based on the needs of the students in the school areas. This means that apart from English, Irish and mathematics, which are the essential building blocks for literacy and numeracy, no other subject will be deemed to be compulsory.

As I mentioned, history is currently not a compulsory subject for all students in junior cycle. The rules and programme for secondary schools state that history is a core subject for all students in junior cycle who attend voluntary secondary schools. Voluntary secondary schools, which are primarily faith-based schools, constitute 52% of all post-primary schools. In other school types - vocational, community and comprehensive schools - the rules and programme make clear that history is not a compulsory subject. In spite of this, 91.1% of students who recently sat the junior certificate examination took history. It is the fifth most popular subject in the junior cycle so I cannot understand the sense of alarm about its imminent disappearance. In spite of the fact that history is not a compulsory subject for all students, the majority of individual schools have very high uptake levels in the subject which are not due to compulsion. Rather, they are caused by schools recruiting qualified history teachers who stimulate high levels of interest in their students.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn: ⓘ 🔍] History teachers attract the students through their love of history and by engaging the curiosity of students. This should continue to be true as the new junior cycle is implemented. One would think from the debate around this topic that young people come through the entire eight years of primary school ignorant of history, when in fact primary school is history rich and relevant to the coming of age of learning.

The new flexibility being provided to schools has already resulted in innovation at school level. For example, one school has introduced a new school-designed and assessed course in digital media and animation for junior cycle. It offered 24 places. It had 66 applicants. Another is offering a course in linguistics to first years, while another is offering courses in graphics and computer science. None of these schools has downgraded or dropped history as a consequence of these innovations. The reformed junior cycle will be implemented on a phased basis from September 2014 with the first cohort coming into first year.

The new history specification will be implemented in schools from 2017. In other words, it will start in two years' time and take three years to run through. This specification will be developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and will involve consultation with the key stakeholders and the public. The new specifications will facilitate the development of skills including: critically interpreting a range of texts - I would have thought that was the essence of historical research, communicating, working with others, critical thinking and managing information, particularly through the use of digital technology.

The new junior cycle will allow schools to provide for the study of history through a number of means, either as a subject in its own right or as a short course, another learning experience.

I think it was Senator Mary Moran who suggested that in, say, Dundalk, some of the local history and the relevance of the former industries and buildings there could be introduced by a teacher with a passion for history and make the town of Dundalk come alive to those young people in a way that is currently not provided for in the generic course.

Short course provision, if that is what is provided for some students, would still be significantly better than the current non-provision of any historical study for more than 5,500 students taking the junior certificate annually. We do not have 100% of students taking history in any shape or form, just 91% of students take history.

It is likely that much of the innovative work which has characterised transition year history will filter into short course provision in junior cycle. We have much to be confident about based on what has already happened. Schools will have considerably more options to add learning experiences in areas of interest to their students. These options will enable students to be exposed to the richness and wonder with which history is replete.

The implementation of the framework presents an opportunity to recast junior cycle history as a vibrant, student-centred and valuable subject, a 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. This will include 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 be based, as currently, on quantitative learning, or rote learning, as we might more accurately describe it. It will be about learning to learn and, more important, learning to think. It will highlight the role of what is termed "assessment for learning" throughout the three years, not concentrated into three hours after five or six other subjects have been taken. This is the opposite of "dumbing down". On the contrary, it is about giving our young people the knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to understand and appreciate history. There will be a dedicated programme of continuous professional development, CPD, provided to history teachers to enhance their skills and confidence. That continuous professional development will commence in autumn 2016, a year before the new specifications are implemented.

I welcome the opportunity to debate this matter. I do not think there is much of a difference separating us but there is a fear for change. The most fearful are the teachers who have got into a groove of doing it in a particular way. Like the rest of us, they do not necessarily like change. I will not mention the Seanad and what might possibly happen to it. That would be inappropriate.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   We have no choice.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn:   None of us in this room will make that decision, it will be decided by the people. We will live with whatever change they give or do not give us.

The way in which we assess and trust teachers and schools is important. There is a wide variation in how schools respond. Schools are circumscribed by their own circumstances in some cases in that if they have a limited number of pupils, particularly in the post primary curriculum, they are limited in respect of the number of subjects they can offer and the levels

at which they can offer those subjects, where there is more than one level. In those areas we may have to find ways in which history can be shared in a town where there are three or four schools and there is one really good teacher.

We need to change the relationship. As part of the legacy of the centralist establishment of the Department of Education and Skills there is a direct line vertically from Marlborough Street to each individual school. The school only goes through that line of communication by circular. That line of communication, important as it is, must be complemented by a horizontal communication with other schools in the area and in the community. I hope the 16 new education and training boards will facilitate a far greater regional engagement in the harnessing of educational facilities and resources, including history.

Senator Sean D. Barrett:   I welcome the Minister and wish him well in his reforms. The first issue I wish to address is the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the IPA note on which states that the Minister appoints the chairperson and the 25 member council. Is that an issue we should look at?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn:   On a point of order, I do not think that is correct. With no disrespect to the IPA, the Minister certainly appoints the chair but subject to correction, the other members of the council are nominated by various education stakeholders.

Senator Sean D. Barrett:   I accept what the Minister has said.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn:   The chair is directly appointed by the Minister of the day but the rest are nominated by the others.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach:   Will Senator Barrett please proceed?

Senator Sean D. Barrett:   Had I known that was the case I would not have raised the issue because what it presented, as written, was a total control from the centre which is the exact opposite of what the Minister has said. I am glad that appears to have been settled and no doubt will be dealt with in the IPA diary next year. Part of the problem as I interpreted it, listening on the monitor to the Minister and other Senators was that some history teachers are annoyed. The same point was made here when we discussed the views of the mathematics teachers on the leaving certificate. What I was saying in a long-winded introduction, having used the wrong source, is that we need to involve the teacher subject associations. They may feel they have been overlooked. If people form a history teachers association and come together at conference to discuss issues of history - or in mathematics and so on - they should be brought into the system.

As the Minister said, I am afraid that sometimes our education system is too bureaucratic and we do not listen to an múinteoir, the person in the classroom. There is a Bord Snip nua number - I hope this one is accurate - which points out that if everybody who is a teacher turned up at primary level the number of teachers should be, say, 16 but in fact there are 24 because many teachers have left the classroom and gone into other duties. The problem with Irish education is that it has become too bureaucratic. We are missing the point. We should all be in the classroom, in the subject areas. In that context what the Minister has said would be well received.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Senator Sean D. Barrett:  ] I support the Minister's views on autonomy for schools. That measure is badly needed instead of the centralised model as described in which everything happens homogeneously. We need a vastly scaled down Marlborough Street, particularly when we are short of money to get people into the classroom. Some of the personnel with posts of responsibility or administrative posts in schools and in universities - I do not want to leave them out - should be put back into the classroom.

I have concerns about comments made by industry representatives on education and I hope that has not influenced the decision on the place of history in the curriculum. The bodies representing industry have a lot of explaining to do to us and to the Minister about how they goofed on a massive scale in 2008 and should come out with their hands up instead of demanding changes in the curriculum of schoolchildren and those doing the junior certificate examination. It was adults who made those errors, who have visited the consequences on schoolchildren and on other aspects of Irish society. I tend to discount such remarks, because as the Minister knows, it tends to be part of the fashion cycle as to what subject should be in and what subject should not be taken.

We should look at teacher training again. I know the Minister proposes to extend the years of the H.Dip. The H.Dip did not traditionally have a great reputation as a course, which is an issue that must be addressed. I would like mathematics teachers to spend as much time in the mathematics department of a university and be as good as any other mathematics graduate because teaching is so important. We let some of the other professions such as banking and accountancy, whose members let the country down, rise in status, but now we must raise the importance of education.

I know the Minister proposes to set up regional clusters of professors of education but I hope they not only talk to other professors of education but that they get into the classroom and into the vital subjects such as history, mathematics and languages. Part of the previous fashion of curriculum overloading meant that we allowed the development of languages to lapse and fall behind in Ireland. We now find in the latest phase of industrial development that there is a shortage of people and we must import people with language skills. In recent times more language departments were shut down in Irish universities than actually opened. A view of what gave rise to economic growth was short term and as an economist I would advise against anybody from economics saying what causes economic growth and how the education system should be altered to suit those short-term needs. I agree fully with what the Minister said about Finland and the autonomy of schools there, which was the system we in Ireland had before it was so rigidly taken under control by the State. The emphasis on the student, on the subject and reducing the amount of bureaucracy as much as we can will get more scholar per dollar, which was a cliché.

History still has an important role in reducing the tensions and the difficulties on this island. I recall the Stormont Assembly debate, in the aftermath of 12 July, in which a man with a strong Unionist background said the Orange Order is as Irish as a pint of Guinness. That was not the version that came to us in schools. Redefining ourselves through the better knowledge of history is something on which our colleagues across the Chamber and the Minister are in agreement. I praise Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell for a very spirited speech on these issues. We cannot discuss these topics enough. We should never waste a good recession. So much went wrong in 2008, we are now trying to design a different society, a post-crisis society and I hope a reformed and retained Seanad will assist the Minister in this task for

many years in the future. The Seanad has a major role. What failed in 2008 and afterwards must be replaced. I commend the Minister as one of the reforming Ministers.

Senator Deirdre Clune: I second the amendment to the motion outlined by my colleague, Senator Jim D'Arcy, who said that the position of history as a subject is secure and that history will continue to be studied by the vast majority of students at junior certificate level. The Minister outlined in his speech the number of students who are taking the subject and will continue to take the subject. Change is never easy and the new junior certificate has come about following consultation since April 2010. There were online consultations and a number of meetings were held around the country with the National Parents Council. During that period of consultation, the need for a core group of subjects was identified and individuals and groups were asked for their opinions. I looked at information from the IVEA, the Joint Managerial Board, JMB, and the Teachers Union of Ireland which submitted their thoughts. None of those three bodies mentioned history, but mentioned English, Irish, mathematics, science, physical education, CSPE and RSE. Subjects along those lines seemed to be the common theme. I agree that history is an important subject.

There is clear evidence of the need for change in the junior cycle. I can see that students do not make much progress in English and maths in their first years, and hence the reason for introducing the assessment earlier. This will give feedback to parents and they will see where the student stands rather than leaving it for three years when the student sits an exam in June and gets the results in September when the student is facing into the senior cycle, having never got to grips with maths, English, history or science. That is what we have debated and we are now in the process of introducing a new cycle at the junior level.

As I said change is never easy. I read an article in yesterday's newspaper in which a science teacher who had supervised 200 students during the two-hour State junior certificate science examination reported that ordinary level students left the examination after 35 minutes, and those taking the higher level paper left after 90 minutes. Students found the exam too easy and one student said that the examination in his or her favourite subject was too easy and did not give the person an opportunity to prove himself or herself. She commented that students were not expected to be able to draw a diagram of the circulatory system as it is already printed on the exam paper. The teacher questioned whether we are encouraging the students to learn in a different way and whether they will have a great understanding of the subject.

As I said change is challenging, but the process to establish the new junior cycle has been worked through with a great deal of work on assessment and consultation. I think it is welcome for the benefits that have been outlined in this debate.

We have debated the designation of core subjects - maths, English and Irish. I do not think that Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell is proposing in her motion to make history a compulsory subject, but she wants it to be a core subject. "Compulsion" is a word that may have negative connotations. The Minister stated there will be three core subjects and a range of subjects within which schools can choose to offer. I would have liked to have science as a core subject. I know there were many calls for that, but the Minister made the case previously on that issue.

History is a very important subject. The fact that it is the fifth most popular subject that students take supports its strong standing. Like all learning it depends on the teacher who teaches it. The next question is the content of the course. I hope we will have confidence in

the proposed changes in our system of education and to know these changes are based on consultation, sound facts and that they will encourage and develop a love of learning and the subject, whatever subject choice takes the students interest.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach:   I call Senator Mooney and he has six minutes.

Senator Paschal Mooney:   I wish to share my time with Senator Daly.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach:   Is that agreed? Agreed. The Senators have three minutes each.

Senator Paschal Mooney:   I thank the Senators for tabling the motion, including Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell. Fianna Fáil believes that history must be a key component of junior certificate education and would be deeply concerned at any syllabus change that resulted in a sharp reduction in the number of people studying history in post-primary schools. I wish to emphasise, although my colleagues may already have done so, that we welcome the reform of the junior certificate and believe many things can be improved in the curriculum. I was particularly impressed with the Minister's response earlier and hope that he is right. He said that it is expected that student experience of the new junior cycle history will provide an excellent base for students continuing to take history at senior cycle and will impact positively in the future on the take up of history at senior cycle. However, I am not so sure and there is an old cliché that those who ignore history are condemned to repeat it.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   Does the Senator know who said it?

Senator Paschal Mooney:   I am not sure. Who?

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   Edmund Burke.

Senator Paschal Mooney:   Thank you.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   I thought the Senator would know that but please excuse the interruption.

Senator Paschal Mooney:   No. I thank her for putting the information on the record.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   I was relying on the Senator to know who it was.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail:   If he was alive then he could have voted on the Seanad as a graduate. Is that correct?

Senator Paschal Mooney:   Edmund Burke was an able parliamentarian and his words are even more relevant for the discussion under way.

I am not sure that history will gain from the new proposals and I am a little concerned, particularly as those involved in the area have expressed their concern. Last June representatives from the History Teachers Association of Ireland told an Oireachtas joint committee that the new syllabus would lead to many schools dropping history and would further reduce numbers taking the subject at leaving certificate level. Professor Diarmuid Ferriter of UCD said that it would be a cruel irony if history, as a subject, was downgraded during the decade of commemorations for events such the 1913 Lock-out and the 1916 Rising. He said that he had concerns that downgrading the subject would lead to a class

divide with working class children far less likely to be offered the subject at school. Another historian, Ms Catriona Crowe, said Ireland should not repeat the mistakes of England. She pointed out that England is about to reintroduce history as a compulsory subject having removed it in recent years.

According to Mr. Fintan O'Mahony of the ASTI:

If history is only offered as a short course here and there the numbers will drop and Leaving Cert history will be affected. We've built the numbers back up since the subject was reformed in 2006, and it's now the fifth most popular elective, and one that students really enjoy.

There has been a big fall-off in the number of pupils studying history at leaving certificate level, with 53,000 studying it for the junior certificate and only 11,700 at leaving certificate level in 2012.

Senator van Turnhout mentioned that there is a race for points which is rather unfortunate. All that I would be concerned about is that the new syllabus would lead to history being sidelined, to a degree, and that schools will no longer offer history. That would be a great shame, particularly considering the divided nature of the nation.

I wish to make a final point. When I went to school history stopped at 1916. In fact it stopped around 1914 because the times were so controversial. Education has moved on-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   That is why the Senator is in Fianna Fáil. Is that correct?

Senator Paschal Mooney:   -----and I would like to think the momentum will be maintained. I do not know who wrote the history books but that is what was in them at that time.

Acting Chairman (Senator Pat O'Neill):   I call Senator Daly and he has three minutes.

Senator Mark Daly:   I welcome the Minister of State to the House and this important debate. I support the idea of history being a core subject for the junior certificate and quote a Russian proverb: those who keep one eye on the past are half blind but those who keep both eyes on the future can see nothing at all. It is apt that the Minister quoted Pádraig Pearse's book *The Murder Machine*:

I would urge that the Irish school system of the future should give freedom - freedom to the individual school, freedom to the individual teacher, freedom as far as may be to the individual pupil. Without freedom there can be no right growth; and education is properly the fostering of the right growth of personality.

The statement is true. How many students will know who Pádraig Pearse was if history is not a core subject? That is the fundamental question for the Minister.

Let us look at our neighbouring island. As my colleagues have said, it is restoring history as a core subject but we are going in the opposite direction in Ireland. We do not seem to have learned from the short history and experience of our neighbouring island. We live in a country that has so many problems and issues that are relevant today due to our history. It is

important that our students and citizens learn why such troubles exist at this time and how we can learn from past mistakes in order to ensure that we do not continue to make mistakes now and in the future. I ask the Minister to re-examine the issue.

I am a member of the Decade of Commemorations committee. It is appalling that history will become a shorter core subject at this time. How much can be taught during a short course? How much history can be crammed into a course that lasts a few weeks or months?

Without making history a fundamental part of being an active citizen, one should know the history of one's country and the meaning of one's flag. If one asked students in Ireland the meaning of the Irish flag and what man created it they could not answer. Article 7 of the Constitution designated what the Irish flag would be. Its colours symbolise peace in the community between the Nationalists and Republicans and the Unionists and the Protestants. I know that it is extraordinary for me to ask the Minister the following. If he carried out a survey of students could they tell him the history and meaning of the flag? That is why I support my colleagues in bringing forward the motion and I ask the Minister to do likewise.

Acting Chairman (Senator Pat O'Neill):   I call Senator Landy and he has six minutes.

Senator Denis Landy:   I welcome the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills to the House. My opening comment is for the Minister. I ask the Minister of State to convey the following message to him. All of the Senators embrace reform.

Senator Mark Daly:   At least the Minister is not abolishing history.

Senator Denis Landy:   I am sure that the Minister would not like to see history abolished.

I wish to take the opportunity, in the week that is in it, to commend the Minister on securing a €50 million stimulus package in recent months. It is great to see the roots of the stimulus package being rolled out into constituencies across the country. Yesterday a school extension in my constituency was announced. The schools has waited almost 20 years for the funding. It is good to see positive things happening.

I wish to quote the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, from Pat Leahy's most recent book who said that when politicians are worn out from saying something it is then that you can realise that the public are actually listening.

I wish to say once more to my colleague, Senator Daly, that the subject of history is not compulsory at present.

Senator Mark Daly:   I did not say that it was.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell:   He did not say it was.

Senator Denis Landy:   The Senator inferred that it was.

Senator Mark Daly:   No, I did not. Look at my notes.

Senator Denis Landy:   In fact history is compulsory in 50% of schools.

Senator Mark Daly:   If it is not compulsory then how is it compulsory in 50% of schools?

Acting Chairman (Senator Pat O'Neill):   Please allow Senator Landy to continue.

Senator Denis Landy:   On reaching second level education, students will have spent eight years studying history as part of their primary curriculum. The changes proposed by the Minister will deal with a number of issues besides history and concerns subject overload. For example, in cases where students are expected to study 12 and 13 subjects the number will be reduced to between eight and ten subjects. I welcome the reduction because a lower number of subjects allows time for proper study, discussion, analysis and debate.

Earlier my colleague, Senator Jim D'Arcy, mentioned how we were taught history and I deem us both to be part of the same generation.

Senator Jim D'Arcy:   I thank the Senator.

Senator Denis Landy:   I knew that would cheer him up. The first I heard of Connolly and Larkin was not in the classroom but at the fireside from my late uncle. At that time history was taught by people who had their own views. The opportunity for students and teachers to spend extra hours in a classroom to debate, discuss and consult will ensure a better learning atmosphere for those who chose to study history for the junior certificate. The proposals provide an exciting opportunity for students.

(Speaker Continuing)

[Senator Denis Landy:  ] I support Senator Daly's point on whether young people have a knowledge or interest in our country's history. Speaking in a personal capacity, I feel that one's interest in history grows with age. People become more interested in history as they move on in life.

Students are entitled to make choices. Senator van Turnhout and Senator Clune referred to the fact that secondary education is now a race for points. Unfortunately that is the case. Many students select subjects that they feel will get them 600 points to do medicine or whatever. In my opinion, education is about sharing knowledge and preparing people for life. I will finish by being the third person to quote from an article in today's edition of *The Irish Times* by Professor Tom Collins. It is on the issue of history as part of the junior cycle. He states:

The single most important attribute a young person should have acquired at the end of the Junior Cycle is a love for learning. Compulsion of any sort is likely to diminish this possibility. There is a difference between what a student should do and what a student must do.

Senator Martin Conway:   I welcome the Minister of State to the House. I am trying to remember when he was here last, but when he is here he makes very useful contributions. Even though he is the Minister of State with responsibility for innovation and technology, he also realises the importance of history. We do not know who we are unless we know where we came from and what our history is. As a nation, we have a phenomenal history going back centuries, but our democracy is a very short history. Sometimes it can be a very blinkered or thwarted history, depending on the teacher. It often would not have been a very fair history.

Things might have broken down according to the teacher's view of the civil war, which is a criticism of both sides. I am very confident that in recent years, the teaching of history has been very fair and balanced. Unfortunately, not enough children are taking history seriously. We are in the world of Facebook, Twitter, e-mails, the Internet, AskFm and so on. That is all very important, but history is extremely important as well.

I completely subscribe to the principle of not making anything compulsory. If I had my way, nothing would be compulsory, because learning should be a love. We need to engender and develop a culture of the love of learning. I recently asked children whether they were looking forward to going back to school this year, and they all answered that they were. I do not know what was wrong in my day, but I certainly did not look forward to going back to school after the summer holidays. Things are improving and these kids are happy to go back to school and are somewhat motivated.

My view is that the points race is deconstructing quality education. I completely subscribe to the principle that people should want to learn and learn for the right reasons. I would subscribe to an interview process and a continuous assessment process for children applying for university. Technically that could be seen as not fair. It could be said that human interaction could create an unfairness about it, but overall it would be a far more holistic approach. I know students who are studying medicine and they neither have the communication skills nor the humanity to be doing medicine. I know students who are involved in science and other areas who find it boring and would not have the creativity for such disciplines. I know students studying law who got the points because they were mathematically oriented, but law is not about maths. The points system is flawed and there is a far better way of doing business.

I welcome this motion and given Senator O'Donnell's background in education and love of language, it is coming from a genuine source. It is very important that Seanad Éireann would debate, discuss and deliberate this aspect of education. In fact, we should be looking at all aspects of education. We should be looking at training our young people to be ambassadors of culture and our language. When I was in school, the teaching of the Irish language turned me off it for years. My love of it has been reignited as a result of Senator Moran's daughter giving me grinds over the last two years. We must look at a change in attitude to education. We were known as the nation of saints and scholars, but being scholars is not about the points system. It is about knowing who we are, knowing our history, wanting to learn, appreciating books and not wasting the day on Facebook or Twitter, but spending the day acquiring knowledge. Knowledge is powerful, but is not dangerous. It is what gives people freedom. It allows people to be equal. Education is the single biggest driver to get people out of poverty, and every penny spent on education is well spent.

I welcome the motion. I welcome the debate this evening. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to speak and I hope we have many more debates on the issue in this Seanad and in future Seanad.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: 🗣️ I welcome the Minister of State. I am a "quare" old historical source like Methuselah. I have been an educationalist all my life, so I was arguing a counteraction to this wind of change for change's sake, with not a lot of thought process. My arguments were philosophical and outside the vested interests that I hear sometimes in the Seanad, philosophy may be what saves us. I will let Members think about that.

The Minister for Education and Skills is a fine Minister. He was a historical architect in the sense that he was one of the people who saved Georgian Dublin, so he has a tremendous sense of what history is and what it stands for. My argument was not about compulsion, but about realigning history to a short course method. It was not about whether something should be compulsory or not. Sometimes we need to argue more about the "how" of things. We have a great aspirational formulaic learning system for outcomes, but we rarely have pamphlets. I would love to see somebody write a pamphlet about the "how" of all this, and not the "why" of it. How are we going to achieve it?

(Speaker Continuing)

[Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: 🗣️ 🔍] We rarely do that. We spend most of our time cloaking learning in all these great learning outcomes rather than discussing how to do it - and by that I mean the how and why of the subject, the training and the teaching. Of course, people do not like to use the words "teaching" or "training" now because we are meant to be helping and project managing, but we are getting nowhere through that approach. That comes from knowing that history is a heartbeat - it is basically our exit and entrance on to the planet.

Short courses do not work for young minds; they fragment knowledge. We need to talk about that. If I was arguing for compulsion, I would be arguing in favour of making the arts a compulsory subject, and many Senators would agree.

Senator Mary Moran: 🗣️ 🔍 I do.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: 🗣️ 🔍 I would restore the arts as a core subject because we do not live in our heads; we live and work with our bodies. Dance is an example of that.

I was fascinated that all the Senators were quoting Tom Collins's newspaper article. He is a fine gentlemen. I think that he was the president of Maynooth where I did - I may be showing off in saying this - one of my degrees. It was a fine university that married the secular and the theological. When I was there it opened up to outside students, and I learned as much from the theological part as I did from the secular part . In the article Tom Collins quoted Pádraig Pearse's *The Murder Machine*. The article was a little extreme. When freedom is discussed one must talk about freedom for and freedom to and define their terms, which Tom Collins did not do. What he went on to say - it includes more of those aspirational verbs - was classic: "The single most important attribute a young person should have acquired at the end of the Junior Cycle is a love for learning". What people need to understand and learn by the end of their education is how to read and write and to have a love of both and how to speak and have a love of orality. With such skills a person can get into any university in the world.

I leave Senators with that thought. I want someone in the Department of Education and Skills to write a paper about the "how ". I invite them to write a treatise on that using aspirational, formulaic and inspirational verbs. It would make interesting reading.

Acting Chairman (Senator Pat O'Neill): 🗣️ 🔍 I ask the Senator to conclude.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: 🗣️ 🔍 We could do with a bit of more fun and joy in here. Education is about joy and energy and igniting things. We are sitting around like old men like Methuselah discussing the issue.

Acting Chairman (Senator Pat O'Neill):   Senator O'Donnell brings lots of joy to us.

Senator Mark Daly:   I second that.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 23; Níl, 8.

Tá	Níl
  Bacik, Ivana.	  Barrett, Sean D.
  Brennan, Terry.	  Daly, Mark.
  Clune, Deirdre.	  Mac Conghail, Fiach.
  Coghlan, Paul.	  Mullen, Rónán.
  Comiskey, Michael.	  Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.
  Conway, Martin.	  O'Donnell, Marie-Louise.
  Cummins, Maurice.	  van Turnhout, Jillian.
  D'Arcy, Jim.	  Zappone, Katherine.
  D'Arcy, Michael.	
  Gilroy, John.	
  Harte, Jimmy.	
  Henry, Imelda.	
  Higgins, Lorraine.	
  Keane, Cáit.	
  Kelly, John.	
  Landy, Denis.	
  Moran, Mary.	
  Mulcahy, Tony.	
  Mullins, Michael.	
  Naughton, Hildegarde.	
  O'Neill, Pat.	
  Sheahan, Tom.	
  Whelan, John.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Ivana Bacik and Paul Coghlan; Níl, Senators Fiach Mac Conghail and Marie-Louise O'Donnell..

Amendment declared carried.