

# NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Friday 13 February 1998

*The meeting was called to order at 10.03 am (Mr J R Gorman in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

**The Chairman:** Before we begin today's fairly full agenda I should let you know that on Sunday my wife and I will be going to South Africa for the family visit that we had to postpone at Christmas and, indeed, in November. Mrs Parkes has kindly agreed to deputize for me at the Forum next Friday. I wish her well.

The Chairman of the Health Committee has requested that following the debate on the Committee's report on men's health the sitting be suspended briefly for a press conference.

## AMBULANCE SERVICE

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** Before dealing with the motion on the Order Paper I should like to say that for several months the Health Committee has been working very hard on an investigation of the needs of the Ambulance Service. We believe that our interest and our efforts have played no small part in influencing those who hold the purse-strings. We warmly welcome the overdue boost which will allow the purchase of 25 vehicles in addition to the 20 or so already on order. We will bring our work to a close when our study, which will make comparisons with two major ambulance trusts in England, has been completed.

## MEN'S HEALTH

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** I beg to move the following motion:

That the Forum adopts the report on men's health in Northern Ireland prepared by Standing Committee C on 9 February and decides to forward it to the Minister for Public Health with the request that he give serious consideration to its recommendations.

No doubt many male Members will want to speak about the state of men's health, so, as ever, I shall be brief.

First, I should like to thank you, Mr Chairman, for facilitating my Committee today with its business, including the arrangements for the press conference. My thanks are also due to Mrs Parkes for her help and encouragement and to all the other Committee members. I am very proud of the way the Committee operates as a team, with everyone making a special contribution. Of course, the people who deserve the greatest credit of all are Mr Arnold and his hard-working back-up team.



I had never been aware of men's health as a separate issue until the Committee produced its report on efficiency in the Health Service.

**Mr Shannon:** The Member must be very healthy.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** Yes.

Like many men, I had never thought much about my own health. You just get on with life — work or, as in too many cases, the lack of it, family and, if you have any, friends. You may worry more about the budgie or the goldfish than about yourself.

A look at the facts shows that something is very far wrong. Many people die before their time, but it is mainly men who die prematurely, often because of sheer ignorance on their part. The causes of death include accidents, cancers, strokes, drug-taking and alcohol abuse, and suicide and smoking-related illnesses account for some of the statistics.

This report is the first of its kind in Northern Ireland, and it is the first of a series of wake-up calls to men about the state of their health. I will not go into what needs to be done — others can do that — but I want to dispel the myth that it is a man's world.

One matter to which I want to draw attention is the growing use of drugs by drivers, particularly in the United Kingdom. I am sure that we all welcome the pilot project in England whereby drivers will be tested for drugs before leaving the scene of an accident. This is not yet a great problem in Northern Ireland, but that could change.

I commend this report to the Forum. Let us hope that it will get the widest possible distribution. These issues need to be discussed. In this respect the Forum is providing a very important public service.

**Mrs Parkes:** May I begin by thanking the Committee's Chairman and other members for their hard work and commitment. I wish also to express the Committee's appreciation to all those who gave evidence, whether written or oral. Without them we could not have produced this report. We are fortunate to have Mr Denis Arnold as Committee Clerk. We appreciate his invaluable assistance and dedication, as well as the support of the other Secretariat staff, including Ms Sharon Young.

I would like to preface my remarks by quoting two short poems to illustrate the different ways in which men and women look at their health — or their ill health. Let male Members take note of the first, which is about a woman with a heavy flu:

"She feels tired, weak and exhausted.  
Indeed, she should be in her bed,  
But there's cooking, cleaning and washing  
That have to be done instead.  
She goes out to get in some groceries,  
Then tries to sit down for a rest,  
But suddenly then she remembers  
He wants his black trousers pressed.  
She does this and then gets the beds made.  
The kids will be home after two.



She collects them, then starts cooking dinner  
And forgets about having the flu."

Female Members will be familiar with the following about a man with a wee touch of cold:

"One sneeze and in sets hysteria.  
'Dear me, I'm taking the flu.  
May the good Lord guide and protect me  
For the suffering I'm about to go through.  
Get me a hot drink and disprins;  
I'm shivering from my head to my toe.  
Make sure there's complete peace and quietness —  
I'm seriously ill, you know.  
I can't sit here, I'm drastically weakening.  
I must instantly take to my bed,  
And don't be too shocked in the morning  
If you come in and find me stone dead.' "

My thanks to the anonymous author of those poems. Such are the stereotypes. Indeed, such was my thinking before the Committee embarked on its investigation. And I am still not sure that there is not a fair bit of accuracy in the second poem.

This report deals with a very serious subject which is not at the forefront of health issues. Something that directly affects 50% of the population and has a knock-on effect on the other 50% deserves more priority. It is right that resources should be devoted to other health areas, but more attention could be paid to health issues that are important to men. The Committee was informed that being male is a disadvantage with respect to health and life expectancy. The average life-span of a man is only 72 years, compared to 79 for a woman. Men are far more likely to die prematurely, and suicide rates among males, particularly young males, are much higher than in the case of females. Men are also more susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse, and 42% of young men's deaths are caused by accidents.

The Committee's report contains recommendations on various aspects of men's health. I should like to concentrate on several points. The Committee recommends

"that men's health be treated as a specific policy issue by DHSS".

The Department needs to give high priority to this area of provision. Future strategic planning should take account of it so that there may be a co-ordinated approach throughout the province. The Committee recommends

"that a publicly funded men's health forum be established in Northern Ireland."

Combining the various interest groups into an effective body would ensure focus. Thus the policy-makers in the Department would not lose sight of what is necessary in this key area.

The Committee commends and supports the Northern Ireland drugs campaign and requests that efforts in this area be sustained. The campaign makes possible a co-ordinated approach by the relevant Government bodies and agencies. This is a major step in the right direction. It is good to see all bodies going the same way. In addition, the education and awareness programme spearheaded by the Health Promotion Agency is very good. Like the



support provided by schools, health professionals and other groups, it is very encouraging and must be built upon.

#### The Committee recommends

"that the Registrar General should review the classification of deaths in his office with a view to improving the accuracy and utility of the information he produces on cases of death. He should consult with health and other professionals, as well as academics who work in this field, as part of this exercise."

Every year some 100,000 people in Northern Ireland are diagnosed as mentally ill. This is very worrying. More than 11,000 are referred for specialist treatment. Mental-health problems affect all groups, but particularly males.

Suicide is a complex matter that is not well understood. For every female who takes her own life, three males kill themselves, and the suicide rate among young males is much higher. Studies and evidence given to the Committee indicate that the rates will always be underestimated. This is a completely unsatisfactory situation, which the Registrar General needs to examine as a matter of urgency. The true extent of suicide needs to be recognized so that the Government may provide the necessary resources to tackle the problem.

The Committee welcomes the review of youth services. We believe that organized support for people between school-leaving age and 25 will be recommended. This, we are convinced, will benefit not only young men but, in the long run, society as a whole.

In Northern Ireland 25% of young people are unemployed. There is much in today's society to divert the young into illegal activities. Males in particular come under pressure from their peers to drop out of post-compulsory education, thereby depriving themselves of a better future. The review of youth services is a very welcome initiative and a positive step in the right direction.

In the time available I have been able to highlight a few areas of concern. This comprehensive report contains many more significant recommendations, on which I am sure other Members will comment. In the meantime I commend it to the Forum.

**Mr Gardiner:** May I, on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, thank you, Mr Chairman, for your co-operation with the Health Committee and the interest that you have taken in this matter. Your heart is in the right place. We are grateful for your agreeing to a suspension of the sitting immediately after the adoption of this report so that the Health Committee may hold a press conference.

*10.15 am*

May I, like the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee, pay tribute to Mr Hugh Smyth for his sterling work in guiding the Committee. He was ably assisted by Mrs Parkes. A similar tribute is due to all the other members for their extremely hard work.

It is interesting that a group of people studying men's health should include five females. When Dr Maw put some questions to the Committee not one of the men knew what



he was talking about. Luckily there were two females who could say "Yes, we know about that." The purpose of this report is to decrease ignorance.

Our thanks are due to Mr Denis Arnold for his professional service as Clerk to the Committee. We are greatly indebted to him and his staff for their co-operation. Nor should we forget those who prepare the Minutes of Evidence, those who type our reports or the people who operate the sound and recording systems.

We took a great deal of evidence, including that of the foremost expert in this field, Dr Ian Banks, who is in the Chamber for this debate and who will be at the press conference. We are greatly indebted to Dr Banks and to all the other witnesses. We shall not allow any neglect on our part to lead to the death of this issue in the way that conditions are leading to the premature death of so many men. That women live so much longer is due to men's reluctance to see to their health.

The Committee Chairman, who is a very heavy smoker, if not a chain-smoker, gave me permission to comment on his health. Having reduced his smoking by 50%, he is looking better and feeling better, and let us hope that in the very near future he will smell healthier. He heard all the comments of his Committee colleagues and saw the leaflets issued by the Department, but the message did not get across until he came face to face with his doctor. If someone of the calibre of Dr Maw were engaged to present the case on television, that would be money well spent. Such publicity would be more effective than posters in surgeries or hospitals.

Often when a person goes to his general practitioner, a consultant or an out-patient department it is too late. The question of men's health must be taken seriously. The Committee's report contains recommendations, two of which I want to discuss.

We are all very conscious of the drugs epidemic. Perhaps Craigavon, on whose council I serve, is fortunate. I appeal to other Members of the Forum, many of whom are councillors, to encourage the authorities to come down with the heavy hand on establishments where drugs are used or sold. Those involved in racketeering must be put out of business. Far too many lives have been lost because of illegal drugs.

Craigavon Borough Council is very fortunate to have the services of Mr Mervyn Cander, the director of environmental health. Mr Cander will stand no nonsense. He is a professional in every way and is exceptionally effective. Craigavon is reasonably low in the drug-pushing league, though certainly there are people in the borough who take drugs. With the co-operation of the police we shall stamp this activity out where possible.

We are concerned about the poor provision in the field of genito-urinary medicine. The Department here must follow the resources guidelines that are laid down in England and Wales. We must also have adequate psycho-sexual support services. We do not like to talk about sex or diseases such as AIDS, but people in this province need help, and we must face reality. I hope that the Department will do what is necessary to make men and women more aware of diseases.



I support the Committee's recommendations. We have highlighted some problems facing men. If Louisa M Alcott were alive today she would probably write a book entitled 'Poor Little Men'. We must ensure that the Department takes this report seriously. I recommend it to the Forum.

**Ms Bell:** I wish to make some comments on behalf of the Alliance Party's two representatives on the Health Committee — Cllrs Geraldine Rice and Margaret Marshall. I am delighted to support this report on their behalf.

Mrs Parkes and Mr Gardiner have been much more specific than I could be. The report is very interesting. I agree with what Mrs Parkes said about the contrast between the attitude of a woman who feels unwell and the corresponding attitude of a man. My husband and I both had flu at Christmas. Despite the fact that I developed pleurisy I had to get up and make the Christmas dinner. Somehow he was able to open the bottle of wine to give us some sort of togetherness.

Men's attitude to the state of their bodies is seriously in question, but this report addresses it. In the course of the Committee's deliberations it became painfully clear that the interest which one finds in the case of women's health is absent so far as men's health is concerned. The report is timely in that it complements the current campaign to make men more aware of the problems that they face or will face and of the need for early diagnosis of serious diseases.

Studies have shown that being born male is a distinct disadvantage with respect to health and life expectancy. A majority of the victims of infant death syndrome — cot death — are male, and the same applies to deaths due to road accidents. Men are more likely to die prematurely than women. They fall victim to strokes, heart diseases and cancers. In all these areas early diagnosis can extend lives. Many women — I am one of them — admit that they would like to have men in their lives a bit longer.

Men seldom talk about their health. Even when they feel unwell they often have to be goaded by a woman to see the doctor. Many men die from specifically male conditions such as prostate cancer, in which case early detection and treatment greatly increase survival rates. Men are also more susceptible to suicide, alcoholism and drug abuse. Many men feel that going to the doctor would damage their macho image. Of course, there is also the simple question of ignorance, and some people are just afraid. The only way to deal with fear is to provide accurate information, such as is to be found in this report. The process of changing attitudes should start in school.

The Committee's concern about the level of resources in the area of genito-urinary medicine is justified. I support the call for application of the guidelines and resources that are to be found in England and Wales. This is a very important recommendation.

We agree with the Committee that the Department should treat men's health as a specific policy issue and should promptly set up a publicly funded forum.

This report will be brought to the attention of the health committee of North Down Borough Council, of which I am a member. It contains much that is worth building on. We



in Alliance commend it to the Forum and congratulate the Committee's Chairman, Vice-Chairperson and other members, and we thank the Clerk (Mr Arnold) and his staff for their hard work in this very sensitive and important area.

**Ms Sagar:** I want to take a slightly more balanced approach than Mrs Parkes and Ms Bell. Actually I can see myself in both of the poems that were quoted. I cannot condemn men for being wimps, as I too can be a wimp. We are all very good at play-acting when it is necessary to pretend. Men seem to believe that any complaint about flu or about pain would destroy their macho image. This is quite embarrassing for them. As a woman, I find it extremely difficult to talk about men's issues, and the same, in reverse, applies to men. But this is a very important subject. I do not like to think that my partner will pass away before I do. The ideal would be for us to go together. Comments about these things are among the most depressing in this document.

We welcome the report. The issues that it raises need to be discussed. We need much more promotion work in the area of men's health. There are many reasons for concern, including the high rates of chronic and preventable disease, reluctance to seek early diagnosis and treatment, high accident rates and increasing levels of risky behaviour such as alcohol and drug misuse. In the case of women's health, females got together to raise awareness and stimulate action. It is time for men to take their own health seriously. The report suggests some areas in which this would be beneficial.

We are particularly in favour of co-ordinated action on drug misuse, health education, (including sex education in schools) that is better funded, a stroke register and more provision for the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.

We would take issue with the part of the report that deals with sexually transmitted diseases. Pregnancy and abortion do not come into that category. I am personally offended by the report's treatment of them as diseases. My three children were born out of love; they are not products of a sexually transmitted disease.

*10.30 am*

We too are in favour of joint health and education work to prevent suicide. The report draws attention to the need for life-style changes. But this is not just a case of men behaving badly. Last week, in a debate on the strategy document 'Shaping our Future', we talked about the importance of the link between public policy and health matters. For example, good transport policies offer the chance to improve safety, thereby cutting the number of accidents, and to reduce pollution. These factors would contribute greatly to improving men's health. On the economic front, creating jobs and protecting the income of the poorest would have similar benefits. We should be concerned not just about life-style and services, but also about good public policy in respect of education, transport and the economy.

We thank the entire Committee, including Dr Wilde, who attends on our behalf, for all their work, and we are grateful to all those who provided information.

Let me give an example of the carelessness of men when it comes to seeing a doctor. Recently my stepfather had a severe toothache. Only when it was very severe did he go to a



dentist. Now — two weeks later — he is in hospital for throat surgery. Had he not gone to the dentist he would not have discovered that he had cancer of the throat and mouth. He knew that he was ill but had no intention of having a check-up. I hope that the condition was caught in time. This exemplifies how important it is that men should take their health seriously. A man washes his car every week and has it serviced regularly, but he treats his body differently. Mothers, wives and sisters have a heavy responsibility. Everyone must learn the importance of health awareness. Each of us has only one body, and it can have a long and healthy life only if it is taken care of.

**Mr Calvert:** I should like, first, to compliment Mr Denis Arnold, the Committee Clerk, for his quiet professionalism and efficiency and to thank Ms Young for her excellent support.

As a member of the Health Committee, I welcome this report. Men's health is a subject that does not yet have the public profile it merits. We are talking here about nearly half of the population. The report reveals many startling facts. Perhaps it should be described as a report on men's poor health. Northern Ireland has some of Europe's worst statistics with regard to health, especially men's health. An era of equality is long overdue. Section 1.4 of the report says

"Such equality does not have to be argued for. It is there to be realized. Its absence is evident through ignorance and neglect, principally on the part of men in relation to their own health."

Men very often bury their heads in the sand with regard to health matters. Issues related to women's health are increasingly the concern of everyone because they are continually highlighted in the media. This report is about increasing awareness with regard to men's health. We need a strategy to achieve equality in prevention, care and treatment. The report is an effective vehicle.

Studies have shown that being born male is a distinct disadvantage in respect of health and life expectancy. As Mrs Parkes said, the average life expectancy for a man is only 72 years, compared to 79 years in the case of women. Seven — the difference — is the number of perfection. Could this be an indication that women are more perfect than men? Undoubtedly men are far more likely to die prematurely. I take some consolation from the fact that my Uncle William will be 101 in March. Men fall victim to strokes, heart disease and cancers. More women than men have skin cancer, yet more men die of the disease. Apparently 12% of the population have raised blood pressure. I reckon that the 12% are in this Chamber. Again men are in the majority, yet only one in six will have hypertension detected.

I welcome the recommendation concerning the establishment of a stroke register. Such a facility would reveal the scale of the problem and would facilitate monitoring and treatment. The lack of a register, which was referred to in the course of evidence, is a matter of great concern to Committee members.

We were told that 80% of men consult their doctor only when their partner tells them to do so. We need a service that caters effectively and sensitively for men. They need to be able to discuss their health freely and to set personal goals. Males who have access to a clinic



in the workplace are more likely to take an interest in their health. Here I refer not just to occupational health but to health generally. The payback for management would be a reduction in sickness absence. An excellent example is the scheme operated by Du Pont in Londonderry, which has won a United Kingdom award. It is directed by a Dr Porter. Of course, small firms would have to combine to cover costs. However, alternatives are offered by various institutions and bodies, including the City Hospital and the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association. It seems that bringing health matters to the place of employment works particularly well for men.

I want to refer to two very important issues about which many people are reluctant to talk. The first concerns diseases that affect men only — principally diseases of the sexual organs, such as testicular cancer and prostate cancer. Prostate cancer is second only to lung cancer in the number of male deaths attributable to cancers. This is a serious public-health problem. There is nothing to show whether or not early detection and treatment improves survival rates. Many friends of mine were killed by prostate cancer. It is a problem that we must take very seriously.

The Committee received evidence about men submitting themselves to rectal examination. This is not a particularly pleasant matter to discuss, but the Committee makes no apology for tackling such issues. Apparently rectal examination is resisted by patients and avoided by general practitioners, yet 90% of colo-rectal tumours are within reach of a gloved finger. Major studies in the United States show that early diagnosis makes a massive difference. American men now accept that such an examination is perfectly normal.

The second paragraph of section 12.5 says

“The Committee recommends that a publicly funded Men’s Health Forum be established in Northern Ireland. Men’s health is a vast area of concern in which the province is already well behind the rest of the country, both in the understanding of it and in coming to grips with it. Indeed, it is almost as if it has been invisible. This forum could be modelled on similar fora in the UK and would consist of professionals, public representatives (representatives of the Northern Ireland Forum and of District Councils, et cetera), voluntary and community groups concerned with men’s health and statutory agencies. We would suggest that someone of the standing of Dr Ian Banks in this area be asked to take this initiative forward. If Dr Banks himself can be involved at least in the early stages this would be a great asset.

The Committee recommends that men’s health be treated as a specific policy issue by the DHSS, which should move quickly in establishing and funding a forum of the kind described above. We welcome the current youth service review, which we believe will recommend organized and much-needed support for school-leavers through to the age of 25. This, we are convinced, will benefit not only young men but, in the long run, society as a whole.”

I recommend that the Forum adopt this report.

**Mr King:** It is with great pleasure that I support the proposed adoption of Standing Committee C’s report. Before commenting on the report itself I should like to refer to the very good working relationships in the Committee, as evidenced by the contributions to this debate. In our deliberations and evidence-taking sessions there was nothing but cordiality and a workmanlike attitude. This is a truly cross-party, non-partisan, cross-community piece of work. On that basis alone I would be happy to commend it.



My Committee colleagues have highlighted almost all the recommendations. I suggest that Members, before wading through the report, go to section 13 and read the 17 recommendations.

**Mr Calvert:** In view of the Member's comments about the way in which the Committee operated, may I ask whether he agrees that the SDLP, if its members are concerned about the health of their constituents, should have been represented on the Committee for its consideration of this very important subject?

**Mr King:** I agree. Prostate cancer is prostate cancer whether the sufferer is a Nationalist, a Unionist or an Alliance supporter. It is a great shame that we did not have a truly cross-community input. But the Committee and its staff did sterling work, and the SDLP's absence will not be allowed to detract from the importance of the report. It is a shame, but I do not want to dwell on a political point.

The Committee's second recommendation concerns drink-driving limits. Section 13.2 says

"We were given evidence from the BMA that a reduction in legal alcohol limits would save lives. We welcome the moves being made in England to lower the legal alcohol limit there, and recommend that the position in Northern Ireland be kept in line with this."

That cannot be stressed enough. I understand that legislative moves are afoot to introduce a limit the equivalent of the alcohol content of one pint of beer. I come from a school of thought which holds that a specific reason for the state of men's health is that men are risk-takers and that any permitted consumption will be pushed to the limit. I think the message would get through better if there were a total prohibition on drinking and driving. That would save even more lives. But most such deaths are caused by drivers who are four, five or six times over the limit. There must be a specific programme to target that sort of behaviour. And, as Mr Hugh Smyth said, the increasing problem of drug-related accidents will have to be addressed. It all comes back to men's risk-taking nature.

*10.45 am*

I wish to highlight section 13.12 of the summary of recommendations:

"The Committee recommends that a Government ban on tobacco sponsorship and advertising should be introduced as soon as possible. An attack on the devastating effects of tobacco smoking on the health of the nation must begin sooner rather than later."

This was topical when we started taking evidence.

The Committee was deeply disappointed at the new Government's attitude. Before the election, we were promised that a ban would be effected within months. Sadly, that has not happened. It seems that financial and internal political pressures got in the way. It is with great sadness that the Committee notes that the Government are putting financial and party-political interests before dealing with death. That is not something we want to see perpetuated. We urge the Government to reconsider their priorities.



There is evidence that young people, especially young men, who watch formula-one racing are influenced by the advertising. The Government ought to forget Mr Ecclestone's millions and think about the millions that could be saved in the National Health Service and the millions of lives that could be improved if simple steps were taken now. People talk about jobs, about money, about inward investment, but we are concerned about the health of the nation. There has to be a balancing act, but it must lead to a total ban.

The fact that we have come up with such a comprehensive document suggests that we are dealing with the tip of the iceberg. The recommendation about the establishment and funding of a men's health forum must be taken seriously. The Committee spent nearly three months taking evidence, and it has produced a 46-page report with nearly 20 recommendations. It was able to do all that in a very short time, though under-resourced. Surely a properly resourced, properly structured men's health forum would be much more effective.

I am saying so not because this is something I like to talk about but because lives can be saved. The Y-chromosome is the biggest deficiency in our make-up. As Mr Calvert pointed out, men are likely to die seven years earlier than their female counterparts. By and large, that is preventable, and the means of prevention is in the hands of men themselves. The Government must provide education, but it is up to us to make use of it. It is up to us to go to our doctor, dentist or work-place clinic. It is sad that there is only one men's health clinic in Belfast — the one on the Shankill Road. I understand that two more are to be established — one in Lenadoon and one in Suffolk. That is good, but I look forward to the day when there will be such facilities throughout Northern Ireland. I also look forward to the day when what is happening at Du Pont in Londonderry, to which Mr Calvert referred, will be not the exception but the rule. Anything that persuades men to take their health seriously will save lives — and that is the underlying theme of this report. We looked at suicide, drug addiction, prostate cancer and risk-taking, but the driving force behind all our deliberations was the urge to save men's lives.

I will conclude by addressing the point that Ms Sagar made about Section 9. I understand her concerns and the sensitivities involved, but I have to point out that paragraph 9.9 refers specifically to unwanted pregnancies. I hope that this will not prevent unanimous adoption of the report.

I wholeheartedly commend these proposals to the Forum.

**Mrs Beattie:** I would like to pay tribute to the Committee's Chairman, Vice-Chairperson and other members for all their hard work. In particular, I want to express appreciation to the Clerk, Mr Arnold, for his assistance.

The report highlights a number of vital aspects of men's health. I would like to draw Members' attention to the effects of alcoholism and drug abuse.

Alcohol consumption has been increasing steadily and is now double what it was 50 years ago. It accounts for about 5% of deaths. According to the statistics, alcoholism is now the third greatest health hazard, after heart disease and cancer.



There has been a frightening deterioration in the drug situation in Northern Ireland. Surveys show that 42% of 15- to 16-year-olds admit having used a drug at some stage, and 18% admit using drugs regularly. Substances like LSD and Ecstasy are becoming increasingly popular. Males predominate in the world of drug-trafficking, and men are more susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse.

We recently visited the Shaftesbury Square Hospital's addiction clinic, which provides an invaluable service. The community addiction teams provide specialized treatment and help for alcohol and drug addicts, and help is offered to their families. There have been several unsuccessful attempts to close this vital service down. I call on the health and social services board to ensure that there will be no more such attempts and to provide additional funds.

I fully support the report.

**Mr Casey:** On behalf of the Labour Party, I congratulate Mr Hugh Smyth and his Committee on their very fine and comprehensive report. It is obvious that the Committee heard a lot of evidence from people who deal with men's ailments and therefore know the situation.

There has been a degree of sexism in the debate. I myself will indulge in a little of it by saying that, from a female perspective, males do not make good sufferers. Nor do they have much sympathy for people of the fair sex when the latter are not feeling too well. Some men may disagree entirely when I say that this may have something to do with how males were treated in their young days. Perhaps we can trace attitudes back to women who spoiled their sons and to girls who spoiled their brothers.

**Mr Carrick:** Does the Member agree that a return to old-fashioned values and principles, moral conduct and personal ethics might help to stem the terrible increase in poor health among men?

**Mr Casey:** Yes. The Member must be a bit psychic, for I was coming to that.

Some of the things dealt with in this report happen without any action on our part. We may, for example, inherit certain traits which will have a lifelong effect on our health. On the other hand, the effects of drugs, tobacco, alcohol, the lack of exercise and sexually transmitted diseases are self-inflicted. Some Members like a wee tippie, others smoke, and there are those, like me, who neither drink nor smoke. I have to confess that I do not take enough exercise. This is a result of my lifestyle. I travel to Interpoint two days a week and to Stormont on the remaining three days. Indeed, I spend the best part of the day at the wheel of my car. Letting off steam in the Forum now and again is the only exercise I get. Maybe that has a beneficial effect.

I wish we could dispose of some of the little things which ail us at times. Unfortunately that is not the case, though there are things we can do to prevent addiction to and the effects of drugs, tobacco and alcohol. Reference has been made to testicular and other types of cancer and to the fact that males are very reluctant to seek advice or go for examinations or scans. There could be a psychological reason for this. We have so many



work, family, mortgage and other commitments that we are almost afraid to take ill. We postpone seeking a diagnosis because we are afraid that we may have to give up working. And whether in industry, in commerce or in an office environment, work is stressful in itself, as is the travelling.

Mention has been made of a stroke register. A stroke is very debilitating and has serious consequences, not only for the victim but for his family too. And it is not only men who suffer strokes.

I am involved with the Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke Association, which does admirable work in this field.

We wholeheartedly welcome and endorse the report.

**Mr Tom Robinson:** It gives me great pleasure to support the adoption of this report, and I wish to be associated with the expressions of thanks to Mr Arnold and other staff. The assignment is one of the most interesting that the Health Committee has been involved in, and I want to record my thanks to all the organizations and individuals who gave us information on this very important subject. I want to express particular appreciation of the contribution made by Dr Ian Banks, who was not only informative and thought-provoking but, at times, highly amusing.

*11.00 am*

Mr Gardiner made reference to the Committee Chairman, Mr Hugh Smyth: a fine example of all that is good in the area of men's health — indeed, a role model. As Mr Gardiner pointed out, he has set a fine example for heavy smokers, cutting down by about 50%. It is probably only a matter of time until we see him jogging round the city hall. I understand that we have managed to secure a human skeleton for today's press conference. Contrary to rumours that may be circulating, I can assure Members that it is not a replica of Mr Smyth.

Even if this report does nothing but flag up the issues surrounding men's health, or lack of health, it will have been worthwhile. However, one hopes that the Government will act upon some of the recommendations, especially the recommendation that a publicly funded men's health forum be established in Northern Ireland.

What is wrong with men's health? That question itself poses a problem: men are not supposed to talk about health in the way that women do. It is not macho for men to discuss their health problems. The report highlights this fact. While it is perfectly normal for women to talk openly, men tend to shy away from public conversation.

This report should be read not only by every Forum Member, male or female, but by everyone. Indeed, this is the only report that the Forum has produced which is personal to each Member.

A number of alarming statistics are revealed. Being male is a distinct disadvantage with respect to health and life expectancy. Men are indisputably more likely to die prematurely than women. The report highlights several other key facts: women see their



doctors twice as often as men do; three times as many males as females take their own lives (the number is higher in the case of young males); the suicide rate is twice as high in rural areas as in urban areas (recent press reports have highlighted the number of deaths in the farming community); we have one of the world's highest rates of death from coronary disease; tobacco is responsible for 3,000 deaths a year (the Government do not allow us to eat a T-bone steak, but, ironically, we can smoke ourselves to death). The evidence is clear that many men die from diseases such as testicular cancer and prostate cancer because they leave it much too late to seek medical help.

I commend this report to the Forum, and I hope that it will be widely read. Men must take their health much more seriously. This is one of the most thought-provoking subjects that the Health Committee has tackled, and it deserves the widest possible media attention. If the report, which will be distributed throughout Northern Ireland, saves one life this will have been a very worthwhile exercise.

**Rev Trevor Kirkland:** I was delighted to receive my copy of the report. Having heard the details of Mr Smyth's sudden change of lifestyle, I am wondering if his photograph is the "before" or the "after" version.

I am pleased that the Health Committee did not fall into the trap of political correctness or the trap of genderizing the subject. Men's health is not just a man's issue, or women's health a woman's issue. A health issue is a health issue. I agree with Mr Carrick that many of these problems are the result of particular life-styles and that a return to a moral way of living would remove many of the causes.

I must, however, caution the Health Committee about accepting empirical evidence. I refer not just to things in the report but also to comments made in this debate. Political correctness prevents people from disputing certain assertions. The report says that there is no disputing the facts, but that there is dispute about some assumed facts is precisely the point.

With regard to smoking, the wisdom of our generation says that this habit kills. The Education Committee's Chairman likes to have a little puff from time to time, though I suspect that the roads of Tyrone may have a greater effect on his health. I do not smoke, for a number of reasons. That smoking could kill me is not one of them. Science has not demonstrated that smoking kills people. What science has demonstrated is that smoking is likely to kill some people. The problem with empirical evidence is that a universal law is extrapolated from a study based on a few examples of the particular. According to the 'Guinness Book of Records' the oldest man in modern history was a chain-smoker. Empirical evidence does not demonstrate infallibly that smoking kills. It is very important to have healthy scepticism about the assertions and statistics that are constantly trotted out by certain vested interests. While welcoming the report I ask the Committee and other Members to bear in mind that it is healthy to be sceptical about empirical evidence.

In the 1600s Richard Farnworth said

"Who are greater liars than lawyers?"



One is tempted to add "after psychotherapists and scientists", but that might be prejudicial to some people.

**Mr Poots:** I do not know how I can follow Mr Kirkland. However, somebody has given me a quote from Robert Burns:

"As father Adam first was fool'd,  
A case that's still too common,  
Here lies a man a woman rul'd,  
The Devil rul'd the woman."

I must at the outset declare an interest. The greatest of all rights is the right to life. Since I am not as sceptical about statistics as Mr Kirkland is, it is no problem for me to refer to the fact that men's life expectancy is seven years less than women's. So this report is very important. It is good that the Health Committee is raising public awareness about men's health.

Men will not go to the doctor when they do not feel well. They take up pursuits that are not necessarily healthy; more men than women consume large amounts of alcohol; more of them take drugs; and more of them take part in other risky activities.

I want to refer to the question of suicide. The majority of people who kill themselves are men. Particularly at risk are members of the security forces and farmers. Of course, they have the means. Almost all members of the security forces have personal-protection weapons, and most farmers have guns, poisons and other means of self-destruction. If the office of the Registrar General were to review how deaths are classified, with a view to improving the accuracy and value of the information on causes, that would, I believe, be of benefit.

This week the Agriculture Committee heard evidence about organophosphorous poisoning. Again, it is mostly men who are affected. Members will be aware of the problems of the Gulf War veterans and the shabby way in which they have been treated by the current Government. Farmers who have been poisoned by organophosphates are getting exactly the same treatment. Organophosphorous compounds are used to make nerve gas. They penetrate the skin and enter the nervous system. Part of the problem is that people are not taken seriously when they go to the doctor. They are treated as hypochondriacs because many tests come back negative.

The Chief Medical Officer, Dr Henrietta Campbell, has told the Agriculture Committee that a centre to diagnose organophosphorous poisoning is to be set up. That is good news. Until now people from Northern Ireland have had to go to the centre run by Dr Jamal in Scotland. I hope that the Health Committee will take this major issue on board. Now that the problem has come to light, we shall hear more and more about it.

**Mr Shannon:** Does the Member agree that there are further implications? The Agriculture Committee heard yesterday about a theory that people can pass this condition on to their children. Apparently some cases have been reported.



**Mr Poots:** Yes. We heard yesterday from a young woman whose daughter has some of the symptoms.

I commend this report to the Forum and ask the Health Committee to consider looking into the issue of organophosphorous poisoning.

**Mr Junkin:** Apart, possibly, from the Agriculture Committee's reports, towards which I am slightly biased, this is one of the most interesting Committee reports ever produced. The person who thought of looking into the subject of men's health is to be congratulated. I have not read the whole report, but I have scanned much of it, and I am shocked that men are being left behind in the health stakes — I thought that men ran the Health Service.

But women too are affected. They suffered seriously during the Industrial Revolution, and they have been suffering since. They were forced to work in mills, and they have worked on farms in all weathers — from hot, dusty conditions to cold, wet conditions — often with children to rear and, until a few years ago, without the help of state benefits. There was always the spectre of the poor-house for those whom death did not claim in childbirth.

This very informative report is compelling reading, and it should be made available to every man in Northern Ireland, young or old. It should be published widely. With a glossy back and a photograph of Hugh Smyth on a fitness machine or a massage table, it would outsell any men's magazine.

*11.15 am*

I congratulate the team. In the few weeks left to this body they might pursue some of the points that have been raised. I think especially of the need to raise men's awareness of the importance of self-examination and of visiting the doctor more often. Prevention is better than cure. With more prevention men's lives could be saved and much family misery prevented.

I commend the report.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** Much ground has been covered today, and I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this very important debate. There are just a few things I would like to emphasize.

The high incidence of male suicides is particularly worrying. More research is needed urgently to establish the cause. We can all make best guesses, but that is not enough. Then there is the matter of drugs. Young people need to be aware of the dangers. The best course is to educate at all levels. In the case of sexually transmitted diseases too, education is the key.

Neither must we forget about alcohol and tobacco, which account for many more deaths than anything else. Here it is a matter not just of education but also of legislation.



I could say a great deal about heart disease and cancer, but suffice it to say that the key is greater awareness on everyone's part.

However, if the Committee were to tell people what is needed, without providing the means of meeting the need, they would fall at the very first hurdle. That is why we have recommended a forum for men's health. I hope that the Government will respond generously. I make no apology for repeating the recommendation that a publicly funded forum be established in Northern Ireland. This problem gives rise to widespread concern. The province is well behind the rest of the country in understanding and getting to grips with it. It is almost as if it has been invisible.

Such a forum could be modelled on similar bodies in other parts of the United Kingdom. It could consist of professionals, Members of this Forum, councillors and representatives of voluntary and community groups concerned with men's health and of statutory agencies. We suggest that someone of the standing of Dr Ian Banks be asked to take the initiative forward. Involvement by Dr Banks himself, at least in the early stages, would be very valuable.

I am delighted that Members feel that this is a good report. I can say without bias that it is probably one of the better reports to come before the Forum.

**Mr Empey:** Mr Junkin raised the matter of distribution. The Forum's Committees have produced some very constructive and worthwhile reports. Despite the very high standard, there are people who have treated this body with derision and contempt.

I hope that at an appropriate time — I leave that entirely to you, Mr Chairman — the Forum will consider the best way of ensuring proper distribution of this material. There is no point in producing reports if nobody sees them. It would be helpful if the media were to pay a bit more attention to the effort that Members put into such exercises, instead of concentrating on the nonsense that is very much to the fore. Many professional people would see in this report material of value to the community. I strongly urge the Committees to consider what might be done.

**The Chairman:** I agree entirely. I wrote for the 'Belfast Telegraph' a piece criticizing the scant attention the media have given to the Forum's very valuable work. I have had meetings with the editors of two of the provincial papers, and a third has been arranged. I have been making this point pretty strongly. Perhaps the Business Committee will consider the matter at an early date.

**Mr Morrow:** I agree that this matter should be referred to the Business Committee, which could take on board what Mr Empey has said.

**The Chairman:** I was at Harvard University when a causal relationship between cigarette smoking and cancer became known, and I invited a leading doctor to address the Harvard Business School — 160 people. At that time I was a heavy smoker, but when I saw the horrifying statistics and the condition of a heavy smoker's lungs I thought that the only thing to do was to go onto the stage and say that I was going to stop smoking for ever. I took the packet of Player's from my pocket and threw it high into the amphitheatre. It fell into a



waste-paper basket. That night, mad for a cigarette, I went to the basket. It was full of apple peelings, pencil sharpenings and papers, but there were no cigarettes. I reckon that the hand of God must have helped, for that was my last packet.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Forum adopts the report on men's health in Northern Ireland prepared by Standing Committee C (Health Issues) on 9 February 1998 and decides to forward it to the Minister for Public Health with the request that he give serious consideration to its recommendations.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.26 am and resumed at 11.49 am.*

### **EDUCATION: PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

**Mr Gibson:** I should like, before proposing the motion on the draft Order, to inform Members that last Tuesday the Education Committee had a meeting with the Minister responsible for education to discuss the private finance initiative. The meeting lasted more than an hour. A formal report of the discussion is available for Members.

### **DRAFT EDUCATION ORDER 1998**

**Mr Gibson:** I beg to move the following motion:

That the Forum adopts the response to the draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 prepared by Standing Committee B and decides to forward it to the relevant Minister for serious consideration.

The Order is a copious document, running to about 89 articles. We welcome the useful explanatory document, and we thank those who made presentations to the Committee.

There is much in the Order that is not controversial. The purpose is to give legal standing to various educational practices. The instrument also paves the way for future legislative changes. Generally we welcome it.

Specifically, we welcome article 3, which deals with the controversial area of school discipline, and, article 4, which is about how teachers may restrain pupils and the question about detention after school.

There is a need for definition with regard to the authority of boards of governors, area boards and school principals.

Another welcome provision concerns baseline assessment of pupils' performance. There is now a common curriculum, and we need a uniform system is measuring



performance. We must be able to compare like with like. The Committee is concerned, however, about the resourcing implications of the Government's legislative proposals.

We welcome the fact that school sizes are to be limited. Also very welcome are articles 17 to 21, which deal with pre-school education — a subject that the Forum has examined. The Committee said that provision for pre-school education should be universal, and we are glad that the Minister has moved forward. We believe that there should be a policy of inclusion, rather than of exclusion, towards those people who are prepared to provide pre-school facilities in church premises, village halls and various other places. They should be encouraged to continue.

The Order also deals with admissions to schools and the handling of complaints. The Committee is concerned, especially in this age of emphasis on partnership and accountability, that there is nothing about parental responsibility and participation. While the policy documents contain very laudable remarks about the wishes of parents, the legislation provides only the right to complain. Clearly, this is an area for policy-makers to examine in the future.

The Order deals with the financing of schools. By and large, the Committee welcomes the instrument, which makes provision for Government action in eight areas. Again the main concern is that there should be sufficient resources to implement the proposals. We want to avoid a paradise for lawyers who deal with complaints. School should be a pleasant and encouraging place for pupils and their parents.

Finally, I would like to thank you, Mr Chairman, for your continuing encouragement to my Committee and to express gratitude to the other members, who have been very co-operative and diligent in coping with a very busy schedule, especially since the new year. The constructive dialogue and the banter that sometimes goes with it lead to a healthy working relationship. My thanks are also due to the Vice-Chairman, Mr Weir, and to Ms Benson and Mr McDougall for their professional assistance.

**The Chairman:** The fact that your Committee was given an hour of the Minister's time this week speaks volumes for the authority that it has gained. Well done.

**Mr Weir:** May I begin by thanking the Chairman for his kind remarks.

I agree with Mr Gibson that the Committee's meeting with Tony Worthington was very productive. We were able to put across the important points that arise from our response to the draft Order.

The response is one of cautious welcome. Much of what the Order contains is very sensible and practical. The instrument is high on rhetoric — a hallmark of this Government — but we are concerned about whether that will be matched by a commitment to implement the proposals.

Two themes run through our response: resourcing and clarification. On resourcing, one complaint that could be made against the Government is that they sometimes appear unwilling to put the money where their principles are. We welcome the proposals on baseline assessment, but it will take proper resources to ensure that these are fully effective. For



example, in the area of special needs the statementing process should ensure that children are assessed as quickly as possible.

We also welcome the proposal, announced this week, to limit the size of P1 to P4 classes. We want that resourcing commitment to include Northern Ireland. We also welcome the commitment to pre-school education.

Some parts of the draft Order are short on detail and somewhat vague. I am reminded of the saying "Clarification is often used not to make things clear but to put oneself in the clear." I hope we shall get the right sort of clarification here. Article 3 deals with the responsibility of boards of governors and principals for discipline, but clarification is needed on the role of education and library boards.

Articles 22 and 23 deal with admission to pre-school classes in grant-aided schools. Here the Department will have to give considerable guidance. The Order also deals with the need for detailed guidance on the new relationships between the Department, the education and library boards and boards of governors, particularly in respect of financial matters. There are a number of issues which, in principle, seem fine, but we need more information.

With those reservations, we welcome the Order. Our response highlights some matters that need more attention. It is a succinct but sufficient response, and it is thanks to the Committee Clerk, Liz Benson, that we have managed to get it out in such a short time.

12.00

I urge Members to support the Education Committee's response to the draft Order.

**Ms Bell:** I join with my colleagues in thanking Ms Benson and Mr McDougall for their help. Our time was restricted, but we were able to prepare a response, which I commend to the Forum.

As one of the Committee members who went to see the Minister, I concur with what has been said about the meeting. Tony Worthington knows that there is a Forum Education Committee and that he needs to listen to what it says. Whether he will act on its advice is another matter. He certainly knows that Mr Gibson will tell him what he thinks. I would like to be able to photograph the look on Tony Worthington's face after some of Mr Gibson's remarks. Anyway, I think we have established our credibility.

Responses to draft Northern Ireland legislation are generally ignored. Instruments go through largely unaltered. One sometimes thinks that what one achieves is not worth the effort. However, for the sake of the Committee's credibility we had to make a considered response to the draft Education Order, setting out the points that we found generally acceptable and outlining some things about which we were concerned, such as the lack of parental involvement.

The Committee's Chairman and Vice-Chairman have mentioned the articles that deal with the responsibility of boards of governors for discipline and those that deal with detaining



and restraining pupils. The important thing, as Mr Weir has said, is that the legislation should be clear.

Our big concern, as always, is resources. There is no point in passing legislation if there are no resources to implement it. For years we have known all about financial restrictions in schools.

The education and library boards will need additional finance to put into effect the proposals for pre-school education. We must make sure that the Minister knows that while we accept the draft Order in principle, funds for its implementation must be guaranteed.

I commend this report and thank the Committee for its work. It is a very good group to be a member of. It is very satisfying to achieve consensus on various issues. There are differences in respect of some things, but that is healthy. Indeed, there have been some very frank discussions. In this case we have done well, and I ask Members for their full support.

**Ms McWilliams:** I apologize for Ms Sagar, who has had to leave urgently.

We welcome this draft Education Order, which was brought forward by the new Labour Government. They were right to use the title 'Raising Standards for All'. Even if we still cannot see exactly how schools can play a part in reducing some of the divisions in Northern Ireland, we have the tools to enable us to implement the Order.

Tony Worthington has done more in the last six months than his predecessor did in the same number of years, and for that we congratulate him. We appreciate the focus he has given to the kind of common task that we set ourselves. Education is probably central to everything we should be trying to do for the future, and here our children are the most important tools that we have.

Four of the matters with which the Order deals we consider to be priorities. First, discipline is a major problem in schools, particularly in Northern Ireland. We need to get it right. There are considerable discipline problems as children move from primary school to secondary school, and it is good that a working party is to look into this matter.

Secondly, baseline assessment of first-year pupils will be difficult. What tools should you use? The transfer test, as it is now called, has concentrated on science, maths and English. I would like the curriculum to be much broader. Children are becoming far too focused on those three subjects at a very early stage. I would like to see the guidelines for baseline assessment.

Thirdly, it is important that the size of infant classes be controlled. This is a burning issue. I do not know whether a needs analysis has been done in Northern Ireland. My eldest child, who left primary school this year, was never in a class of more than 24 or 25, yet my youngest, who is now in P5, has known nothing but classes of 35. The school has coped by bringing in volunteers, who help the kids and the teacher to get through the school year. The teacher deserves credit for taking on such a class. She must be under considerable stress. The size of infant classes is crucial. I was glad to hear Tony Blair saying on national



television yesterday that his intention is to get numbers below 30. The aim should be fewer than 25. Only in such classes can children so young get the attention they need.

Fourthly, there is the need to supervise school management teams. To date, there has not been such supervision.

Other proposals that are welcome include the one concerning a teachers' general council. Such a body should be set up as soon as possible.

The provision of a framework for pre-school development is an issue dear to the hearts of members of the Women's Coalition. There ought to be a place for everyone and more recognition of the role of parents in the planning and management of pre-school provision.

We take issue with the draft Education Order for its failure to address what we see as a basic human right — the right of parents to choose a type of education that is in conformity with their religious or philosophical beliefs. The Order contains no clear recognition of that right. Where, for instance, are the structures to guarantee the right to integrated schooling? In principle we have nothing against the proposal that future integrated education, like other types of schooling, be funded in accordance with the general formula devised by the education and library boards. But it would be grossly improper if that responsibility were not governed by the obligation imposed on the Department of Education under the 1989 Order to facilitate the development of integrated education. The obligation already exists; it just has not been fulfilled.

Integrated schools have good relationships with the administrative and professional officers of the boards, but it has to be remembered that most Education Committee members are representatives of, or political spokespersons for, segregated school systems and have no interest whatsoever in promoting integrated education.

**Ms Bell:** Will the Member confirm that she has just said that Education Committee members have no interest in integrated education?

**Ms McWilliams:** No. I am saying that we tend to be dominated by those who have an interest in segregated education.

**Ms Bell:** That may well be so, but I do not think that they are against integrated education.

**Ms McWilliams:** I am not saying that they are against it, but when a discussion is going mostly in one direction it is very hard to open up a space for integrated education.

**Ms Bell:** I assure the Member that her representative and I manage to do just that.

**Ms McWilliams:** We are also worried about the lack of democratic accountability in the planning of local education. The fact that boards are made up of providers rather than consumers means that there is little democracy for parents who want integrated schools. According to surveys, at least 30% of parents in Northern Ireland want integrated education



but only 3% of children are catered for. These parents are not stakeholders, and they have no way of influencing decisions before they are made — unlike parents in Britain, where, under Mr Blunkett's plans, there will be local ballots to decide the kind of school system.

What happens in England should happen in Northern Ireland. Why does the draft Order not include such a provision? School-based ballots are not the same as local democracy. Why should parents here not be given a say in planning a range of local school options? Instead, the Government have thrown their weight behind the idea of transforming existing schools. Until two days ago — and we welcome the intervention — the enrolment criteria were so high that it would have been virtually impossible for grant-maintained integrated schools to meet them. The number has been reduced from 100 to 80, which is fair.

We appreciate the provision which will permit integrated schools to apply, like other schools, for pre-school nursery funding.

Finally, I want to deal with the important matter of the transformation of existing schools. It has not been demonstrated that this will be cheaper or more cost-effective than other courses, but it has been demonstrated that it is contrary to a principle set down by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its report of December 1997, in which it is argued that it is against human-rights principles to prevent choice. These are specialist schools, and they ought to have a fresh start. We hope that the Minister will ask the working group to look again at the legislative framework for transformation so that there may be genuine cross-community input and genuine protection for whichever tradition is the minority, whether pupils or staff.

He should also ensure that transformation is a real option for the parents of children at schools in the maintained sector. We in the Coalition feel that it would be disastrous for public confidence if only controlled-sector schools were to become integrated. If this draft Order is about anything it is about getting the balance right, and we have some concerns with regard to transformation.

*12.15 pm*

**Rev Trevor Kirkland:** Education is not the most riveting of subjects, but I want to reiterate two points to which the Committee Chairman drew attention — points that have been a running sore for some years.

The first concerns parents. As the Committee's report says, the draft Order makes no provision for parental participation in education in spite of repeated references in policy papers to the important role of parents. The Order has no place for parents; their only right is the right to complain. It does not matter how many policy documents say that parents are a child's first and most important educators if these principles are not followed through when the legislation is being drawn up. Recommendation 5 of the Committee's previous report on pre-school education highlighted the importance of a definable role for parents, but this draft Order simply ignores them. It is not good enough for civil servants and politicians to pay lip-service to the role of parents in education and then ignore them in legislation.



Article 18(2) raises another important issue: that the provision of pre-school education should be inclusive rather than exclusive. I must take issue with what Ms McWilliams said a moment ago. As a parent, I should have the right to send my children to a school which fits in with my ethos, philosophy and religion. I can send them to a Roman Catholic school under the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) or to a school in the integrated sector or the state sector, but I have no right to send them to a school that fits in with my ethos, religion and philosophy, for none exists. The integrated sector is funded 100%, and the rules are constantly changed to suit it, but there is no school for my children — not one. It is people like me who are being discriminated against — not the CCMS, and certainly not the integrated sector.

The integrated sector is a new form of segregation, discriminating against everybody in a different way. It is nonsense to suggest that the integrated sector is doing something different. I am not opposed to segregation, but if one sector is being funded, every sector should be funded. And that includes people like me.

The legislation also affects pre-school advisory groups. These will have one representative of the Irish-medium interest, one from the integrated sector, two from the CCMS and two from the education and library boards, but there is no mechanism to ensure an input from parents. There is certainly no provision for people like me to be consulted — we are completely ignored.

We must deal with this running sore in the education system. It is all very well having debates on education Orders, but legislation that ignores parents is seriously flawed. I trust that my comments will be taken on board by those Members who are councillors and that they will pursue this matter.

**Mr Gibson:** I must challenge Ms McWilliams's assertion about Tony Worthington's contribution to education here. Only a limited amount of money has been made available. Instead of getting the £8.3 million that was set aside to implement the Tory voucher system for pre-school education, we have received £2.7 million to put the new proposals into practice. The Minister is carrying out a financial review, and it will probably be April before he knows the exact state of the books that were taken over from the previous Administration.

I thank Members for their contributions.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Forum adopts the response to the Draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 prepared by Standing Committee B and decides to forward it to the relevant Minister for serious consideration.



## SPORT IN NORTHERN IRELAND: GOVERNMENT FUNDING

**Mr Peter Robinson:** I beg to move the following motion:

This Forum is deeply concerned at the serious reduction in Government funding for sport in Northern Ireland.

May I first welcome the Chairman of the Sports Council, Mr Don Allen, and his chief executive, Mr Eamon McCartan, who are in the Chamber. Those who know anything about sport in Northern Ireland will be aware of the valuable contribution they have made and of their commitment to developing sport in the province.

This is the first time the Forum has had a full-blown debate on sports issues. Some might say "Not before time." I too must declare an interest as a member of the Northern Ireland Sports Council. Indeed, Mr Allen and I are its two longest-serving members. I am sure my tenure will not be renewed after what I say today, but I suspect that the new regulations would have made sure of that anyway.

The motion is brief, but it provides an opportunity for Members who want to comment on general sports issues. It is important that we do so because sport has been very undervalued given its contribution to life in Northern Ireland.

When most people think about sport here the well-known personalities spring to mind — and we have had many world champions. Motor sport enthusiasts will obviously talk about people like Joey Dunlop. Those of us who are football fans will remember George Best and, of course, Glentoran, which is one of the premier teams and the only one from this island to have won a European competition. In athletics we have Mary Peters, and in snooker we have Dennis Taylor and Alex Higgins. We have had many stars, as one might expect, in both shooting and boxing, and we have had several world champions in bowling. For a province the size of Northern Ireland, that is an incredible achievement. I do not think that everyone realizes the extent of our contribution at the highest levels of sporting excellence. In case I offend my hockey friends, I must say that several Northern Ireland people have played in the British Olympic team.

I commend to the Forum a first-class publication which sets out the strategy for the development of sport from 1997 to 2005. It would be useful if the Sports Council were to make a copy available to every Member. It has a section on the benefits of sport. To concentrate minds on the importance of the subject, I will refer to that section.

Sport enriches the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every day. It helps with personal, moral and physical development and gives enjoyment to all who play or watch it, at whatever level. There is a range of economic, health and social benefits — particularly relevant in the context of today's Forum debate on men's health. People who have been active in sport for three quarters of their lives have a much lower incidence of heart disease, angina or breathlessness than those who are less active. Those who take part in sport have lower coronary-risk scores. Elderly people who have remained active through sport are much more mobile and are better able to perform everyday tasks than those who have not.



The document shows that between 8,000 and 12,000 people are employed in sport — probably more than in banking and finance. So it is a significant contributor to the economy here, creating about £100 million of wealth. Believe it or not, Northern Ireland consumers spend more on sport than on alcohol or tobacco. So there are very considerable economic benefits too.

A survey of social attitudes has shown that eight out of 10 folk believe that sport can help to build lasting relationships between people from different religious and social backgrounds, so fostering cross-community relations. Indeed, in many cases, because of our geography, it is only through sport that people from different backgrounds have a chance to meet one another.

Given all these factors, money spent on sport is clearly a sound investment, so it is particularly sad to look at the Government's contribution in this area. In 1980-81 their contribution to capital grants was £5,421,000; in 1981-82 it was £5,615,000-plus; in 1982-83, over £8 million; in 1983-84, over £6 million; in 1984-85, £5,300,000; and in 1985-86, over £4 million. The contribution to district councils has been roughly £5.5 million a year, and local government has played a key role in provision for sport in the province. Perhaps I should declare that as an interest.

*12.30 pm*

Then the lottery came along. We were told that it would boost sport. The lottery money was to be additional, but while it has produced about £7 million a year, the Government's contributions have been as follows: £100,000 in the current financial year; £14,333 last year; and £252,000 in the year the lottery commenced. The lottery is now carrying the whole burden; nothing of any significance is coming from the Government. The Department is riding on the back of the lottery.

I hope that the Forum's Education Committee will look very seriously at this matter. It is an education question. The Government are obviously considering the number of teachers and the need for new schools, and the education budget is being directed towards those things. But sport has been forgotten, and it has been left to the lottery to do almost all the funding.

This being so, we need to look at what is happening to lottery finance. The money is divided among about six good causes in the first instance, and in Northern Ireland the allocations for the arts and for sport are made through the Arts Council and the Sports Council respectively. The net effect is that each of the six good causes receives about 16% of the United Kingdom pot, which, on a population basis, means that Northern Ireland gets 2.8%. There are items of expenditure that are similar in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It costs roughly the same to administer sport in this province as anywhere else in the United Kingdom, so the 2.8% is inadequate. Somebody said, perhaps facetiously, "What good is 2.8%? You cannot have 2.8% of a swimming pool; you cannot have 2.8% of a football pitch; and you cannot have 2.8% of a training centre."



There are pressures on the lottery funding. Between £23 million and £24 million has been allocated to 448 sporting projects in Northern Ireland. That has resulted in considerable benefits, but there are still 117 projects seeking more than £25 million, which clearly cannot all come from the lottery. There is a debate about the lottery itself — “a tax on the daft” — but that is a separate issue.

The Sports Council has listed Northern Ireland's needs — using a very sharp pencil! For example, Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom not to have a 50-metre pool, which is a necessity for competition at the highest levels. The cost of providing such a pool would be between £8 million and £10 million. The Sports Council recognizes that it could never hope to raise that amount except in partnership — in fact, it would cost about £3 million even to contribute towards providing a tank — so these are pruned-down figures, which show that the total funding gap is about £15 million.

You cannot simply take £15 million from the lottery. Indeed, legally, the Sports Council cannot use the lottery for development purposes. It is required to assess each application on its merits. It cannot direct funds to specific areas, whereas that can be done with capital funding from the Government. Therefore the pressures for capital funding of sport are going to increase.

Most district councillors will accept that many of the province's recreation centres, having been built in the 1970s, look very tired and dilapidated — even tatty. They need to be rebuilt or revitalized. But where will the money come from? If two or three councils were to get lottery funding, that would wipe out Northern Ireland's allocation. The money is just not there. Let us not forget that sport is beneficial in a divided society. The Government are prepared to assist other areas of education where they think there is cross-community advantage in so doing, but they do not seem to want to assist sport.

Furthermore, in the case of a number of sports Northern Ireland does not have national-level training facilities. I recall the plans of the so-called Billy Bingham Committee to provide indoor and outdoor training facilities at Shaw's Bridge. I remember the Chairman of the Sports Council, Don Allen, myself and others going, cap in hand, to the Government and pressing them for help, but all we got was a contribution towards the initial pitches. We need a massive contribution for a brick-built indoor training facility, and the same applies in many other areas where we want national-level facilities.

The absence since 1994 of Exchequer funding to support capital schemes is burdening the already inadequate lottery allocation, and our inability to make anything other than modest awards precludes our addressing the need for major facilities. Our lottery money will provide lots of small facilities, but major facilities are not possible.

While only about £7 million of lottery sports funding comes to Northern Ireland each year, money is being set aside because of a number of United Kingdom pressures. There are obligations to spend that money in a certain way, thereby reducing the amount available for capital schemes.

How can we address this issue? One obvious way would be for the Government to discharge their responsibility by making funds available to the Sports Council through the



Department. The money could be allocated on the basis of need, as identified by the Sports Council. Or the lottery rules could be changed to take baseline expenditure into account. Northern Ireland cannot get major facilities with 2.8%. The allocation should be increased, though that would probably lead to difficulties in the United Kingdom as a whole. A preferable route would be for the United Kingdom Sports Council to be allocated a proportion of lottery funding for building national facilities on a kingdom-wide basis and according to need. That would put Northern Ireland well to the fore. The benefit of our United Kingdom membership is that we are part of a family. We should be treated as equals within that family. Such an approach would go a long way towards meeting Northern Ireland's needs.

The Government have not fulfilled their obligation to fund sport in Northern Ireland. Indeed, in some cases they have not accepted that the new funding is supposed to be additional and have backed off as a result. Additional provision for sport would allow us to take a more prominent role on the national scene, would help us to develop sport further and would lead to economic and health benefits.

For all these reasons I urge the Forum to support the motion. I also urge the Education Committee to raise this issue with the Minister at the earliest opportunity. It will find him fairly sympathetic, but he will be helped to present his case if he knows that it is not just Northern Ireland's sporting fraternity who have an interest.

**Mr Coulter:** I support the motion, and I congratulate Mr Robinson on his analysis of the situation.

I labour under two difficulties. First, my party's main contributor in this debate was to be Mr Stoker, but he had to go to England, and he left his speech with me. Clerics are often accused of preaching other people's sermons. Well, I confess that I will be reading another person's speech today. My second difficulty is that the speech is handwritten. Those who are acquainted with Mr Stoker will know that he is better with the trowel than with the pen. However, I will do my best.

*12.45 pm*

Clearly, Mr Stoker and Mr Robinson have drawn from the same primary sources. The fact that the statistics are similar may be a good thing in that it will help to concentrate minds.

Here is Mr Stoker's speech:

"We in the Ulster Unionist Party are very grateful for this opportunity to highlight the fact that sport in Northern Ireland is underfunded. I will not go into the historical background, for we should be looking to the present and the future, rather than the past, so that the imbalance between Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom can be redressed.

Let us look at where we are today. The Sports Council for Northern Ireland has a meagre annual budget of about £2 million. That may not look bad on paper, but it would hardly get the plans for a national sports facility onto the drawing-board, never mind lay the first brick. Where does the £2 million go? Like other parts of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland has to meet fixed running costs."



I do not know whether "running costs" is meant to be a pun.

"We have to provide advice and guidance to the same number of governing bodies. We have to develop and establish new programmes, such as coaching for teachers and child protection, all of which, as well as other things too numerous to mention, have to be paid for. If the funds are not made available, these will not be developed to the same standards or have the same effect as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

In the present framework 2.8% of the United Kingdom's resources goes to Northern Ireland. This population-related figure fails to take into account Northern Ireland's higher fixed costs. We are not asking for a massive increase; a rise to 4.5% would enable the Sports Council and the voluntary organizations to operate more effectively.

Some people will think 'What about the lottery fund?' The lottery fund is divided equally between six good causes: heritage, charities, arts, sports, the millennium and new opportunities. Of the 16.6% that is allocated to sport, Northern Ireland receives 2.8%, which since 1995 has amounted to £23 million. That money has been spent. There are currently applications amounting to another £25 million. These will be dealt with, but over a longer period. Our allocation for 1998-99 is £7.5 million, but from 2000 we will have only £6 million. We need that small increase to 4.5% of the United Kingdom pot just to stand still.

What does all this mean for those who take part in sport? Underfunding means no new facilities, no upgrading of centres and no centres of excellence. It means reduced participation, reduced employment — 12,500 people are employed in this sector — reduced enjoyment and poorer health. Let me give a practical example. In 1995, during a community sports event in Sandy Row, a young man of 14 ran 100 metres in 11 seconds. Some may think that there is nothing spectacular in that, but they should take into account that the youth was running on grass, was wearing ordinary shoes and had not had any training. Given that most inner-city areas of Belfast have no sports facilities, how many young people with talent like that are slipping through the net? For that reason alone, I call on those in positions of influence to work actively for the small increase that Northern Ireland needs.

I support the motion."

*The meeting was suspended at 12.51 pm and resumed at 2.02 pm.*

**Mr Neeson:** I am very pleased that we are debating this subject and grateful to Mr Robinson for proposing the motion. I too served on what was known as the Billy Bingham Committee. It tried to establish facilities for the development of sporting excellence in Northern Ireland but did not, I regret, achieve that goal.

Sport in Northern Ireland is quite clearly underfunded. What we are asking for today is a level playing-field. There must be equity of treatment between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

One of the big advantages of sport in Northern Ireland is the economic benefit. The evidence is clear: people spend £600,000 a day on sport; there are 12,500 people in sports-related employment; and sport earns over £150 million for the economy each year. Leisure is one of the fastest-growing industries in Northern Ireland, so the more sport is developed — and the demand is there — the greater will be the economic benefits.

With regard to sporting excellence, it has to be borne in mind that Northern Ireland, unlike other parts of the United Kingdom, has no national training centre. There is no Crystal Palace, no Welsh Institute, no Bisham Abbey, no Inverclyde. There are no indoor sports



arenas — no Wembley, no Hampden Park — and, as two Members have already pointed out, there is no 50-metre pool. And we have no Meadowbank. So we are clearly disadvantaged in areas which could greatly help the development of cross-community contacts. This is important because sport is a non-controversial issue, and in most areas it is a cross-community activity.

Northern Ireland has no budget for the provision of national sports facilities. This is in stark contrast to England, Scotland and Wales, which between them have nine national sports centres, in addition to national stadia and a growing number of indoor arenas. We are disadvantaged in that we do not benefit from Exchequer funding in the way that other parts of the United Kingdom do. Northern Ireland has the greatest need but no Exchequer funding and an inadequate lottery funding threshold. Northern Ireland competes on equal terms but from a disadvantaged base. That applies across the whole range of sports — athletics, soccer and all the rest.

We should be trying to have the threshold restrictions eased. Northern Ireland should get the same level of funding as the rest of the United Kingdom for youth sport and the provision of facilities. To realize our vision of sporting excellence, that is what we need. In the present funding framework, as other Members have said, Northern Ireland gets 2.8% of United Kingdom resources. This population-related figure completely fails to recognize that the fixed costs are not population-related.

Much has been said about lottery funding and the development of projects for the millennium, but I have yet to come across anyone who supports the unreasonable amount of money that is being spent on the dome at Greenwich. What waste. Surely the money would be far better spent on practical facilities, not only in Northern Ireland but throughout the United Kingdom. That is the way to celebrate the new millennium.

Since 1994 Exchequer funding for capital schemes has fallen, thereby further burdening the already inadequate lottery allocation. It is not a question of additionality (a major problem in Northern Ireland with regard to funding from Europe); the problem is that lottery money has been used as a substitute.

Northern Ireland's commitment to the facility proposed by the United Kingdom School of Excellence has been costed at £24.3 million. There is a shortfall, which is expected to be met by the Sports Council, but with that body's reduced funding this has become almost impossible. I hope that money will be made available by either the Exchequer or the private sector.

I have mentioned the millennium projects. As Members are well aware, the Northern Ireland project is known as Odyssey. It will include an indoor arena, but the facility will be for entertainment and other events as well as sport. Another annoying thing is that, while sports councils in other parts of the United Kingdom are not being asked to contribute to their millennium projects, the Northern Ireland Council is being asked for about £2 million — disadvantaged once again.

This motion brings the underfunding of sport into the public arena. We are not on a level playing-field with other parts of the United Kingdom, yet sport has made a significant



contribution in the province over the years. One has only to think back to major events in which Northern Ireland was involved to appreciate its impact. It creates a feel-good atmosphere. Soccer is my favourite sport. I remember the last time Northern Ireland played in the World Cup. That event had a very important effect. Sport brings people together.

I support the motion.

**Mr Casey:** I too support the motion.

The Labour Party is alarmed at the severe funding difficulties faced by sport in Northern Ireland. Sport is, or should be, an integral part of society. It is open to everyone, and it brings together people from all backgrounds. It can encourage and build talent and confidence, and it is important for development at several levels — for example, through social interaction and the achievement of goals. People are involved for many reasons: socializing, relaxation, enjoyment. The more dedicated take part in the higher echelons.

The 1990s have seen a worldwide health and fitness boom. I do not know whether others, like me, have noticed that these days many young females run on the roads. The number of people who use leisure centres, gyms and health clubs is an indication of the remarkable growth in what has become an industry. This morning we debated men's health. But everybody — not just men — is starting to take more notice of the health benefits of exercise and sport.

Northern Ireland has a great deal of catching up to do. Many of its sports and leisure facilities are poor. I do not know if district councils are to blame, but they are supposed to be the providers. Why should the facilities be so poor when sport is so popular, regardless of the level of excellence to which people aspire? Sport requires a solid infrastructure. It takes time to develop talent and provide people with opportunities for a sporting career — amateur or professional. We need to improve facilities in Northern Ireland, whether those in schools or those at specialist levels, such as are to be found in the training camps and sporting academies that Mr Neeson referred to. But such improvements require adequate funding.

It is very difficult for Northern Ireland folk to compete with people from other parts of the United Kingdom or overseas whose training facilities are so much better. It is virtually impossible for those who take sports seriously to train full-time in Northern Ireland. That is a serious disadvantage for those who wish to participate at a higher level and bring credit to the province in doing so.

Schools play a vital role in children's development and their enjoyment of sport. This cut-back in funding has very serious implications for a whole generation of potential sportsmen. We need individuals and teams at local, national and international levels, and the Government have a duty to help. Ministers are only too eager to take the glory when a British team or individual does well. We have the talent, as is proved by the many people who have competed at the highest levels in athletics, boxing and other sports.



2.15 pm

Under the present arrangements 2.8% of United Kingdom resources comes to Northern Ireland, which accounts for about one fortieth of the population. This totally fails to recognize the costs encountered in Northern Ireland. The recommended minimum is 4.5%. There must be recognition of the economies of scale. The *pro rata* approach fails to address Northern Ireland's needs. When one looks at 1974-86 funding levels one sees a fall of almost 30%. The average annual figure is 17%.

We must also recognize that national and district needs are totally distinct and both need to be taken into account. This highlights other problems. For example, we have no national-level training facilities. Our swimmers have to go to the United States or elsewhere to practise in a 50-metre pool. Some local councils, including Craigavon and maybe Bangor have toyed with the idea of providing such a facility.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** That will put the rates up.

**Mr Casey:** They all go up from time to time — even Castlereagh's.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** It is still the lowest.

**Mr Casey:** Northern Ireland's budget is substantially less than that of any other region in the United Kingdom. Indeed, it is smaller than that of some schools in the province. An allocation of 4.5% of United Kingdom lottery and Exchequer funds would enable the Sports Council and the voluntary organizations which depend upon it to operate effectively. The council requires £24.3 million for basic national-level training facilities, and we need to develop an institute of sport to train, nurture and guide competitors to the highest levels.

Since the advent of the lottery and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts the Government have got themselves off the hook by making many sporting organizations in Northern Ireland dependent on them for funding. Many junior football teams, Gaelic teams and cricket teams have derived great benefit from these funds and have been able to improve the facilities at their grounds. Unfortunately, with the advent of the Wednesday lottery draw, the Foundation for Sport and the Arts has found that its funding, which used to be £1 million a week, has dropped to £100,000 per week — about a tenth of the previous level. Not only are we going to suffer from the cut-back in Government funding, but clubs will have to bear the consequences of a loss of income from the pools promoters, who donate the money to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts.

We have great pleasure in supporting the motion.

**Ms McWilliams:** Sport plays a very important part when we are choosing a grammar or secondary school for our children. Not only do we try to choose one on the basis of its location but we also think about how it does in sports. That is very significant and shows the importance we place on sport as part of our children's upbringing.

The reduction of funding for sport in Northern Ireland can only be described as a complete disaster. Considering that we now get only 17% of the average funding that we got



annually between 1974 and 1986, it is a wonder that we can go on providing any kind of facilities at all. I am very concerned that the Sports Council only gets a 2.8% allocation from the lottery — a figure based on population. Those of us who have a particular interest in the National Lottery Charities Board fought for and won an allocation of 4.5% on the grounds that Northern Ireland has extra needs, not only because of the deprivation here but also because it costs more to provide anything in Northern Ireland as economies of scale do not apply. If that is good enough for the Charities Board it should be good enough for the other distributing bodies, particularly the distributors of the sports funding.

There are six distributing bodies for lottery funds. Originally there were only five, but when Labour came to power they added one to fund pre-school tuition and play groups. The sixth is called "new opportunities". Of course, they are taking money from the existing pot. If sport is badly funded in Northern Ireland now, it is going to be even worse off because a percentage of funding is now going to another distributor. In terms of statutory funding and lottery funding the future for sport looks pretty bleak.

It is good to hear that there is consensus in the Forum for pressure to be put on the Heritage Department to increase the allocation to Northern Ireland to 4.5%. That is a very strong recommendation for elected representatives and those who are tasked with this in the Sports Council to take to the Minister.

We have already heard about the importance of sport to health, and we do have serious problems with health in Northern Ireland. Unlike the United States, Australia, Canada and many other countries, we do not get the importance of sport for health into our children's heads at an early age. Sport is about bringing forward talented, élite athletes. The Soviet Union went down that road and catered only for an élite, talented athletic group. That is not what we are about. We want to get this right and get into both children's and adults' heads — and I include myself — the importance of sport in helping to prevent cancer, arthritis, osteoporosis and heart disease and reducing stress.

And prevention of illness is another good reason for not underfunding sport. We would spend less on remedies, and that would make economic sense. When facilities are not close, people do not bother. Many, particularly those in rural areas, have to travel considerable distances. My biggest concern is that most facilities are now privately owned. The days are gone when we had well-funded public sports facilities. Now anyone wanting to participate will almost certainly have to pay. We are getting a healthy, exercised, well-off minority on one side and the low-income majority on the other for whom participation in sports is becoming too expensive.

Safety is another important aspect. If we do not put money into upgrading our current facilities, there will be safety problems. New regulations are continually coming out which require these facilities to meet certain standards. If they do not meet these standards — and I hear that many of them do not — they will be closed down. So where is the money going to come from to upgrade them? We are facing the closure of institutions and facilities and further redundancies. It is not good enough to stand still; if we do not make improvements we will incur the cost of dealing with injuries that happen because the facilities do not come up to standard. That is not cost-effective.



We have already heard the importance of sport to the economy, and that raises a number of other points. Research in the United States has proved that the team-building aspect of sport is very important. You look at potential employees' curriculum vitae to find out about their merits and qualifications, but you flick to the back also to see what other interests they have. Often these include sports. Employers judge how good people may be for the company team by their involvement in team sports, so if we do not develop team sports we are doing a disservice to business in the future and particularly to international bodies that come here to recruit.

Many team sports are still very male dominated. We have started to cater for female soccer teams, but the expenditure on females is not nearly as high as it is on young males. We need to get it into our heads that girls should not be left to watch. They should not be left in the passive area of sport or in individual sports. Money should be made available so that they can benefit from team sports too.

Contact has already been mentioned. Of course — and I would take issue with Mr Neeson on this point — this is no more the case in Northern Ireland than it is anywhere else, but it is particularly pertinent to this discussion. Sport is controversial. Of course it is. Look at the discussions that have gone on about the GAA or about the money spent on boxing, and so on. Nonetheless, it is also the case, as has been said time and time again, that sports can keep young people out of trouble. That is also cost-effective. The police and parents agree that young people who actively participate — and I know this to be true from my son — in soccer or other sports have an enormous interest that keeps their minds active and keeps them, on one hand, from spending all their time on computer games and, on the other, if they are in a deprived area, from getting mixed up in other activities.

The point has already been made about cross-community contact. Northern Ireland still has 97% of its schools segregated, so sport is probably the one driving force for cross-community contact. Children who attend those schools and participate in sport are making some contact in that way — probably their only contact. Education for mutual understanding may not be taking place in the school grounds but rather on the playing-fields.

Mr Peter Robinson recommended that a United Kingdom body should be set up to look at expenditure for the regions. I know from past experience that this type of body has resulted in applications coming in from many of the English regions pretending that what they are proposing to do is going to apply to Northern Ireland as well when, in fact, it will not. But, having said that, we strongly recommend that a United Kingdom working party be set up to look at parity of funding for sports and at the results of that.

The Millennium Commission has already been referred to. We have heard that we have a very serious problem because we do not have a national stadium and that poor old Northern Ireland is paying money in so that the rest of the United Kingdom can build their stadium and, indeed, provide facilities at both national and international level. We are losing out on two counts. First of all, we are not getting the money to Northern Ireland, and, secondly, we are paying out for provision elsewhere. Something has to be done. A United Kingdom working party on sport should be tasked with looking at that, and the Millennium Commission should address it seriously.



2.30 pm

Our third recommendation is for parity in the distribution of funding. Northern Ireland should get 4.5% and should get it this year.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** I too would like to congratulate Mr Peter Robinson for bringing this motion to the Forum. It is a motion which, I am sure, all parties support.

I would like to congratulate the Sports Council for Northern Ireland on the tremendous job they have done in the past and continue to do. During my year as Lord Mayor of Belfast, I had the privilege of working with them, and it was only then that I realized the tremendous job they do under very difficult conditions.

It has been said that funding should be increased to 4.5%. I think their funding should be at least doubled to give them any sort of chance. As a result of the cuts to the education budget, schools — certainly those in the working-class area that I represent — are no longer providing sports tuition and facilities, and kids who were used to participating in sport at school cannot do that any longer.

As the Women's Coalition have said, that has an impact on health, a topic which we debated this morning. It has been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that, in later life, those kids who take part in sports have less chance of suffering heart attacks or some of the other killer diseases which are prevalent in working-class areas. The Government must face up to their responsibilities.

We expected many of the things that we got from the Tory Government, but we were all hoping and praying that when a Labour Administration came to power, they would look at the things that mean a lot to all of us, irrespective of where we come from. I am talking about issues such as housing, the environment, employment, education and sport, but the Labour Government are introducing cut-backs in each of those areas; they are doing nothing, and we are far worse off now than we were under the Tories.

The Government missed a wonderful opportunity to prove that they were serious about sport. Many people, particularly in the Sports Council, were making strenuous efforts to bring the Commonwealth Games to Northern Ireland, and, with a bit of a push, that could have happened, but the reason it did not happen was that the Government would have had to spend millions of pounds on providing facilities, and they were simply not prepared to do that. If they had, think of the legacy that would have been left behind — sports facilities which could have been used by each and every one of our constituents, no matter where they came from.

Many years ago Belfast City Council had to rescue the Mary Peters Track. However, while we rescued it, we were not, and probably never will be, able to put sufficient finance into it to make it what it should be. That is a disgrace; it is wrong, but it is not our fault. Being a council, we are restricted, and the Government must recognize that.

There is all this talk about cross-community groups. If you can prove you are going on a cross-community trip, the Government are very keen to let you have money for it, but if



anything can bring our people together, sport can; it crosses all religious divides. That was brought home to me after the Shankill bomb and the atrocity at Greysteel. Members may not realize that there is a joint football team from Greysteel and the Shankill which plays together and goes on tours. That was the very last thing anyone would have expected. People from the Shankill, where nine innocent people were killed, and from Greysteel, where there was also a massive loss of life, were brought together through sport, and they go away as ambassadors for Northern Ireland. That is one of the rewarding things that sport can do, and we all know that it happens right across the board. The Government are going to have to take this particular subject seriously.

I think that the amount of money that is being put into soccer in Great Britain through television at the moment is sinful. Players are getting contracts of £2 million a year, and just yesterday we saw a manager breaking his contract because he could not get £3 million. The Government are going to have to take some control of this, because if they do not, soccer is going to die on its feet. In Northern Ireland, it is already dying because of a lack of finance, and I suggest that unless the Government waken up, the same thing is going to happen in England. The football clubs are well off now while they are still getting money from the television companies, but sooner or later that will run out, and, because of the influx of continental players, the lack of money and the fact that our young boys are not getting an opportunity to come through the system, soccer is going to die. One of our main sports, not only in Northern Ireland but right across the United Kingdom, will cease to exist. A United Kingdom body should be set up to investigate this very serious matter and I want to congratulate Mr Peter Robinson again.

I support the motion.

**Mr Shannon:** In his introduction, Mr Peter Robinson was talking about how well the "Glens" have done. The reason they are doing so well is that they have now got the former manager of Ards, Roy Coyle.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** He learned his football at Windsor Park.

**Mr Shannon:** Yes, he has come a long way, but he got a good grounding at Ards as well.

Mr Hugh Smyth said that football in the province is dying on its feet. The new management team that was appointed last week — Lawrie McMenemy, Joe Jordan and Pat Jennings — shows that it is not dying on its feet. And to prove that, the 'B' team beat the Republic 1-0 in Dublin.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** Would the Member agree with me that it is a shame that the Northern Ireland squad has had to appoint an Englishman and a Scotsman to manage them?

**Mr Shannon:** We tried to get Martin O'Neill, but he is managing Leicester City. However, we have Pat Jennings who, as we all know, was the best goalkeeper Northern Ireland ever had.



**Mr Alcock:** The Member mentioned Lawrie McMenemy. Let me remind him that Mr McMenemy was, at one time, chairman of Southampton, which won the FA Cup Final of 1976. As an Englishman myself, and from Southampton, I welcome him most sincerely and hope that all Members will join with me in that.

**Mr Shannon:** We can hardly blame the Northern Ireland team for having an English manager, when we bring Englishmen into the Forum team.

Sport in Northern Ireland is very important from a fitness point of view, and also because it contributes to better relations between the two traditions. As many Members have said, sport transcends all religious beliefs and cultures. Participating in sport makes people forget their religious differences by and large, except when somebody fouls, and you probably want to get your own back — but that is another matter.

Funding for sport is crucial. A fund should be established to address deficiencies in facilities and provide for United Kingdom initiatives. Secondly, a *pro rata* formula similar to that currently used by the National Lottery Charities Fund should be adopted which should give Northern Ireland 4.5%.

I am deeply concerned at the lack of funding for the proper development of facilities. In 1994, the Department of Education passed responsibility for such development to the Sports Council with little or no budget, and what budget there was had completely disappeared by 1998. Lottery funding should be additional to Exchequer funding; it should not be replacing it entirely, as is happening at present. The main problem with the lottery fund is that it is a challenge fund, and it is difficult, if not impossible, for councils to look at a corporate plan for developing facilities when that is the case.

The introduction of a sixth good cause has meant that the lottery cake is being divided into even smaller slices, and therefore, funding for sports is suffering yet again. In the mid-1980s, councils were able to sit down with representatives from the Department of Education and plan ahead for capital facilities, and it may be that in the future, subject to agreement with the Department, there will be grant-aid of 75% on capital expenditure which would reduce the cost of such provision to the ratepayers. During the last three or four years, the onus for the refurbishment and upgrading of facilities in the Ards areas has had to be borne entirely by the council and that has been the case in other council areas as well.

If the capital spend had been grant-aided, many more facilities could have been provided and sport could have played its vital role in community development. We wish to see equitable funding in Northern Ireland just as there is in England, Scotland and Wales. Development of the lottery revenue programme would permit greater investment in people, and a regional arm of the United Kingdom Institute of Sport would provide a much needed boost for the Northern Ireland excellence programme.

The implementation of a Northern Ireland strategy for the development of sport would provide very high quality sport for everyone, and the fixed costs for providing sport here are not the same as those in the rest of the United Kingdom. Take swimming pools, for example. A district council pool has to be 25 metres, and the national requirement is for 50 metres, but there are no resources available to enhance the district facility. In Ards, we have a successful



and energetic swimming club that has produced some very good swimmers with potential, but extending that pool is not eligible for funding and the cost is, therefore, prohibitive. A youngster who has shown talent deserves the same chance as his counterpart in Great Britain to develop that talent to its full potential. A capital budget needs to be reinstated if Northern Ireland is to prosper and not become a sporting backwater.

Another problem is the Sports Council budget, which is currently £2 million for the whole of Northern Ireland — that is substantially less than that of any other region in the United Kingdom. Take one example: £4,000 was received for the coaching of teachers in Northern Ireland, while £2 million was spent on the very same thing in England, a vastly different sum. How can you put together a new coaching programme for teachers on £4,000? That would not even buy their running shoes.

I have to express my concern about the continued financial support for certain so-called sports, the participants in which have strong political viewpoints and directly discriminate against my side of the community. Because of their ethos, I, as a Unionist and a former member of the UDR and the Territorial Army, would not be able to participate in them. I feel, as do the people whom I represent, that no funding should be made available to sports that discriminate in this manner.

With an allocation of 4.5% of the United Kingdom total, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and the voluntary organizations which are dependent on it would be able to operate effectively.

2.45 pm

**Mr Jim Rodgers:** I support this very important motion.

Part of the problem is that we do not have a local administration in Northern Ireland, and while the present team of Northern Ireland Ministers may be interested in sport themselves, it is not at the top of their priorities for Northern Ireland. Indeed, most people in Northern Ireland would not know that it is the Department of Education that is responsible for sport here.

Nobody has really taken any interest since the days of the late John Saulter, a senior civil servant at the Department of Education, who was responsible for the Irish Football League's receiving a sizeable amount of money to install floodlights. We then have to go back to the days of the previous Labour Administration when Lord Melchett was the Minister, and he did a tremendous amount for sport. While we are paying for that now — given the state of Belfast's leisure centres — it was, nevertheless, a very positive move at that time that helped to keep some young people off the streets and from getting involved with paramilitary organizations.

The Sports Council for Northern Ireland does a great job with limited resources of £2 million, and it is good to see its chairman, Don Allen, and its chief executive, Eamon McCartan, in the Gallery today. But we need to do more. We need to put pressure on the Department of Education to make this more of a priority, otherwise our young people are not going to get the same opportunities as those in the Republic of Ireland, England,



Scotland, Wales and other parts of Europe. We can compete but not if we do not have proper facilities. Of course we need a national stadium. It has been talked about for many years. We also need a school of excellence where people can develop their talents. We have some very fine coaches here, but unless the finance is made available we are always going to be second best.

The World Cross-Country Championships are coming to Belfast in 1999, and they will be using the city council's facilities at Barnett's Park and part of Queen's University. That will be a very positive event, yet the organizers are relying on the city council, the Sports Council and private sector organizations to pump money in. All you get out of the Department of Education is "Sponsorship, sponsorship, sponsorship", but the Government have a responsibility to assist with this as well.

Councils have an important role to play, and we in Belfast City Council are trying to help a number of sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and Gaelic football. Indeed, we were close to leasing some of our grounds only to be told by the Department of Education, the previous owners, that they could be neither leased nor sold. That is a retrograde step, and we are going to pay dearly for it. We need to lobby the Department of Education, and we need to back the Sports Council. They know how difficult it is to manage on a very small budget. When we compare the £2 million they receive with the millions of pounds that are being put in by other European countries, it is dreadful.

Finally, we are all aware of the finance that was given by the Government to upgrade stadia in the rest of the United Kingdom — Northern Ireland was not included in that — following the terrible tragedy at Hillsborough, when so many people lost their lives and so many were maimed. I understand a report is on Mr Worthington's desk. We need a response to it. England, Scotland and Wales have received finance to upgrade their stadia, and the same should apply to Northern Ireland — there could be a serious accident at one of those grounds if we cannot upgrade the facilities.

**Mr Davis:** I fully support this motion.

In the Sports Council's annual report Mr Allen says

"that the sportsmen and women have been great ambassadors for Northern Ireland, and through their sporting achievements they have portrayed an image of Northern Ireland which makes us all justifiably proud".

I am sure we all agree with that.

I was reading a local authority's January magazine and I noticed the headline "Hey, Big Spenders". The article itself said

"It may come as a shock that local authority leisure and sport investment is booming. Even in the current climate of savage budget cuts for councils, next year is shaping up to show the largest ever investment in public leisure and sporting provision. A review of the 441 councils across the United Kingdom makes startling reading. Its findings show that planned leisure investment by local authorities, which includes sport, for 1998 stands at a whopping £3.2 billion compared to more than £1 billion last year. Broken down regionally, Wales appears to be the best performer showing a 645% increase on last year. The principality will see more than



£160 million invested compared to £23 million for 1997. Northern Ireland is also showing a staggering boost to planned investment for 1998. It is up 470% on 1997 figures to £177 million."

By contrast, England is only up by 306% and Scotland is only up by 27%.

A few months ago I compared what Northern Ireland is receiving from the millennium fund with what the mainland is getting. I said then that we were being discriminated against because many excellent schemes put forward by district councils had received no funding, including one from Lisburn Borough Council for the regeneration of the River Lagan, and there is similar discrimination with the financing of local authority developments this year. This magazine says that Great Britain will see: 432 leisure-centre and sports-hall developments comprising 237 new builds and 195 refurbishments; 192 pool developments comprising 92 new builds and 100 refurbishments; 183 health-and-fitness centres comprising 111 new builds and 72 refurbishments or extensions; 209 artificial turf pitches and multi-use games areas comprising 178 new builds and 31 refurbishments; 30 new or refurbished indoor tennis centres; 43 new or refurbished athletic tracks; 2 national ice-rinks; and healthy life-style schemes. This is all taking place in other parts of the United Kingdom.

It is little different, when we consider how funding from the national lottery has been divided up: the Sports Council for Northern Ireland received 2.8% of the pot (£4.2 million), the Sports Council in England received 83.3% (£125 million), the Sports Council for Wales received 5% (£7.5 million) and the Scottish Sports Council received 8.9% (£13.35 million). So too much of the cake is going to Great Britain.

But how do we get a greater proportion of this money? When I was in the DUP, a deputation, including representatives from other parties, went to see the then Minister, Nicholas Scott, about bringing the Commonwealth Games to Northern Ireland. We might as well have talked to the wall. Likewise, it is no good our having this debate today and hoping that the Minister will read the report. We have to get some mechanism set up to help our fight for the increased funding which the Sports Council and the people of Northern Ireland so richly deserve. The people of Northern Ireland are under severe pressure from terrorism and everything else, and in a province where sport is a great healer, we are being badly done by.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** Mr Chairman, I do not feel it necessary to wind up — I usually only wind up if somebody has wound me up during a debate, and I am glad to say that that has not happened today.

Some very useful contributions have been made. I know that we send our reports to Ministers, and we are told that they read them, but I am not so sure of that. May I ask you to consider communicating with the Minister to make three key points: first, if the charities board can have an increase in their allocation of lottery funds from 2.8% to 4.5%, why can that not be done for sport; secondly, that consideration be given to the United Kingdom Sports Council's allocating funds on a United Kingdom-wide basis, and on the basis of need; and, thirdly, that the Government take responsibility and provide sport in Northern Ireland from their own budget.



**The Chairman:** I will be most happy to do that.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

This Forum is deeply concerned at the serious reduction in Government funding for sport in Northern Ireland.

### **FUNDING OF GRAMMAR SCHOOL PREPARATORY DEPARTMENTS**

**Mr Gibson:** I beg to move the following motion:

This Forum is content that the Chairman of Standing Committee B write to Mr Worthington urging him not to proceed with further reductions in grant-aid to preparatory departments and to restore their funding to at least the previous level of 40% of teaching costs.

I made a short statement to the Forum on 28 November 1997, in which I indicated that the Minister was proposing to reduce the level of funding made to preparatory schools. The Education Committee has since taken evidence from interested parties, and it is our proposal that we forward a letter to the Minister recommending not only that he reconsider this, but that he restore preparatory-school funding to its former level.

I do not come from a preparatory-school background because there are very few in the rural areas. In fact, I think the only one we have in the west of the province is at Foyle and Londonderry College. There is one at Magherafelt, and the rest are mostly in north Down and east Belfast. But when the Committee looked at the funding of controlled, maintained and integrated primary schools it found that they receive 100% funding. However, preparatory schools only receive 40% funding. Many people have misread the situation; they have assumed that preparatory schools receive special funding, which is not the case.

The one group that has not been mentioned is the independent sector. They get no funding, yet that sector is almost as big as the integrated sector. It should be noted that the independent sector includes schools which wish to become integrated, but they have to remain independent until they are fully accepted as integrated schools or colleges. The Committee came to the conclusion that the best course was to write a simple letter and to attach for the Minister's consideration some of the evidence that it had received. The opposition to the proposed reduction from 40% to 20% was so great that he backed down, to the extent of going for 30%. That was the easy way out. We on the Committee are agreed that there is still a degree of injustice.

*3.00 pm*

This week I received a fax from the Women's Coalition. Despite the Committee's agreement, the Coalition refers to 12 areas in respect of which it is not happy. Having attached information from the preparatory sector, I would be happy to annex these points too. I am, however, concerned about the question of protocol. Standing Committee B is the one



Committee in which all the parties attending the Forum participate. There may be a reason for the failure of some members to make an input during the Committee's deliberations.

**The Chairman:** Was the Women's Coalition represented on the Committee?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes.

I would be content to leave the matter to a vote of the Forum. It is the Forum as a whole, and not the Committee, that makes final decisions.

The first of the 12 points that were put to me misses the main thrust. It is a false argument. The reference to injustice in funding also misses the point. Most of the arguments are out of date and wrong in intention. It is the people whose children are in the preparatory sector who are being treated unfairly.

In east Belfast and north Down there is not a single spare primary school place. Children who would otherwise be in the preparatory sector would have to be bussed all over Greater Belfast, and class sizes would increase. So much for the argument that we heard earlier today. But closure of the preparatory schools and departments would be self-defeating in financial terms too. That is the only point we made. Every Member has received a copy of this document, which begins "Dear Oliver Gibson", and the Forum can vote in the normal way.

This morning there was a long discussion about integrated education, in which this matter was raised. Integrated schools are not a new idea. The grandfathers of most people in this Chamber attended such schools. Most places of learning were national schools where Protestant and Catholic sat side by side. I remember my father, when someone taking part in a programme he was watching on a small black and white television set described integrated schools as a great idea, smiling and saying "I was at one of those schools. My mate, Mickey 'the Gaoler' McGirr, later led the local IRA, and I led Sixmilecross UVF." So integrated schooling does not necessarily produce the harmonious society about which many people talk, and there has never been any evaluation. Those who are always talking about integrated education remind me of supporters at a football match who shout "Remember 1690."

I do, of course, believe in freedom of choice. I would hate to live in a society that did not recognize the need for a controlled sector. A controlled school must take any pupil, whether Muslim, Hindu, Catholic or Protestant. There is therefore plenty of opportunity for integration. The majority of grammar schools are already pretty well mixed, as are most preparatory schools. This point was made to the Committee by a person of rare type — a Catholic from the Shankill Road.

I am very happy with the letter. If the Forum wishes to include the Women's Coalition's points as an annex I shall be content to abide by its decision.

**Mr Weir:** I am happy to support the motion.

The letter expresses the feelings of most Forum Members. Tony Worthington's proposals for preparatory schools are ill thought out in terms of both practical and financial



implications. In the 1970s Denis Healey, when introducing tax proposals that would affect the upper echelons, said that he wanted to squeeze the rich until the pips squeaked. Healey was clearly driven by class prejudice, by a desire to get at people on the basis of a political agenda rather than the merits of the case.

Having heard from teachers and parents associated with preparatory schools, I do not believe that the group about whom we are talking is some sort of rich élite. It is clear that there is a misguided ideological reason for what is being proposed. If Tony Worthington's aim is to achieve equality of education he will be very disappointed, for the effect will be exactly the opposite. We heard that a reduction from 40% to 20% in the funding for teachers would probably result in the closure of all 25 prep schools and departments — all would at least have to consider their situation seriously — and the creation of a small, completely independent private sector. Northern Ireland has not had primary-level public schools such as one finds in England. We have had a system of education in which, broadly speaking, ability to learn, rather than ability to pay, is of crucial importance. If these proposals are implemented, that will be in grave danger. I believe that most of us want to avoid such a situation.

The funding reduction from 40% to 30% instead of 20% is not financially sensible. Even if prep schools do not have to close, parents will have to bear an increased burden, and many will be forced to send their children to ordinary primary schools. The supposed saving is £0.25 million. The removal of just one child in seven would wipe that out. Even if all prep schools and departments were able to stay open — and that is very doubtful — there would be no economic sense in the proposal.

The Minister is familiar with the situation in England, where there is a very large private sector, and he is labouring under the myth that Northern Ireland people who send their children to prep schools are rich. In the vast majority of cases that is not so. People who are not very well off make great sacrifices. Indeed, they may have little option. As the Committee Chairman has said, many schools in north Down are full to overflowing. Kilmaine Primary, which did not exist when I was starting school, reached that stage a couple of years ago. It was the largest primary school in the United Kingdom — perhaps, for a while, even in Europe. As north Down does not have an extensive rural hinterland, all primary schools there are very full. Such areas will be unable to cope if prep schools close.

Then there is the question of educational disruption. The whole proposal makes no sense. It is therefore important that this letter, together with the evidence given to the Committee, be sent to the Minister, as it reflects the feelings of the vast majority of Members. This is a very important issue, and I urge Members to support the motion. Let us hope that common sense will prevail and that the decision will be reversed.

**Ms Bell:** The Committee's Chairman and Vice-Chairman have covered most points, but I want to refer to several matters.

This document and the one with which the Forum dealt this morning were prepared in a very short time. Without the efforts of Ms Benson and Mr McDougall this would not have been possible, so I want to express my party's gratitude to them.



I am from North Down, but my concern about preparatory school provision is not restricted to that constituency. My party is interested in all prep schools and departments. We support this move as we believe that the Minister's proposals fly in the face of the Government's directive on parental choice and the right of every child, whatever the circumstances, to realize his or her potential through an adequate system of education. However much we want a truly equitable society, and however hard we work to achieve equality of opportunity for people in all walks of life, there will always be different levels. People have a right to work and improve their situation. They also have the right to want the best possible start, as they see it, to their children's education. To let it be otherwise is to penalize and discriminate against those people because of their financial or social circumstances.

*3.15 pm*

Last week in the Commons Tony Worthington said that his primary task was to streamline levels of education to make it more equitable. We have no problem with that, but radical changes such as phasing out or, as Mr Gibson put it "killing off", need to be made gradually and sensitively. Unfortunately, as I have said before, the Labour Government seem to have adopted the Tory habit of introducing something without realizing the repercussions on the ground. The repercussions of such a dramatic change can only be damaging to education services and resources as a whole.

As I have already said, we must allow for the fact that all parents have a right to choose the schooling they want for their children. These parents are prepared, whether we agree with them or not, to consolidate their children's future by paying fees and subsidizing the education facilities and teaching that are provided by the Government.

There are also implications for staff — either redundancy or, if possible, redeployment. I have to say that the latter option, given the cuts in staffing and the financial situation in the boards, seems unlikely, and that matter has obviously not been addressed.

I am not sure though that I totally agree with paragraph 12 in the annex, which refers to integrated education. I have not seen any specific evidence, or "empirical evidence", as my Colleague Mr Kirkland would say, that the ethos of integrated education is fully in the prep-school arena. Having heard evidence from the deputation of concerned parents, I know that they do operate a definite non-sectarian policy, but those schools could not be, and most of the parents would not want them to be, classed as integrated preparatory schools.

I too attended, as the Chairman, Mr Gibson, did, a country school in the late 1950s, which had a non-religious base. It did not call itself integrated. Two mornings a week we were given religious instruction, and the non-Catholic children left, and on the two mornings a week when the Protestants were being given religious instruction we played football. On Friday there was an interdenominational session, which I found very good. It was a very good start for me in many ways, but it could not really have been called integrated.

In the main, it is right that the Department of Education look seriously at this issue, but it must also bear in mind the many problems that will result if this proposal goes through now. The displacement of staff and pupils has not been significantly addressed. This



response may well persuade the Minister to look at the matter again and give us some answers. If this funding is to be phased out, it must be done with proper consultation and by well-considered measures.

We were talking about the credibility of Committees this morning. The Education Committee visited Thornfield, a school for the hearing-impaired. One of the children did a painting of me which the school sent me through Mr Eric Smyth. They were very happy with our visit, so I hope we are making a difference.

I ask Members to support the motion.

**Ms Sagar:** Before I begin I want to point out that the Women's Coalition does have a representative on this Committee. That member told the Committee about her reservations and put forward the Coalition's position on the matter. She was not treated fairly in any way, and I am surprised that Mr Gibson does not remember the incident when the member spoke out. The Women's Coalition has not decided, out of the blue, to oppose the Committee's letter. The matter was raised in the Committee so it is not a new issue.

**Mr Gibson:** I do indeed remember the incident, and if I had to apportion blame, I would blame the Women's Coalition representative for her outburst.

**Ms Sagar:** That is fine. Mr Gibson is entitled to his opinion as we are entitled to ours. That is why the matter was raised. I do not see why the member in question, who cannot answer for herself in the Forum, should have received the abuse and discourtesy that she did receive. Unfortunately, the member in question did not want us to raise the matter, and we chose not to raise it because we do not feel that issues of bad behaviour and ill-mannered answers should be constantly being raised.

**Mr Gibson:** That matter was dealt with in the Committee, and the member of that party was admonished in a kind and disciplined way. But if the Women's Coalition feels that it has to continue a feud, I will consider taking further disciplinary action. I thought not only that I was fair and equitable but more than indulgently kind to the Coalition's representative, so I feel somewhat hurt that someone is seeking to continue an unnecessary feud that was of her own making.

**The Chairman:** We should leave the matter there and pass on to other issues.

**Ms Sagar:** On a point of information, Mr Chairman. I was responding to remarks that were made because the person in question cannot speak for herself in the Forum.

**The Chairman:** You raised the matter first during this debate.

**Ms Sagar:** I am answering remarks that were made with regard to the motion. It has been said that the Coalition did not raise this matter. You asked Mr Gibson if there was a member of the Women's Coalition on the Committee. Of course there was a member on the Committee, and she raised this issue and was, in my view, treated rather unfairly. She was the subject of discourteous remarks. I am not personally attacking Mr Gibson; I am merely making a comment about what has already been said.



**The Chairman:** Can we address these 12 points because I am not clear what this is all about? I have not seen the annex. Perhaps you will give us your arguments.

**Ms Sagar:** Yes, I intend to. However, I want to ask if it is your opinion that we should not mention certain things

**The Chairman:** Just tell us what the 12 points are.

**Ms Sagar:** The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition cannot support sending off the proposed letter as it stands. While we understand and sympathize with the anxiety felt by pupils, parents and teachers we feel that the question raises important and complex matters which this letter does not begin to address.

The letter contains a number of omissions and unproven assertions and to send it would do the Forum no justice. Standing Committee B invests a considerable amount of time and effort in gathering and weighing up information and evidence from a range of sources. However, on this occasion it has not been as thorough as it normally is. The letter also fails to address the policy framework of the new Labour Government or give any rationale for demanding special and different treatment for Northern Ireland. In fact, some of the assumptions in the letter are open to some quite bizarre interpretations. For example, if we accept the argument that prep-school subsidy saves the Government money, is the Committee saying that subsidizing private education is a good thing in itself? If it is, it is setting a very dangerous precedent.

The Women's Coalition believes that there is a place for prep schools. They add to the diversity of the educational scene, and many parents are obviously very happy to send their children to them. However, those of us who are interested in the provision of services for the majority of people who will never be able to afford prep schools have a duty to consider the long-term basis on which the Government fund publicly provided compulsory education in general.

The Women's Coalition is also of the view that the Forum must consider issues from the perspective of rebuilding trust on both sides of the community and the capacity of the democratic process to deliver the same standards of justice and fairness to all. The subsidy to prep schools, and the lack of accountability it entails, does not engender this kind of trust.

The Government's stated objective is to address social needs by providing equality of opportunity in fully funded schools. Increasingly, this has come to encompass avoiding discrimination between different school sectors, not least between schools catering exclusively, or mainly, for one religious denomination. Under Section 19 of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973, the courts are now looking more closely at the discriminatory impact — *[Interruption]*.

It would be nice to have a bit of order. I am courteous and polite when other Members are speaking.

**The Chairman:** I heard you quite clearly.



**Ms Sagar:** I am glad you can hear me, Mr Chairman. I am having trouble hearing myself.

The courts are now looking more closely at the discriminatory impact rather than just at the overtly discriminatory intent of Government policy and legislation. As far as we are aware there are no Catholic maintained or voluntary prep schools which receive state subsidies. Also it is not clear that the prep-school subsidy does not have an indirectly discriminatory effect. If it does, we believe that this means that the continuation of the prep-school subsidy in its present form is not an option and that it might have been more prudent for Standing Committee B to have proposed some alternatives in its letter to the Minister. It is not doing this, nor is it presenting any figures which permit any sensible alternative to the Government's own conclusions.

The Department of Education estimates a reduction in primary enrolment of approximately 10,000 pupils by 2001 and argues that the 3000-plus prep-school pupils can easily be accommodated in existing primary schools. Without some very significant reductions, school closures and teacher redundancies, there will not be any money to pay the prep-school subsidy. This was not discussed by the Committee.

The Women's Coalition shares the concern about any potential financial hardship that may arise over the change in funding prep schools but does not believe that that can be considered in isolation. Many parents make sacrifices for their children; others do not have that option. Our view is that the state has an obligation to ensure that all pupils can be accommodated in local schools without having to pay. If there are some pupils in prep schools who do not have this option, the state will obviously have to pay for them. Perhaps the money should follow those pupils who have no option and be targeted according to need rather than simply handed over to schools regardless of the availability of alternatives.

There are no simple answers to these questions; we are certainly not saying that we have the answers. But surely it is reasonable to expect Standing Committee B to consider our views before dashing off a letter to the Minister.

There are other matters which we were not even permitted to raise in the Committee, which is a sad reflection on the Forum's claim to be a democratic institution, operating according to democratic principles. The Women's Coalition has no hesitation in saying that the Committee deserves no marks for this shoddy and ill-considered piece of work and that it should go back and think the matter over again.

As Mr Gibson and Ms Bell pointed out, in years gone by Catholics and Protestants did go to school together, but that stopped a long time ago. Now we have this new term "integrated education". When the troubles started in Northern Ireland, fear made people take their children out of certain areas. If we want a democratic and open society, our children have to be taught together. It is not that this is a new term or that nobody recognizes that there was once integrated education. Of course there was, but the last 27 to 30 years put an end to it, and we would like to see that changing.



3.30 pm

**Mr Casey:** The Labour Party cannot support the motion. In January the Minister responsible for education, Mr Worthington, announced that public subsidy for preparatory schools would be reduced from 40% to 30%. The original intention was to reduce it to 20%, but they had a rethink and settled on 30%. The rationale behind this decision is to free financial resources for other areas in education and improve overall standards as a result.

We noted with concern the proposal by the Chairman of the Education Committee to write to the Minister urging him not to impose any reduction in grant-aid to preparatory departments but to maintain the present 40% subsidy level. We disagreed on the grounds of equity because we do not feel that mainstream schools are competing on a level playing-field with the preparatory schools.

We feel that the Education Committee has handled this issue in a most inappropriate manner. It is only common sense to listen to both sides of an argument before coming to a conclusion, but the Committee has only heard from those who support preparatory departments. This was highlighted by the fact that evidence was taken from the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, which argued the case for teachers employed in such schools, and from the Northern Ireland Network for Concerned Parents, which supports the current funding arrangement. Both these organizations have a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo*.

This letter is, therefore, based on one-sided evidence and should be returned to the Committee for reconsideration and further investigation.

During this debate we have heard the arguments for parental choice. Parental choice is important, but groups such as the Northern Ireland Network for Concerned Parents only represent 3,400 children. What about the rights of the vast majority of parents whose children do not attend preparatory departments? They have a basic right to receive the best possible education the state can provide. Ms Bell referred to parental choice, but we are all aware that there is not always parental choice in education.

**Ms Bell:** I agree with the Member wholeheartedly. But parental choice was a Government policy matter — another useless policy.

**Mr Casey:** Parental choice would be great if everyone could have it, but many pupils cannot find places in the schools of their choice when transferring from primary school. Parents face the same problem when trying to find places for their children in infant schools. Some schools can only take children in for two days a week, whereas others cannot fill half their places.

So there must be parental choice throughout the system rather than in just one instance. Why should the vast majority subsidize an elitist system of education that is available only to a small minority? Education is a right, not a privilege.

We are fully aware of the concerns of those immediately affected by the proposals. However, the Minister's intention is a positive step that will go part of the way towards



creating a fair and just system of primary education that will give equality of opportunity to all, irrespective of social and economic backgrounds — and that is a democratic imperative.

I do not wish to criticize the Committee, because it has done good work, but we feel that the evidence in this case is one-sided and that the Committee should reconsider the matter.

**Rev Trevor Kirkland:** I would like to pay tribute to Ms Benson and Mr McDougall who service the Committee and have helped it produce a number of excellent reports. I also want to clear up one or two misconceptions.

There are many views on the Committee, and every member is given an opportunity to voice his opinion on all the issues raised. Of course, like any committee, there are times when members disagree with each other.

Mr Casey has just mentioned the submission from the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers. Mr Tom McKee is actually against preparatory schools. He does not have a vested interest in them, so I suggest that Labour re-examine the evidence.

The first argument used against preparatory schools is that they are Protestant and middle-class. That, of course, originated from the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) report. Many of the delegation of concerned parents were neither Protestant nor middle-class so we must nail this myth that preparatory schools only serve one sector of the community.

The Women's Coalition claim that there is no evidence that parents are not prepared to spend more. Ballyclare has just closed its preparatory school — that is the evidence. And many others will follow suit if parents have to keep contributing more and more towards the cost of their children's education. It is a slow death caused by a gradual reduction in funding year after year.

The integrated sector only caters for 2% of the school population. But you would think with their bluster that they represented 80%. Let us put this in perspective. The preparatory sector caters for almost as many as the integrated sector, but the integrated sector is fully funded. The preparatory sector was funded by 50% before they cut it to 40%, so even before the integrated sector came along, parents were paying 50% of the cost of their children's education in preparatory schools.

Mr Worthington has obviously decided to support integrated education. Integrated education is getting more favours than state schools and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and more, especially, than preparatory schools. The criteria have been changed time and time again just to facilitate 2% of the school population. Not only that, a committee has now been set up to see how they can further integrate education. Where is the committee for CCMS? Where is the committee for the state schools? Where is the committee to determine why my community does not even have a school? But the integrated sector is fully funded to cater for 2% of school children.



The new integrated sector is actually a segregated sector. It is segregating and discriminating in a different way, but it is none the less a new segregated sector.

Further, the Department of Education has confirmed that it costs £440 for each child at a preparatory school. But it will cost the Department £1000 more to place these children in the mainstream sector. These are the Department of Education's own figures. The Government are not subsidizing preparatory schools — parents are subsidizing preparatory education, and thus they are subsidizing the Government. Who is subsidizing the integrated, segregated sector? The taxpayers. Not only have preparatory schools been discriminated against in terms of funding, they were also discriminated against when they could not take part in the classroom-assistant scheme. But who did take part in it? The integrated sector and CCMS.

By reducing funding to preparatory schools the Government are saying to every child and every preparatory school "You are getting second-class treatment, but if you go to the integrated sector, CCMS or the state sector you will get first-class treatment." The Women's Coalition report has been drawn up hastily. They failed to take account of what parents are saying and the weight of the evidence given to us.

The Education Committee, having listened to all the views expressed at the Committee, has drawn up a report. It did not say — I am also quite clear on this — "We are in favour of preparatory schooling." But in the interests of justice, if the integrated sector, representing 2%, is fully funded, the very least the Government can do is return not just to the 40% but to the 50% subsidy. In fact, any parent in the preparatory sector who qualifies for legal aid should sue the Government on the grounds of discrimination and demand the 100% funding that the integrated sector gets from the taxpayer.

**Mr Jim Rodgers:** This committee has been doing a tremendous amount of work, and I resent some of the comments that were made by Ms Sagar of the Women's Coalition. This is not the first time that she has tried to tear Forum committees apart, and when Members respond, she takes it personally.

It is vital that this letter be sent for a number of reasons. People do have a right to choose. Not everybody may agree about sending their children to a prep school, but many parents are giving up a tremendous amount because they feel it is the best type of education.

The area I represent, East Belfast, has many prep schools. Some of them get tremendous results, others could perhaps do better. Nevertheless, people must have the right to choose. Mr Worthington has been very badly advised over trying to take money from the preparatory sector. What for? For the integrated sector. He talks about getting increased funding for education, but money has been drawn from various sections for the integrated sector. I have nothing against integrated education, but it must be treated in the same way as the other sectors.

Finally, Ms Sagar made comments about the way in which our Chairman treated a member of the Women's Coalition. I was there that day, and I want to pay tribute to Oliver Gibson. A member of his party was involved in the exchanges with Ms Moffat, and



he might have sided with him. He did not. And Ms Moffat had the same opportunity as everyone else to make her point, and she did.

We must be man enough here to stand up for what we believe in, but let us not behave like children.

3.45 pm

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Who is Ms Moffat, and what are her democratic credentials?

**Mr Jim Rodgers:** She has none. But we all know who the Women's Coalition represent — they do not represent anybody.

**The Chairman:** You have made your point, Mr Rodgers. You have all made your points. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Hussey:** Mr Chairman, Mr Rodgers has given way. Ms Sagar put a lot of emphasis on democratic accountability and the democracy of the Forum. I am sure Mr Rodgers will agree that if this were a truly democratic body, only elected Members would be sitting here.

**Mr Jim Rodgers:** Yes.

Mr Chairman, it is very important that the Minister get a letter on his desk and that you have a word with him as well.

**Mr Poots:** Prep schools are not private schools. I know people who are multi-millionaires and yet send their children to the ordinary primary school that mine attend. I also know ordinary working people who send their children to prep schools, having made a sacrifice to do so. Because the classes are smaller, they believe that their child will get a better education, a better chance. However, if that child fails the transfer test he will not get into a grammar school and will have to go a secondary school as others have to.

We are not talking about élite private schools like Eton, we are talking about ordinary schools which happen to have preparatory departments. If I wished to send my child to an Irish-speaking school, I would not have to pay extra money; if I wished to send my child to an integrated school, I would not have to pay extra money; but if I wish to send my child to a prep school, I would have to pay extra money.

There has been a lot of talk recently about racial discrimination, and legislation has been introduced to help combat that. I know of one prep school in my constituency which is attended by a lot of children from ethnic minorities. That is a very common practice. People from other countries have come here and worked extremely hard, and any money they have made has been put into their children's education. By increasing these charges, as Tony Worthington is proposing, will we not be guilty of even more discrimination against people from ethnic minorities?



**The Chairman:** Mr Gibson, I hope you will not use the time allotted for winding up to go over old ground.

**Mr Gibson:** I am content that every member of my Committee has had a fair opportunity to express his or her views. Unfortunately there are those who cannot accept normal democracy; there are also those who can be slightly vindictive. But I do not wish to use my time to talk about that.

Tony Worthington is English and there may be in England an antipathy to private schools, but private schools and preparatory schools are two totally different types of institution. The man has made an error of judgement; we want to give him an opportunity to retrace his steps.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

This Forum is content that the Chairman of Standing Committee B write to Mr Worthington urging him not to proceed with further reductions in grant-aid to preparatory departments and to restore their funding to at least the previous level of 40% of teaching costs.

### SPECIAL DEBATE (RULE 10(5))

*Motion made and Question proposed:*

That this Forum at its rising today do adjourn until Friday 20 February 1998. [*The Chairman*]

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** We live in strange days. It was Harold Wilson who said that a week was a long time in politics. In Northern Ireland 24 hours can seem a very long time in politics. We have the very strange situation whereby, in the name of democracy, those who do not believe in democracy and think that people should be wiped out with bullets are demanding to sit at the table and deliberate the future of our province. The prevarications we have heard today from the Secretary of State are an indication of what the Government would like to do about this. There is only one thing they can do and that is make sure that IRA/Sinn Fein are removed from the table, because they have broken the Mitchell principles over and over again.

You have only to look at the statistics issued by the Chief Constable for the vile beatings being carried out by Republicans and then read that Mitchell said that these beatings should cease. They have never ceased; we have never had a total cease-fire. But what we do have is a situation where some of those at the table are not only involved in violence but have the cheek to tell us that we cannot even have talks except they are kept at the table, and they quote some person from the South of Ireland who has said that the talks will not be worth a penny candle unless they are there. So there is this implied threat that if we do not let them stay at the talks, we will be in trouble. It is time the United Kingdom Government realized that once you bring people to the table on the strength of the bombs and the bullets that they hold in their armoury, you are attending not a peace conference but the funeral of democracy.



Today, as the hours tick away until Monday, Mr Clinton is being called in, the South of Ireland is being called in, everybody is being called in — except the ordinary people of Northern Ireland. The ordinary people of Northern Ireland are saying that they have had enough of this deceit, dishonesty and cover-up. Those who go for the bullet have no place in our society and no place in deciding its future. What are our children to grow up to? Are they to grow up to the fact that people who have illegal arms and use them have a right to decide our future?

The time has come to get back to the basis of democracy. We need to have the sort of talks about Northern Ireland at which no one would have to leave the table because everyone was dedicated to pure democracy. We heard a call for democracy today from those who only got here by creeping through the door, and when they had crept through the door, they nominated someone else to creep through the door — Ms Moffat who sat on a tuffet in the Education Committee. The time has come for us to return to democracy. I am pledged to democracy.

I once said to Margaret Thatcher “You do not like me, Prime Minister, and millions of people in England do not like you; you ought to know that. But the ballot-box put me here and put you here, so I have to thole you and you have to thole me.” The final arbiter in any democracy is the ballot-box. Let us get back to it, and by getting back to it, we will be getting back to peace.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Forum at its rising today do adjourn until Friday 20 February 1998.

*The Forum was adjourned at 3.59 pm.*