DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM SHAINCHEISTEANNA RÍTHÁBHACHTACHA A THÉANN I GCION AR AN LUCHT SIÚIL

JOINT COMMITTEE ON KEY ISSUES AFFECTING THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

Déardaoin, 5 Samhain 2026

Thursday, 5 November 2026

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 12.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 12.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

John Connolly,	Maria Byrne,
Dessie Ellis,	Malcolm Noonan,
Tony McCormack,	Anne Rabbitte.
Séamus McGrath,	
Naoise Ó Muirí,	
Maurice Quinlivan,	
Pádraig Rice.	

Teachta / Deputy George Lawlor sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Tháinig an comhchoiste le chéile i seisiún príobháideach, cuireadh an suí ar fionraí ar 12.49 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís i seisiún poiblí ar 12.51 p.m.

The joint committee met in private session, suspended at 12.49 p.m. and resumed in public session at 12.51 p.m.

Traveller Employment: Discussion (Resumed)

Ghlac an Seanadóir Malcolm Noonan an Chathaoir.

Senator Malcolm Noonan took the Chair.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): No apologies have been received. This is our second hearing on Traveller employment to discuss specifically Traveller apprenticeships and employment. Our witnesses today from Dublin Bus are Mr. Billy Hann, chief executive officer; and Ms Barbara Carroll, chief people officer. From the ESB, we have Ms Sinéad Kilkelly, executive director of people and sustainability; Ms Orla Gardner, senior manager for diversity, equity and inclusion; and Ms Anne Gaskin, apprenticeship development manager. Finally from Iarnród Éireann, there is Mr. Barry Kenny, head of corporate communications; and Mr. Conor Doolan, apprentice training officer. I welcome all of our witnesses. I ask anyone attending remotely to mute themselves when not contributing so we do not pick up any background noise or feedback. As usual, I remind all of those in attendance to ensure their mobile phones are on silent mode or switched off.

Members attending remotely are reminded of the constitutional requirement that in order to participate in public meetings, members must be physically present within the confines of the Leinster House complex. As the witnesses are within the precinct of Leinster House, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the presentation they make to the committee. This means they have an absolute defence against defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. However, they are expected not to abuse that privilege and it is my duty as Cathaoirleach Gníomhach to ensure the privilege is not abused. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative they comply with such direction. Members are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or entity outside of the Houses or an official of the Houses either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I now invite Mr. Hann to make an opening statement on behalf of Dublin Bus, followed by Ms Kilkelly on behalf of the ESB and then Mr. Kenny on behalf of Iarnród Éireann. We will then proceed with a question and answer session.

Mr. Billy Hann: I thank the Cathaoirleach Gníomhach, Deputies and Senators for the invitation to appear before the committee today to discuss Traveller apprenticeships, employment opportunities and the wider challenges facing members of the Traveller community. I welcome the opportunity because these issues go to the heart of the kind of organisation Dublin Bus is and the values for which we stand.

Dublin Bus is more than a public transport provider. We are part of the fabric of Dublin, connecting communities, supporting economic activity and providing meaningful employment and career opportunities. We serve people from every background and every walk of life. We

believe our workforce should reflect that diversity and everyone should have a fair opportunity to build a career with us. We recognise that members of the Traveller community continue to face significant barriers to employment. Discrimination, educational disadvantage and difficulty accessing training and employment opportunities remain real challenges. As employers, we have a responsibility to recognise those barriers and consider the practical steps we can take to help overcome them. Dublin Bus offers a broad range of careers, including bus driving, engineering, apprenticeships, administration and management. These are good jobs, offering stability, training, development and the opportunity to build a long-term career. Apprenticeships can be an especially important pathway, combining practical experience with structured learning and recognised qualifications. However, making opportunities available is not enough. We must ask whether they are genuinely accessible, whether people know about them, and whether our recruitment processes and supports remove barriers rather than unintentionally reinforcing them. That requires engagement, listening and a willingness to do things differently. It also requires a genuine commitment to equality and inclusion, not simply as policies on paper but as values guiding our decisions.

At Dublin Bus, those values have a history. We have previously stood alongside communities when doing so was not necessarily the easiest or most popular course. We did so because we believed it was right. That approach is not about favouring one community over another. It reflects a simple principle; everyone deserves dignity, respect and a fair opportunity to participate fully in society. That principle applies equally to the Traveller community. We are living through a changing political and social climate around diversity and inclusion and some organisations are stepping back from commitments they previously made. Dublin Bus is not one of them. Our commitment is not dependent on the prevailing mood. Our values do not change when the weather changes but values must be reflected in action. For Dublin Bus, that means seriously examining how we can improve access to employment, strengthen pathways into apprenticeships and ensure that people from underrepresented communities have an opportunity to succeed. We recognise that more work is required. We do not claim to have all the answers and we know meaningful progress depends on partnership.

That means engaging with Traveller representative organisations, education and training providers, Government agencies and others who understand the challenges and can identify practical solutions. It also means reviewing our recruitment processes, improving awareness of the opportunities available within Dublin Bus and ensuring that people joining our organisation have the support they need to develop and progress. Organisations like Dublin Bus have an important role in demonstrating leadership. We must ensure that our values translate into meaningful action and that the opportunities we provide are accessible to the communities we serve. Equality of opportunity should not depend on where someone comes from, who they are or the community to which they belong. That principle has guided Dublin Bus in the past and will continue to guide us. We welcome the committee's work and I look forward to questions.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: I thank the Cathaoirleach Gníomhach and the members of the committee for the invitation to today's meeting. I am the HR director for ESB and am joined by my colleagues, Orla Gardner, senior manager for diversity, equity and inclusion, and Anne Gaskin, who is the ESB Networks apprenticeship development manager. I welcome the opportunity to speak to the committee today under the broad heading of Traveller apprenticeships and employment and other related matters. ESB is committed to supporting

equality of opportunity and reducing barriers to employment for underrepresented groups. Supporting greater access to employment for underrepresented groups, specifically members of the Traveller community, is a key pillar of ESB's people strategy. ESB can offer a pathway to a skilled and lasting career. We want members of the Traveller community to see that as a real possibility for them, with opportunities to develop, progress and contribute.

This is not about a once-off recruitment outcome. It is about building trust, addressing barriers and sustaining that work over time. As part of this work, ESB has developed an ongoing partnership with the Irish Traveller Movement, ITM, since 2023. A particular focus of this partnership is on improving access to apprenticeship and employment opportunities for members of the Traveller community through the Traveller apprenticeship incentivisation programme. Through engagement with ITM, ESB identified several barriers that may affect access to employment for members of the Traveller community. These include limited access to information about employment opportunities, unfamiliarity with corporate recruitment processes and a lack of trust arising from experiences of exclusion. ESB's approach has therefore focused on sustained engagement with ITM, alongside practical measures to make recruitment processes more accessible to prospective applicants.

On measures introduced arising from the partnership over the past three years, ESB has provided a range of supports aimed at increasing awareness of the ESB Networks electrical apprenticeship programme among members of the Traveller community and helping prospective candidates navigate the recruitment process. These have included multiple online information and in-person support sessions. ESB Networks' apprenticeship development manager presents annually at the ITM's Traveller apprenticeship incentivisation programme webinar for ITM members, Travellers seeking apprenticeships and stakeholders supporting the Traveller community. The programme includes practical supports for applicants, including CV and interview preparation and information about the application process. It includes communications, including a promotional video developed in collaboration with the ITM highlighting what the electrical apprenticeship programme involves.

These activities were designed to provide prospective applicants with clearer information about available opportunities, recruitment requirements and what to expect during the application process. They helped to increase the number of applicants from three in 2025 to 11 in 2026. This work also contributed to the successful appointment of the first self-identified Traveller apprentice through the programme. Given that disclosure of Traveller identity is voluntary, ESB recognises there may be other Traveller employees or apprentices in the organisation who have not disclosed their identity.

We meet the ITM monthly to discuss employment barriers and identify further action. These meetings deepen our understanding of the Traveller community's culture and aspirations, thereby helping to ensure that our programmes and policies reflect lived experience and community insight. Building on this engagement, ESB has also begun discussions with the ITM to explore opportunities in non-craft roles, broadening the focus beyond electrical apprenticeships. These discussions are at an early stage and reflect our long-term commitment to widening access to careers across ESB. In addition, the cadence of engagement between the ITM and ESB Networks' apprenticeship development manager increases significantly in the run-up to our annual apprentice recruitment campaign, as we profile opportunities for members of the Traveller community.

ESB remains committed to strengthening its partnership with the ITM and using what we learn to reduce barriers and widen access to employment and apprenticeships. Creating a workplace where everyone feels welcomed and valued reflects our core values and who we are. This year marks an important milestone in the partnership, with early signs of impact demonstrating the value of sustained engagement. Go raibh maith agaibh. We are happy to take any questions from the committee.

Mr. Barry Kenny: I thank members for the invitation to today's meeting to discuss Traveller apprenticeships and employment and other related matters, along with our colleagues in Dublin Bus and ESB. Our chief executive, Mary Considine, asked me to pass on her apologies that she was unable to attend. Iarnród Éireann is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the communities we serve, embracing individuals from all backgrounds, including members of the Traveller community. In both the apprenticeship and the wider employment spaces, we have taken proactive and practical steps to ensure awareness of and opportunities for roles in Iarnród Éireann among members of the Traveller community. My colleague, Conor Doolan, will be able to answer the committee's questions on our apprenticeship programmes. Mr. Doolan has been recognised personally by Generation Apprenticeship through its apprentice advocate award and has led the effort to bring our apprenticeship programme to where it is today.

Within this, we have engaged with the Irish Traveller Movement to support access to our apprenticeship programme. Through the Traveller apprenticeship incentivisation programme and the broader access to apprenticeship programme, run through TUS Athlone, TUS Limerick, TU Dublin and MTU Cork, members of the Traveller community and other underrepresented and disadvantaged groups have been afforded the opportunity to participate in a 12-week programme, staged twice annually. A crucial element of this programme is that, for participants who may not have had the opportunity through formal education to achieve our standard education requirements, the practical elements, if successfully completed, supersede those requirements. We have facilitated a number of candidates who met our broader requirements with an intern apprenticeship, a six-month paid probationary programme, which leads to a full apprenticeship. In last year's programme, for example, two members of the Traveller community became apprentices with us via TUS Athlone. We are grateful to Bridget Kelly and the ITM for their partnership. Indeed, she outlined our participation to the committee when she appeared before it this time last year. We will work to ensure that these pathways are ones that are consistent, known and achievable.

We engaged with the ITM to encourage participation in our annual try-a-trade week at Inchicore railway works, during which we welcome more than 2,000 young people, together with our sister companies, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann, for a hands-on and enjoyable visit to see the opportunities available through apprenticeships. We are pleased to say that the ITM has availed of this opportunity in recent years to bring interested young people to Inchicore, and we look forward to welcoming the next groups in February 2027. As mentioned, all three operating companies in the CIÉ group participate in this initiative in Inchicore. We would welcome members of the committee, if they wish to attend, to see the type of engagement we get from young people at this event, and we would be happy to co-ordinate that with the Irish Traveller Movement.

In broader recruitment, as members of the Open Doors Initiative and as a Business Working Responsibly Mark accredited member of Business in the Community Ireland, BITCI, we have worked with other businesses to raise awareness of employment opportunities for members of the Traveller community. A highlight was last year's break into transport event at the Wayfinding Centre in Glasnevin, where members of the Traveller community were among the attendees who, as well as learning about the career paths available, received practical advice on navigating the recruitment process, with many availing of the opportunity to complete a mock interview with a recruiter.

There is much more to do, of course, but we are committed to working with representative bodies such as the Irish Traveller Movement and our partners in Open Doors and BITCI to understand and act to make our workplace more inclusive and more accessible for members of the Traveller community. Conor and I welcome any questions members have on these and related matters.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): I thank the witnesses for their very strong statements. I appreciate it.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I thank all the witnesses who have come before us, and for the opening statements we got beforehand. We are not here to have a pop at any of them. We want to see how things are going and how we can progress matters. My question is to all three organisations, but I will preface it with the access to apprenticeship programme, which Iarnród Éireann mentioned. It was trialled initially in my local university at TUS, which I attended, and Vincent Cunnane and Susan Meagher were the ones who pushed it. It has been successful, not just for Travellers but for people from deprived backgrounds. One day I was coming down from Dublin on a busy train and a couple of apprentices got on. I was chatting to them and found out I knew their parents. They were the first from their family ever to have been in third level education, and they were doing apprenticeships with Iarnród Éireann. It was great to see.

How many Travellers are working with each organisation? I understand that some Travellers will not identify themselves. What are the biggest barriers to having more Travellers working with the organisations, not just for apprenticeships? What do we need to do and what needs to change to help them employ more Travellers?

Mr. Billy Hann: I thank the Deputy for his question. The number of identified Travellers working in Dublin Bus at the moment is one. When people join Dublin Bus, they are asked to fill out a form, and on that form they are asked to identify what group they associate with but it is not mandatory. We have reached out to that individual and they know of other individuals from the Traveller community working in Dublin Bus, so it is certainly more than one but we do not know the exact number at this time.

The question the Deputy asked about the barriers is probably more important than the numbers, particularly with regard to the apprenticeship system. Even outside of Travellers, we have struggled to get apprentices over the past five, six or seven years in Dublin Bus because trade skills were an area in decline in this country. An awful lot of people were going into third level education and doing degrees and master's degrees, and we lost a whole generation of apprenticeships. We have done a huge amount of work in Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus and Irish Rail to try to address that balance. The good news is that we have had more applicants for apprenticeship programmes across all the organisations in recent times than ever before, so it

is strong. We have about 72 apprenticeships in Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann. We have a joint programme with Bus Éireann. As two bus companies, the programme is worked on together. To me, one of the bigger barriers is the educational requirements.

As there is a minimum educational requirement to take up an apprenticeship, there has been work to look at that and at how it could evolve. There has been a pilot programme in which one person from the Traveller community came in to do six months' work with regard to how to bring people to the level of education needed to meet that minimum standard. I do not know what the results of that have been. That is ongoing at the moment.

On communication, we have an open door policy as regards accepting people from the Traveller community into our organisation. The real question is whether they know about it. Our apprenticeship manager has been working very closely with ITM, particularly Bridget Kelly and Megan Forrest, on running roadshows where we go out to communicate the opportunities that are available in the bus companies, both Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus, to the Traveller community. At least ten of these have been organised for the period between the middle of this year and the middle of next year. They are ongoing at the moment. That is the way I would see it. I do not know if Ms Carroll would like to add anything to that.

Ms Barbara Carroll: I will add a little bit on the barriers we see, the things we do as an employer and our responsibilities. Among the things we do proactively is to look at the job specifications to make sure that any requirements within them are specific and appropriate to the role. For example, on the bus driver requirements, we do not specifically specify qualifications. What we do require is a clean car licence. That can be helpful. We do not look at where people live or things like that. We are aware that there is a mindset in the Travelling community whereby Travellers may be reluctant to apply for certain roles. We have a very large recruitment campaign at the moment. It is all over the buses, on social media and in shopping centres. However, we are aware that there may be more we can do to provide pathways to this particular community and to take away any stigma that may exist in their minds as to whether these roles are appropriate or available to them. We can do work with partners such as Pavee Point. We are currently working with the Irish Traveller Movement to understand what we can do to communicate directly with the community, perhaps coming together with other employers to do something like the Yellow Flag programme that is run in schools to indicate that it is safe to apply. It is not just about getting into the recruitment process. It is also about what employees' life is like within the organisation and whether they are safe. These are all the things we are taking into account.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: Before I start, I thank the committee for the opportunity to be here today. This is an area we are really invested in and we are delighted to have the opportunity to share some of the things we are doing in a little bit more detail. I might go back three years and look at the journey we have been on as an example of the challenges we face together and the things we are doing about them. The partnership with the Irish Traveller Movement is super. We find it really effective. It is really valuable in helping us understand the challenges. It also allows us a network back into the Traveller community, allowing them to share what they see as the issues. That collaboration is really important for us. It is very valued and very trusted. Having that relationship in place with Bridget Kelly, who is up on a pedestal for us, and other members of the Traveller community is very powerful.

What we have learned from all of this is the importance of communication, awareness, reaching out, and getting connected into the different forums so that we can be there and be visible. We know that members of the Traveller community may not even consider a career in the ESB. I am talking about a career as opposed to a job. What does a long-term opportunity like that look like? The opportunity to share that is really important.

The third thing we have learned is the importance of understanding the process, that is, how to apply, how to navigate the system, how to write a CV, and how prepare for and engage in the interview process.

Those are the three things. It is about the relationship, the trust and then the process and how to engage. These are the things we continue to work on and which we have been found to be really helpful for us and for members of the Traveller community. I might ask Ms Gaskin if she would like to comment on access to apprenticeships.

Ms Anne Gaskin: I thank Ms Kilkelly and the Deputy. On the access to apprenticeship programmes right across the different technological universities, we are engaged with those groups. They come to our training centre down in Portlaoise once during their 12-week session to find out at first hand exactly what is involved in our apprenticeships. We support them and go through how to apply.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: This is people on the access to apprenticeship course.

Ms Anne Gaskin: Yes. They spend a day with us during their 12-week programme. They spend the day with us and find out exactly what is involved in our apprenticeship. We talk them through the process of how to apply and let them know how we can support them in doing so. If they need any further support, they can come back to us and we will engage with them through the college or through individual support groups they may be involved with.

Mr. Barry Kenny: On the number of Travellers working in individual companies, it is voluntary to disclose that. We have an online platform where colleagues can fill out demographic information but, again, this is voluntary. We did an investors in diversity accreditation process. Approximately 10% of our workforce participated. Within that process, two Travellers declared but it would be wrong of me to say that is *pro rata* or anything like that.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: That was two out of 10%.

Mr. Barry Kenny: It was two out of 10% of the workforce, yes. This is again something we are encouraging with new entrants simply to give us a snapshot so that we know whether groups are underrepresented. As an example, women are unfortunately underrepresented in the transport sector. That is obviously something else we are working on. We have spoken about the barriers and about the processes. That event on breaking into transport tried to address some of those barriers in providing practical experience. Some people may not have had interview opportunities before and there were other issues like that. As to what we can do, visibility is very important. We are working with existing apprentices and employees on that. The Deputy will find that, within both the public transport group and the wider semi-State sector, we are always borrowing from each other. A lot of collegiate work goes on because we face common challenges in many areas. We learn from each other. The witnesses from the ESB have mentioned very good visibility campaigns, as have our Bus Éireann colleagues. If

you cannot see, you cannot be it. It is a bit of a cliché but it is one that is absolutely accurate. We need to make the opportunities more visible. I might ask Mr. Doolan to comment on any specific barriers or other issues with the programme.

Mr. Conor Doolan: I was delighted to hear the Deputy mention Limerick. We have a long-standing relationship with Susan Meagher in Limerick through the access to apprenticeship programme. One of the barriers we have noticed is the educational barrier and the aptitude tests. We find that a lot of Traveller people might apply for apprenticeships but then fall down on the aptitude test. I saw a gap in the market there. We supersede the educational requirements for the application process through a two-week work placement. That then leads on to a six-month internship. At 12.30 p.m. today, people from the TUS campus in Athlone called at the main depot in Portlaoise to do a site visit. We have two Irish Rail apprentices, a co-ordinator and the team from TUS. We do not know who is on that visit yet but it will be disclosed if there are Travellers on it. If they are interested in an apprenticeship, seeing is believing. They are going to be given a full tour of the depot. They will go through the bells and whistles. If they like what they see, we will be called back to a speed dating event. It is not that sort of dating. It is where candidates get to speak to the employers directly. If they like what they see on the site visit, they can ask questions about it and their first preference or second preference can then be Irish Rail, the ESB or whatever other company. Once they come along with us, we will give them a two-week opportunity to work with us as work experience. The work experience we provide is very hands-on. Participants are completely thrown in. We get them involved in every aspect of what we do. They are not just sitting in a corner. They are actively engaging and doing the exact kind of hands-on stuff they would be doing if they were in an apprenticeship.

It opens their eyes and their mindset to the idea that this could be them, that seeing is believing and that they like this and really enjoy it. Then we offer what is known as a six months' paid internship, where we take people in and they work for six months in the trade; the same as with apprentices. It is up to six months. Sometimes we would sign them up and in a month's time, we would know straight away but we afford them six months to give them the best opportunity to make themselves shine and stand out. That supersedes the aptitude test. For people who are genuinely interested, they do not have to go through the aptitude test process. The two weeks' work experience supersedes that and that is a fantastic path route. We have seen loads of people who have applied for it. They have not got it and have been disheartened. This is a path route into that and it is fantastic.

We are down in TUS the following week. I think it is on the Thursday. TUS is going to the Limerick depot and it does its site visit down there and that is a date as well. With Susan Meagher, Pat Galvin and the team there, I think there are 15 in this group, and that will be headed by my colleague down in Limerick. They will go down - sometimes I will go down myself - and then the speed dating follows the Friday after. Ms Meagher will ring to say she has four fantastic people and we will give them the opportunity. As Mr. Kenny said, two Travellers were on the last access to apprenticeship programme in Athlone and we took them in from there. They are excelling in it at the minute. The two of them are in college at the minute so they are doing really well. It is a breath of fresh air to have them on board.

Try a Trade Week was also a fantastic initiative that we set up. We bring students from across Ireland. They come from everywhere, including Donegal and Kerry. We opened the

Inchicore railway works and as Mr. Kenny said, it is an open invite to come and see it. That is hands-on; we have all the activities laid out for them. Our colleagues from Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann come as well. It is really hands-on. For people at a crossroads in their lives, it is make or break when they see a thing that is hands-on. They say, "Oh God, I could be that; seeing is believing". We invited the Irish Traveller Movement to come and it has availed of that. I spoke to Ms Megan Forrest and they are really keen to do a kind of promotional event to come. They are going to go to all their members and they are going to get slots. We will book a slot for them and they can mingle in with the rest of them.

Out of that, we have a QR code; you can scan the QR code and apply for an apprenticeship there and then but we also encourage people to go to the access to apprenticeship programme. If they do not get in the traditional route - we get about 3,000 applications for apprenticeships every year and sometimes they can get lost - if they are in the mix there, we have a direct path route. It is a ring-fenced for the access to apprenticeship programme and we encourage Travellers to go into that, as it means they have a path route in. That is all I have to say.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I thank Mr. Doolan. It is good to hear the good interaction you have with the TUS scheme that is being rolled out. I think it is in Dublin, Athlone and Limerick. It is being rolled out in Galway shortly, I think, and Cork as well.

Mr. Conor Doolan: Yes, Limerick was first. It is Dublin, Limerick, Athlone and then Cork. Then it is going to be rolled out in different places. It is a very good incentive and we get some fantastic----

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: The crew in Limerick will very happy to hear Mr. Doolan's positive contributions there.

Deputy John Connolly: I am a bit tight on time. I have a Topical Issue in the Dáil.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): I will move on.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: The ESB never came back. Have I missed it? I refer to the amount of Travellers working with it. I might have missed it.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: I will come in on that. I thank the Deputy for that. We are probably very similar to Dublin Bus, in that we have one apprentice who came through successfully in our electrical apprenticeship programme. We do not have the obligation to disclose, as the Deputy knows.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I will give my time to Deputy Connolly then.

Deputy John Connolly: The one thing that strikes me from each of the opening statements is that the Traveller apprenticeship incentivisation programme is having an impact. I am not certain about this but my understanding is that it is still a pilot programme and that its long-term funding is uncertain and its long-term existence is threatened by it not being aware of that. From today already, I would suggest that we write to the Minister for further and higher education to ask for an update on that programme being streamlined and being placed on a long-term footing.

The witnesses have all mentioned Bridget Kelly. Ms Kelly was here with us. She is administering that programme on behalf of the Irish Traveller Movement and is doing an excellent job. We should commend her but I would like to think that from our discussions

around it, we would see it being developed as a full-time, permanent programme rather than just a pilot programme. We might look for an update on that.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Have we agreement on that? Agreed.

Deputy John Connolly: One of the things I take from the opening statements and the discussions is that I have to admire the honesty of the ESB in regard to one of the barriers being a lack of trust arising from experiences of exclusion. They are experiences of discrimination and racism as well, I would say. I noticed Ms Kilkelly went through the measures ESB was working on to try to incentivise the participation of the Travelling community in its apprenticeship programmes. Do we have a formal means of tackling what could continue as experiences into the future for members of the Travelling community when they are employed in any organisation?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: I thank the Deputy for the question. The challenge is creating trust, and trust is hard to win and is easily lost, as the Deputy knows. We have a value of inclusion really strongly embedded in ESB, going back a long time now but particularly in the past number of years, when we recognised the changing nature of society and the importance of giving equal access of opportunity to people from underrepresented groups. That includes members of the Traveller community but also those with disability, those from other ethnic backgrounds and so on. We work hard at that and we do that in a number of ways from a policy that you would expect but, in reality, it involves things like mandatory training for all employees. We have supports and resources in place in the workplace where we bring people from particular demographics together to help understand and get their feedback. We make sure that the process of recruitment, for example - Ms Gaskin can maybe talk about what we do on the apprenticeship application process - does not require people to disclose. We are making sure that their experience on the day at work is one where they can feel trusted and respected. It is not simple. It is not easy or quick but it is consistent and that is the piece that is really important.

Deputy John Connolly: That training is very important. Are the other organisations offering this? Ms Kilkelly said it is mandatory in the ESB.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: It is, yes.

Deputy John Connolly: Are other organisations mandating their staff to undergo similar types of training?

Ms Barbara Carroll: We are certainly training the staff. We are learning from each other about mandating it. It would be interesting to see how that is impacting ESB but we are open to that if it is going to add value.

Culturally, in Dublin Bus, we have 95 different nationalities, and a workforce of over 4,700. Inclusivity is critically important to us. It is something about which we are sending out messages regularly. When people are appointed, they are appointed with mentors so they are integrated into the organisation. We regularly do some messaging around dignity at work. We are just about to do a new campaign on that. It will be an external and internal campaign to support integration of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. That is really important to us.

On how we measure, we look at the number of issues and complaints that come in to us every year. On average, we have about two complaints that come in every year with a workforce of that size. It is a positive thing but we do not sit on our laurels to think that there are not other things going on. We think it is important to keep the messaging strong, keep the managers aware of issues, and look at things like bystander training. If people notice anything, that is happening to make sure people are accepted and safe for who they are and what they are bringing. All of that is critically important, but we certainly will look at mandating training if that is going to solve some particular issues.

Deputy John Connolly: A lot of people, through every organisation, may not fully appreciate the depth of their activities or their commentary. That was highlighted to us here by the members of the Travelling community previously - that there has been a tolerance and acceptance of a certain type of terminology of language around the Travelling community and that it is no longer appropriate

Ms Barbara Carroll: It is quite a unique minority group. We need to learn a lot more about the background and the barriers that come with that group. It is really important.

Mr. Barry Kenny: Iarnród Éireann has strong policies and training. For example, all induction training covers our policies. As well as pure discrimination, there is an extensive unconscious bias training programme. We are looking at trialling blind CVs where names and addresses are withheld in the initial assessment, because that can be an issue for various groups who experience discrimination and speaks to unconscious bias issues. These things have to be integrated if we are to ensure we have a representative workforce.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: Employment is very important for people, their lives, their well-being, their life outcomes and that of their families. It is crucial for everyone. It is important we remove any barriers to accessing employment because it has a huge impact on people.

There are systematic levels of discrimination that are extraordinarily high against the Traveller community, which faces more discrimination than almost any other group in Europe, according to some international rights bodies. We need to be keenly aware of the barriers and the level of discrimination that is in place, as well as the historic level, and the impact it has on people.

During my first year in secondary school, I sat next to a young Traveller guy and got to know him well, but he was not there in second and third year and did not do the junior certificate examinations. He dropped out of education and that will have had an impact on his life later, in accessing apprenticeships and all that goes with it, because he did not get to the point of sitting the junior certificate examinations. That is unfortunately the experience of many others in the community.

I will dig into the numbers. Dublin Bus said that one Traveller works in the organisation. Did that person come through an apprenticeship programme?

Mr. Billy Hann: It is a bus driver.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: How many employees does Dublin Bus have in total?

Mr. Billy Hann: It is 4,700.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: Of 4,700 employees, just one is a Traveller, that Mr. Hann knows of.

Mr. Billy Hann: One has declared himself as being a Traveller. We have more, but they have not declared. We know that because we have engaged with him and he knows others.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: One in 4,700 is extraordinarily low. Does Mr. Hann accept that?

Mr. Billy Hann: I agree.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: ESB Group employs one as well. That is out of how many employees?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: We have 10,000 employees.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: Just one known Traveller in 10,000 employees.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: Yes, we have one known Traveller.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: Irish Rail has two or three out of what total number of employees?

Mr. Barry Kenny: We have 5,400 employees. I do not for a moment claim that we can necessarily extrapolate from the two of 520 people who completed a survey, but it suggests it is a higher number.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: The three organisations have about 20,000 employees between them and four Travellers we know of working in them. That is deeply concerning and shows why much more work, resources and effort need to go into removing barriers and increasing pathways. I have no doubt that huge effort and resources go in from the Irish Traveller Movement and the other organisations which do great work, but they need support in that. We all need to work together to remove the barriers. It cannot be left to the Irish Traveller Movement and other small NGOs, which are tackling lots of other issues we discuss, including health issues and mental health crises. They are trying to address many other challenges so it is important the State and State agencies are as proactive as possible. Have the witness organisations set targets for the number of Travellers they would like to work in their organisations?

Mr. Billy Hann: No.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: We know there are extraordinarily low numbers but no target has been set. Are there targeted recruitment campaigns, that are Traveller focused, featuring Travellers, talking about being a Traveller in the organisation?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: I am happy to pick that up for a moment. The Deputy is right. The numbers are very low, too low. We share the goals and remit of this committee, to look for and drive increased participation in the workforce. In the first year we engaged with the ITM, we had three people from the Traveller community apply. Against the odds, one member of the Traveller community was successful in gaining employment on the apprenticeship programme. The following year, that number rose to 11. For us, continuing to see the increased number of people applying is a measure of success. That is something we are going after, the participation, getting people interested and to apply is where we think the real success is. Targeting different types of jobs, roles or careers is important. To set an absolute target is something we can look at. We have not looked at it to date.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: If there is no measure or target, it is much harder to make progress. Action plans with targets, actions and timelines, with the name of the person responsible next to them are needed, as well as having the budget named in the action plan. Organisations need to go after it in a strategic way and set it as an organisational priority. The reason this Oireachtas committee exists is that these issues are a priority and we want to see change and progress. That is why we bring in organisations. It is because things need to change and employment is a crucial area for that. Having targeted action plans and targeted recruitment and understanding as much as possible what are the barriers to access is important, that is whether documentation is an issue, whether there is a digital barrier to access with online recruitment and whether the entry requirements are an issue for people.

I am interested in work placements. I think it was Irish Rail that mentioned them. That is a good innovation. Perhaps other organisations could consider it. If people are not making it through the aptitude test, are there other ways to test people's suitability for a role? It could be done by bringing them in for a few weeks to shadow or do a work placement or by having alternative pathways in recognition of the barriers to accessing employment people face and how crucial employment is for people. It would be interesting to see that model be considered by others, to look at whether there are other ways we can improve access and remove some of the barriers, because it is important.

I hope the next time the witnesses are here, the numbers will be much higher. If their organisations need support in getting those numbers higher, they might let the Oireachtas know so the committee can make recommendations in the report it will produce at the end of these sessions about what needs to change. Do they need more funding? Are there other things that need to happen? My concern is that we rely too much on the community organisations to do the heavy lifting. It is not fair on them and the State bodies and the State itself need to take a more proactive role, invest in this and make it a priority. We will only get real, long-term change if we invest in these things and if we ensure people have better opportunities and better life outcomes and pathways out of poverty.

Too many people in the Traveller community live in poverty and we have to change that. We cannot continue to have a situation where human rights abuses are happening at the scale they are today for this community. Organisations like the witness organisations have a real opportunity to change that and be the leaders in it for the private sector by setting out how this can be done in different ways and innovating. That can be copied by other organisations, particularly in the private sector. It is welcome that work is under way and there is engagement with ITM. However, collectively we need to do more. It needs to be a higher priority and we need to try to achieve change. Innovation and removing the barriers might be the way to go. I hope we will see more progress on it. I thank the witnesses for their time.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I thank the witnesses. Deputy Rice has set the scene of where we need to get to. Bridget Kelly was before the committee and we had the figures for how many people were accessing apprenticeships before us a few weeks ago. We know how many people the witness organisations employ. What range of apprenticeship offerings does Dublin Bus have? Other than driving a bus, what offerings does it have? I am sure there are mechanics and so on. What range of apprenticeship models is available in Dublin Bus?

Mr. Billy Hann: Driving a bus is not an apprenticeship model. It is a profession, which people can undertake. Apprenticeships are largely around heavy goods vehicle, HGV, mechanics and electricians working on cars. That is the range.

The reason the range is so narrow is because that is the sector in which we are working. We are obviously providing bus services to our customers on a daily basis, and the reality is those bus services need to be maintained. We maintain them in-house in conjunction with some of the manufacturers that support us.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: How many apprenticeships does Dublin Bus take on for the HGVs and the other element on an annual basis?

Mr. Billy Hann: We have 72 in the system at present.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: That is one, two and three years.

Mr. Billy Hann: They are four-year apprenticeships.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: They are four years. On average, Dublin Bus takes 20 apprentices per year.

Mr. Billy Hann: I think we took on 26 this year, but it averages between 20 and 26. It is team building.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: That is fine, and I can understand we are coming from a low base and are going back to the apprenticeship model. I put the same question to the ESB.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: Our flagship would be the electrical apprenticeship programme. This year, we will take on 120 apprentices. To put that in context, we had over 4,500 people apply for that apprenticeship programme.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Over the four years, how many does the ESB have?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: Over the four years, we have about 450 apprentices.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: All right.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: We also have other apprenticeships. We have a vehicle mechanic programme which we run every second year. I do not have the numbers for that but my colleague, Ms Gaskin, might have them. We then have a small number of apprenticeships in the areas of HR, procurement and IT. It is a small number - maybe ones and twos on an annual basis.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Does Ms Gaskin have that number with her?

Ms Anne Gaskin: We will have 485 from the electrical apprenticeship at the end of this year. We have our final group due to start this year and that is over four years. We also have 12 HGV mechanics over four years, who are taken on every second year. That is from an ESB Networks perspective.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: All right.

Mr. Conor Doolan: We have five different apprenticeships. We have those for electricians, heavy vehicle mechanics, OEM technicians, MAMF, which is a maintenance fitter, and welding. We took on 38 apprentices this year.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Going back to the very first one Mr. Doolan mentioned there-----

Mr. Conor Doolan: The electricians.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: -----how many electricians does Iarnród Éireann take on an annual basis?

Mr. Conor Doolan: Sixteen.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: That runs for the four years.

Mr. Conor Doolan: Yes.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Okay. Then there is the next set of apprenticeships.

Mr. Conor Doolan: We have two fitters.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Two, which Irish Rail takes on every year.

Mr. Conor Doolan: Yes, we take two every year. Now, 40 is what we initially aimed to get but obviously, we got about 3,000 applications and had to whittle it down. It depends on what trade they go for when we interview them, and then we go for the business needs at that given time. The OEM technician is a very high one for us.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: If Mr. Doolan does not mind me asking, what does that stand for?

Mr. Conor Doolan: While it stands for original equipment manufacturer, it is basically a technician programme. It is electrical and mechanical combined into one. It is tailor-suited towards the rail industry and is the future of maintaining fleets because it incorporates electrical and mechanical. It is relatively new and is one of the post-2016 apprenticeships. Again, that has been very successful. It is a three-year programme, so we are getting people into the workforce quicker.

We took on ten of them this year and we will take on another ten next year.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I understand what Mr. Doolan is saying. Irish Rail takes on 40 every year across the various apprenticeships. Now I have an understanding, and I still have some time.

I want to talk to the diversity and inclusion side of the house. I now have an understanding of how many the witnesses employ and how many from the Travelling community have self-identified within the organisations. I also have an understanding of how many apprenticeship offerings they have, and how many they take in.

I will start with Ms Gaskin. I was highly impressed with the ESB's opening statement as to how it presented where it has come from and how it has engaged, but I think we have to move beyond how we have engaged towards getting people in the door. Within its diversity and inclusion office, while people can self-identify and everything else, how does it measure? We are having a conversation on Traveller apprenticeships, no different than the one we could have on early school leavers or on people in care. How do we ensure we are hitting those

demographics or disabilities? In that inclusion diversity office, how is the ESB measuring this? Ms Gardner is the diversity and inclusion officer.

Ms Orla Gardner: I am, and I thank the Senator for the question.

ESB is a fair and equal opportunity employer, and that is on every single advertisement we have online. In terms of measurement, we currently only measure gender. Essentially, our other major measurement tool within ESB is our employee survey. Within our employee surveys, we have DEI questions-----

Senator Anne Rabbitte: But at that stage, you are an employee and you are in the gate.

Ms Orla Gardner: Exactly.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: The ESB currently measures gender.

Ms Orla Gardner: Correct.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: That answers that question. I put the same now to Dublin Bus.

Ms Barbara Carroll: There is definitely more we can do on the measurement side.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Just tell me what it measures.

Ms Barbara Carroll: We are doing quite a lot on the gender side of things, so we measure that area. We also do an outreach to our employees. Is that what the Senator is talking about?

Senator Anne Rabbitte: No. I want to understand within the diversity and inclusion office when we look at women, disabilities and the various ethnic groupings. The office is able to tell me Dublin Bus has 97 different nationalities, so that has been measured within the diversity and inclusion office. I am now trying to understand what else is measured within that office before people become employees.

Ms Barbara Carroll: To echo that, we have been doing a lot on the gender side of things and we have been doing a lot on bringing more women into transport. There are a lot of initiatives around that and we have increased it threefold since 2019. That is quite a significant campaign we have been running, and we have been getting Government, Ministers and media people involved. That in itself has been very successful. There is more we can do around areas of bringing people with disabilities and members of the Travelling community. It is a difficult measurement because there are a number of barriers against us in asking people their ethnic background and whether they are comfortable declaring that during their recruitment or access to employment. We are also very cautious about that, because we want to ensure we are not creating barriers by asking those questions.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I understand, but Ms Carroll has answered my question. It is funny, the two witnesses did not acknowledge there is a 6% target set for people with disabilities which is not measured. I just need to have that on the record.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Did Ms Kilkelly wish to respond to that?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: Just to update the Senator, we do measure accessibility. We have an active process under way at present to make sure we are increasing the number of people with a disability. We do measure that.

Ms Barbara Carroll: We have a lot of initiatives around bringing people in with disabilities and neurodiversity, so we do measure that.

Mr. Billy Hann: We partner with various organisations such as WALK and so on in that regard, so we do measure that.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I asked the question in a particular way, and that is fair enough. I will take it on board.

Mr. Kenny said something very interesting in a follow-up to somebody's comment on Irish Rail blind screening.

Mr. Barry Kenny: Sorry, we were looking at piloting it.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I am very interested in that, because that in itself is an openness and willingness or acknowledgement perhaps. That is very interesting. Could Mr. Kenny expand on why the organisation is landing in that space?

Mr. Barry Kenny: I think it is because we recognise there are biases in existence. There are countless studies on this which show the impact of people making judgments based on names or addresses and other factors that are revealed in the disclosure of normal information revealed as part of this. It is a pilot to see if there is a notable impact there affecting our recruitment processes. It is to be open to that possibility of unconscious bias. There is training on this in many organisations, but this is a more practical application or way of addressing that issue.

Our EDI team is looking at piloting that shortly.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Can I ask my last question because I am out of time?

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Very quickly.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: All right. If I were to ask about this in 12 months' time, what would be different? I would hope the pilot would be in operation. In saying that, I have nearly answered my question for the guests. I would love to see the pilot up and running and the outcomes.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Ms Gaskin wants to come in on a previous point.

Ms Anne Gaskin: I mentioned previously that we have blind short-listing because we have to remove all unconscious bias. We also provide unconscious bias training for our apprentice interviewers to ensure we are removing any barriers that may exist and ensuring fairness across the board.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: What would be different in 12 months?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: One of the things we are working on with the ITM is our transition year programme. We will set aside a number of positions for Travellers on that programme. We are also exploring the non-craft apprenticeships, which the Senator rightly pointed out. There are

a number of things that arise in this regard, particularly targeting particular types of roles and opportunities.

Mr. Billy Hann: We are already engaging with the ITM on a programme of communication around the opportunities that would be available in Dublin Bus, particularly in relation to the apprenticeship system. We have ten meetings already organised. Two have been completed and there are others to come. If we are back here next year, I would like them all to be completed, but we need the two sides to work on that. We have made ourselves available and we will give the presentations, but we need the other organisations to come in behind us, attend and so on.

On where I would like to be, let me return to the issue of complications around measurement. I would like to see an increase in the number of applicants, irrespective of whether they actually get through the system. There are associated barriers and issues, but I would like to see an increased number of applicants, at least. It would mean we would be at least breaking down the communication barrier and that applicants would know what is available to them. In effect, that is what the roadshow has been set up to try to achieve.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I thank the witnesses.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Does Mr. Kenny want to respond quickly on that matter?

Mr. Barry Kenny: Application numbers are very significant. Speaking to Deputy Rice's point, a real measure of success is a higher number of applications. As I mentioned earlier, we want more women to apply. We have had more women applying for driver roles. They are getting driver roles *pro rata*, not through minimum targets. When people apply, we discover they have the skills required. Higher numbers of applications will be a huge part of this.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): I thank Mr. Kenny.

Senator Maria Byrne: I thank all of the guests for their opening statements and answers thus far. I am aware that the numbers of Travellers currently employed in each of their organisations are quite low. Are there people who have gone through the apprenticeship programme but have not gone on to full-time employment? That question is for all three groups.

Is it that Travellers do not apply for the apprenticeships? Is there a difficulty in this area? All the guests mentioned that they are working with the ITM, but is it that there is a low number applying? Is it due to discrimination? Has there been discrimination within any of the guests' organisations? Those questions are for all the guests. Maybe I will start with Mr. Hann.

Mr. Billy Hann: I am not so sure there is discrimination. There may be unconscious discrimination but I can tell the Senator, as CEO of Dublin Bus, that there is no bias against any employee in our organisation. That is just not where our organisation is at. To me, it is about what is available to the Traveller community within the organisations we are talking about here today, and specifically Dublin Bus. Do those concerned know the opportunities are available to them? We are talking an awful lot about apprenticeships here today, which I absolutely appreciate, but the fact is that I have only 200 mechanics in an organisation of 4,700. The vast majority of our employees, 3,500 or 3,600, are drivers. This may be an opportunity

for people. The person from the Traveller community working in Dublin Bus is a driver, not a mechanic.

Are we getting enough Travellers applying for the apprenticeship programmes? I do not have a figure on that because many will not self-declare, which is probably a problem in its own right. Again, to me, it is about having the roadshows. It is about working with ITM, working with Pavee Point and communicating with the various communities to say there are opportunities in Dublin Bus, whether as apprenticeships, drivers or administrative workers. It is also about communicating how to apply and helping people through the process as best as we can. We have work to do on that. We have a programme in place over the next 12 months in this regard. It has already started and I would hope that at the end of it we will see more people from the Traveller community applying for positions in Dublin Bus. However, we need them to apply. We can do an awful lot around communication but we still need people to reciprocate and start to apply for the positions.

Senator Maria Byrne: We will move on to the ESB.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: Our experience is probably not too dissimilar to what Dublin Bus has described, but we do not have any people who have been successful in applying and then not continued. That is progress. We have also seen an increase in the number of Travellers applying for the apprenticeship programme. That is positive. Can we do more? Absolutely, we can. Do we want more? Absolutely we do. The question is therefore how to grow the number, as was mentioned by Dublin Bus. It involves the things we have talked about already, including growing awareness, building trust and explaining how to go about applying, not only for the apprenticeship programme but also for other jobs and opportunities we make available.

I have been listening with great interest to the other examples that have been described here, including work experience placements. Some of our roles are safety-sensitive roles. Working with electricity is not something one plays around with, so we have to find the right opportunities to provide taster experiences for people to explore the various roles.

I will ask Ms Gardner to comment on discrimination.

Ms Orla Gardner: As we outlined at the beginning, we have mandatory respect and dignity training for every employee in ESB. In addition, every programme run by ESB has an inclusivity element woven in. That includes training and learning programmes across all of our remit. Finally, we have five employee resource groups. These cover cultural and ethnic diversity, accessibility, family and carers, gender and the LGBT+ community. The groups amplify employees' voices and we listen. We listen to how we can do things better or differently.

Senator Maria Byrne: I thank Ms Gardner. Can I now hear from Irish Rail?

Mr. Barry Kenny: We are fortunate as an organisation that there is a lot of investment and expansion at the moment. If people successfully complete the apprenticeship programmes, the careers are there for them. We have been retaining them, and long may that continue. I ask Mr. Doolan to comment on a couple of the other points.

Mr. Conor Doolan: Again, awareness is one of the big issues. It is about showing people who we are and what we do, providing hands-on experience with us and showing what careers are available. Once people come into the workforce and are treated very well, word of mouth

can be great. They tell others, who then enter the programmes. We have built a fantastic relationship with the organisers of Access to Apprenticeship. They ring up regularly and say, for example, that they have four Travellers on their programme and would really love it if we could take one of them on. Since Access to Apprenticeship knows Irish Rail is a semi-State body, it knows – let us face it – that the individuals will be treated better than if they go down the road to private industry, where they might get swallowed up or whatever. Access to Apprenticeship works with us on that. It matches apprentices to the various organisations. On foot of its recommendations, we take apprentices in and support their development. The end product would be providing them with all the courses and training. Once they go through the system, word of mouth reaches others. We would hope the number of Travellers applying for an apprenticeship will increase, as it definitely will, and that the number of women applying will increase as well. Once we get a couple on board, automatically it opens the floodgates for others to come in. That is what we want to grow and that is where we are going to focus.

One of the big barriers for Travellers applying for an apprenticeship has been the educational requirements. Some have failed the aptitude test. The organisers might say, for example, that five applied last year but failed the aptitude test. It is disheartening for them. It is a downer for them, and they feel they are not getting the opportunity. They feel it is because they are Travellers, but many others face the same challenges. That is one of the big things. It is about getting work experience. Once they have completed the work experience, it supersedes the other criteria. That is a pathway in. It is a great pathway.

Senator Maria Byrne: Can the guests state whether their organisations work with organisations such as ETBs in tailoring courses? Sometimes they may have people from the Traveller community coming through the system who meet the criteria.

Mr. Billy Hann: I am not familiar with the term "ETB".

Senator Maria Byrne: Education and training boards. They do apprenticeships and training for people. They start with the different levels.

Mr. Billy Hann: We would be dictated to by the criteria and curricula set at Government level around the apprenticeship system but we are absolutely happy to have conversations with the Department of education, ETBs or anyone else on tailoring that to help overcome barriers around education for the Traveller community - or for anyone else, for that matter. We have good connections with those Departments so are happy to have those conversations outside this committee to see where that might be able to go. I can commit to having the conversations; I cannot promise we can change the programme in any particular way. The apprenticeship programme is very prescribed, and for good reason. At the end of the day, they come out with a skill and a trade. It could be electric or maintaining a bus. There is a critical safety element to all these jobs. It is important we do not under-represent a particular trade or skill set. There is a base level of education and skill required to deliver on it. From their perspective, it will be important that be maintained. Are there other ways of proving that? That needs to be explored.

Ms Anne Gaskin: We engage with the ETBs quite regularly on lots of training experiences - the training they are delivering in phase 2, etc. Currently, the entry requirements for the electrical apprenticeship are set by SOLAS and that is as standard. We recently engaged hugely with Laois-Offaly ETB to establish a new overhead lines technician apprenticeship which will

be delivered by our contracting partner. That is another apprenticeship coming on board that will have people recruited into it from our partners from February 2027.

Mr. Conor Doolan: We work closely with ETBs and a variety of stakeholders. We work with LEAP, World of Work and many charities and organisations. Access to apprenticeships is not just for the Traveller movement; it is for disadvantaged people, disadvantaged areas and giving people a second chance in life. We have four or six places ring-fenced every year. They are all incorporated into that. We are giving an opportunity to people who would not get it except through the access route. We went back to the OEM apprenticeship. It was post 2016. That has a skill set that was a missing piece of the jigsaw for us. Any apprenticeship post 2016 that will benefit the workforce, we are incorporating it into our recruitment. No one knew what an OEM was four years ago but our first OEM apprenticeships are coming out next month. It is a three-year programme. We are getting people into the workforce quicker, going back to the market and putting highly skilled apprentices through and they are hitting the targets we did not have before.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Unfortunately, I was in the Dáil because I had to do work, so I did not hear the statements but I have read them. I have been trying to keep on top of it as much as I can.

On advertisements, I assume Pavee Point and the ITM are the groups the witnesses go to. Are there no other mechanisms? Do they go directly to schools, secondary or otherwise? That may produce more because they will be limited in dealing with the groups I mentioned.

Numbers mentioned for apprenticeships by the three organisations are quite small. I think it was one, one and three or four. I do not know but I assume there were no women in any of those. There is a big problem, especially in the Traveller community, with the amount of women who are not employed. Within the Traveller community, they tend to look on it a bit differently to most people. Are we targeting the women as much as we can?

I know we are talking about apprenticeships but there are offices, manual work and all sorts of things. Are they part of the advertising? How do the witnesses go about it? Is there much of a take-up? We are only clear on the apprenticeships but I would love to find out if there is more.

Dublin Bus has 97 nationalities. We deal with the Roma and the Travellers here. I do not know how much of it the Roma would take up but it is an idea because that is what this committee deals with. Will the witnesses fill us in on that?

When there is take-up, is there much drop-out across the board? I imagine the witnesses cannot identify all the Travellers in the different organisations and there are probably many more who will not identify for various reasons. Is there much drop-out when it comes to targeting people?

Mr. Billy Hann: I thank the Deputy. With regard to mechanisms outside of ITM and Pavee Point, we go to shopping centres on the northside and southside of the city. We do schools as well. There are advertisements on the side of our buses, which is probably the biggest advertisement we can get because we have 11,000 buses on the road at any given time. We use other avenues for our recruitment drive. It is important to recognise Dublin Bus has recruited over 1,000 drivers in the past three years, so it is quite substantial.

The biggest barrier from a Traveller community point of view is they are not necessarily applying. How do we break down those barriers to allow them apply?

The question about women is extremely interesting because until recently we had one female apprentice - full stop - across all backgrounds. Thankfully that has gone up to high single-digit or low double-digit figures on the back of a huge drive in the apprenticeship programme, whether the world skills event or specific areas focused at women. Female representation in the apprenticeship programmes we run is incredibly small anyway, let alone what it would be from the Traveller community. I cannot say for sure because people do not declare, but I do not think any of our current female apprenticeships are from the Traveller community. I could be incorrect on that.

As the numbers are so low, we have no evidence with regard to drop-outs. We need to keep an eye on that and monitor it over time for the people who have declared. We have between 5% and 7% turnover in our organisation. I lose four to five people per week from Dublin Bus's driver cadre. That can be through retirement, around 40%, and the other 60% are people moving on to a different organisation. Regardless of minority organisations, we do have turnover. By the way, it is very small in this industry but it is something we are up against all the time.

The real challenge for us is communication and advising the Traveller community of the opportunities that are available. I agree with the Deputy it is not just the apprenticeship system. That is only 200 of 4,700 staff. We have another 4,500 positions. That to me is more important than the 200 mechanics we have working for us, which is not to degrade that particular cadre. Our programmes going forward will not just be about the apprenticeship system; they will be about communicating opportunities within the whole of Dublin Bus to the Traveller community. We will do that through ITM and Pavee Point with regard to the roadshows we are running at the moment. I hope that has answered the question to a certain extent.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Yes, I hear what Mr. Hann is saying. I have seen the advertisement and that, but we are talking about a specific minority group.

It is going through the Irish Traveller Movement and Pavee Point but I am not sure it is getting out there enough because there is an awful disconnect in a lot of these sites and different places where Travellers are. I do not know whether there is a way Dublin Bus can get at those more and perhaps advertise directly at Travellers as opposed to in general.

Ms Barbara Carroll: We connect with the Open Doors Initiative and advertise our positions there. That is one way of connecting more directly with Travellers. There is certainly more we can do. We see the value in working with partners to help us to identify how to get out to them, for example, by participating in webinars and so on where we can break down the stigma of applying for particular roles.

The Deputy mentioned schools. We just launched a schools campaign this week to reach out to schools, even just for children to get to know the brand of Dublin Bus and the approachability of Dublin Bus. That has an impact as well. We are also working with Pavee Point. Regarding some of our suggestions, in particular around dropout, it is difficult to measure because we do not always know the ethnic background. However, working with our partners, we are reaching out for them to identify, with us, the applicants they are submitting to us in order that we can measure their journey through the application process and see where

they may be falling out of the process, so that we can address it in that way. There is a need to work in partnership and there is certainly more we can do.

Ghlac an Teachta Naoise Ó Muirí an Chathaoir.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí took the Chair.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: Starting with the topic of increasing opportunities for women, the intersection of Traveller women is doubly hard. To give the Deputy some confidence, over the past number of years, we have focused in particular on women in our apprenticeship programme, which had none, similar to members of the Travelling community. We had no women in our electrical apprenticeship programme at all. We started to focus on that. Across our whole programme, about 25% of our apprentices are now women. We know that where we focus, we can make a difference. That gets back to some of the comments from earlier on. We would love to have more women but also that maybe a Traveller woman might see that as an opportunity as we grow the numbers overall.

I will ask my colleague to talk to the committee about the work we do with schools, both primary and secondary, and our engagement with them.

Ms Anne Gaskin: My team, the apprenticeship development team, goes into secondary schools to talk about apprenticeship and entry point. We talk about our own apprenticeships obviously, but we give some guidance on all apprenticeships. It is very much driven by connecting with teachers. We send out details to guidance counsellors and offer them the opportunity to have us go into the schools to talk to prospective candidates. We have a lot of engagement in schools, in particular with the northside and southside partnerships in Dublin and partnerships around the city. That is an important place for people to see our apprenticeship as a viable option.

There are a number of other activities. Science Blast, which is taking place next week in the RDS, is for national schools. National school students can meet and engage with current employees of the ESB, including apprentices, as well as people from all levels of the organisation.

Mr. Barry Kenny: To the points the Deputy raised, Mr. Doolan has confirmed that both of the Travellers who joined the apprenticeship programme last year were women, which is fantastic. Mr. Doolan may want to elaborate on the number of women more broadly in the apprenticeship programmes in recent years.

Mr. Conor Doolan: Similar to my colleagues, we started off with zero. This year, we had the highest number of female applicants to apprenticeships and the highest number of females we employed. We took on ten females this year. That is a huge increase.

We have attended 76 schools and careers events this year so far. Due to ongoing strike issues, a number were cancelled during the most recent strike and I think others will be cancelled next Thursday as well. We expect that number to reach around 100 per year. That is where we raise awareness.

There is also Try a Trade. We send an invite to all schools on the system across Ireland to attend Try a Trade. Two days afterwards, we get applications for 2027. That tells you what the appetite is. We started with 1,000 attending Try a Trade. That increased to 1,500 and then

to 2,000. In 2027, we are looking to increase that to 3,000. I have no doubt that if we increased it to 4,000, there would be the appetite nationwide for that.

Mr. Barry Kenny: An important partnership we have is iWISH, a careers organisation for female second level students interested in STEM subjects. We are the travel partner for that event. We bring almost 2,000 students from around the country to it for free by train. I think about 20,000 attend the event in total over the couple of days. It is about ensuring female second level students can see the opportunities available across a significant number of employers which participate. It is an important partnership. We launched our partnership for this coming February last week.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: It is good to see the number of women and the progress that has been made. It is slow but we just have to keep working away at it.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Senator Noonan has gone to catch public transport, which is no doubt running on time, so I will chair the rest of the meeting. My apologies to the witnesses; I was in the Dáil Chamber so I missed the opening statements.

I will concentrate on the area of apprenticeships. I will start with ESB Networks. From reading the statement, it has engaged in a programme since 2023, I think, but it seems to be fairly slow. Is that a fair characterisation?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: The Chair is right; it is slow but it is slow and steady. We are building trust, which takes time. We are building awareness. This does not happen overnight. We are working in a very committed and consistent way to establish credibility for members of the Traveller community in engaging with the ESB as an employer. There was an increase in the number of Traveller applicants from three to 11. We will continue to look for more, not just in our craft apprenticeship, which is our flagship one, but in other apprenticeships that may be better suited to people with different aptitudes, for example. We will continue to do that. It takes time. The steady and consistent approach will get us to where we want to get to.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): To Deputy Rice's point, it is good to work with numbers and targets. Does the ESB have a number for the long term? In the next five years, if it consistently receives, let us say X number of annual applications for apprenticeships, and maybe more broadly, from the Travelling community, it will feel it is making progress. What is the thinking around this?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: We have not yet looked at targets *per se*. We are targeting groups of the community and particular types of roles. We will engage on the back of this meeting with the Irish Traveller Movement on targets to see if we can speed up progress.

We are very willing to look at that.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Are the three applicants from 2025 still with the ESB?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: Three applied and one was successful. That one person is still with us.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Of the three who applied, two did not make the grade; they did not qualify.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: To put it in context, this year over 4,500 people applied for the apprenticeship programme.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Of the 11 applicants in 2026, how many qualified or made the cut?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: We are nearly there. That programme has nearly closed but it is not there yet.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Ms Kilkelly does not have that information.

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: No, we do not have a number.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): This committee is interested in doing what we can do to support employers, specifically with respect to apprenticeships. I will be asking every organisation this question. What is the key issue that needs to be addressed if we were making a report or pushing Government to do something?

Ms Sinéad Kilkelly: As an employer, what we need most is more awareness and more supports for members of the Traveller community to engage with us. We reach out very well and very strongly. When somebody applies, the apprenticeship is attractive because it is something where people earn as they learn. There are other roles which may not be as attractive but we need to continue to support and grow that awareness of the different opportunities. I think we are well placed to do that. I think more supports may be needed to go back into the Traveller community organisations.

Ms Anne Gaskin: The visibility of apprenticeships in schools is still not great. In all schools, people seem to be driven towards further and higher education. Apprenticeships are not always high up as a route to a qualification.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): It is a problem across the board.

Two members of the Traveller community became apprentices with Iarnród Éireann recently. Are they still with the organisation?

Mr. Conor Doolan: Yes, they are still actively with us. They are currently in college and are doing well. They have done their term with Irish Rail and then they move into phase 2 in the ETBs. Both are in ETBs. One is in Longford and the other one is in Galway.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): What level of intake does Iarnród Éireann expect for this year?

Mr. Conor Doolan: Our intake for this year is included. We still have places ring-fenced for Travellers. We are doing a site visit to TUS in Athlone today. If there are any Travellers there, we will be looking for them. We will be looking in Limerick and Dublin next week. That is our pathway to recruiting Travellers.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Would Mr. Doolan be in a position today to say Iarnród Éireann will earmark three spaces for Travellers? Is that a possibility? Would that show the Travelling community that the company is committed to it? Are there downsides to that? How would that be characterised?

Mr. Conor Doolan: We ring-fence access to apprenticeship for disadvantaged students and Travellers. That is incorporated into that. Rather than ring-fence it just for Travellers, we have it open. We encourage all Travellers to apply through the traditional routes and access to apprenticeships so that it widens the horizon.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Does Iarnród Éireann state how many places are ring-fenced?

Mr. Conor Doolan: Yes. They are aware that there are four to six places, depending on the calibre of people who apply for it. Even though we have them ring-fenced, when we have the engagement and do the two-week placement, if they are not suitable, they are just not suitable. However, we actively encourage them to apply through that route.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): I put it to Mr. Kenny that it seems to be very slow progress in generating interest and getting people in.

Mr. Barry Kenny: It is. However, we have an opportunity to accelerate it. Based on the success to date and the visibility, and working with members of the Traveller community and their representative organisations, we can broaden the awareness. The type of expansion and investment that is happening in the organisation gives us a rare but welcome opportunity to accelerate this. Our engagement with the committee today shows the issues and the urgency.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Is it just because of Iarnród Éireann's investment programme and its resource profile?

Mr. Barry Kenny: It is not. The apprenticeship programme has been re-established for a number of years. The Cathaoirleach Gníomhach is saying it is slow progress. It has been to date, but we have an opportunity to accelerate it.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): I read the Dublin Bus statement on apprenticeships, which I found quite generic as opposed to being Traveller focused. Does Dublin Bus have an engagement with the Irish Traveller Movement? I apologise that I missed the opening statement.

Mr. Billy Hann: We have a whole programme with ITM with regard to roadshows over the next eight to ten months. We started them back in September with regard to educating the Traveller community on the opportunities that are-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Is this Dublin Bus's first year for this programme?

Mr. Billy Hann: As regards those particular roadshows, it is, but we have been engaging with the ITM for 20 years.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Dublin Bus has an ongoing engagement.

Mr. Billy Hann: We have ongoing meetings. We have a meeting with Pavee Point coming up on 12 November. That engagement has been ongoing. The pace is slow, but it is slow across the whole of society. It is not just slow with the State organisations represented here today. We are very open to members of the Traveller community applying from other organisations, but we are just not getting the numbers applying. We need to try to communicate with them so that

they understand the opportunities available to them and the supports we can give them in the application process. That is what we need to work on.

The Cathaoirleach Gníomhach asked what more we can do. Certainly, we need to look at how we break down that barrier of communication so that, at least from their perspective, State organisations and many other organisations, including Leinster House, are open for them to apply for various jobs. That is down to communication. The roadshows we have in place with the ITM will certainly go some way to help to measure how effective that is. We need to look at the educational piece with the Department of Education and Youth and with SOLAS. We need to establish if there is any movement on the standard educational requirements that are in place for various apprenticeships. We need to have a discussion with them on that. That will bring its own complexities but that is certainly something we are willing to do.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Having Travellers working within Dublin Bus would probably send the most powerful message back that it is a good place to-----

Mr. Billy Hann: That is a really good point. We are only aware of one Traveller working in our organisation. That person is not an apprentice and is working as a bus driver. When we reached out to them, they know of other Travellers working in the organisation but they have not declared that for personal or other reasons. We will work with our partner organisations such as the ITM and Pavee Point. We will also work with that individual internally because they are happy to do so and see what we can do internally in the organisation to encourage more people to apply roles and so on. They think they may be able to bring some others with them but that is a conversation that has to be had.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): It is worth having, though.

Mr. Billy Hann: I agree, 100%.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: This may have been covered already. Are all those completing apprenticeships guaranteed a job? Will they be employed or do they just complete their apprenticeship and have to go seeking a job?

Mr. Billy Hann: A Traveller or anybody else doing an apprenticeship is never guaranteed employment at the end of it. However, we are in good times at the moment. We are short of mechanics and have to bring them in from overseas. Therefore, the probability of somebody getting a job with Dublin Bus at the back end of an apprenticeship programme is very high. Whether it remains like that as time goes on depends on how the economy is doing and how the business of the organisation is doing. I think the same applies in most organisations. I could be wrong and I will not speak for everyone else here. No one is ever guaranteed employment at the back end of an apprenticeship programme. However, if they succeed, they are guaranteed that their trade will make them employable across multiple sectors within that particular trade.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I understand that but we are putting huge concentration on the Traveller community and then at the end of the apprenticeship, people still have to go out and search for a job if they are not employed by the organisation.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): At the moment, it is keeping them-----

Mr. Billy Hann: It is no different than any other-----

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I understand that, but it is a bigger problem.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): On behalf of the committee, I thank everyone for attending today and for engaging with us as witnesses. I think that is it in terms of the clár.

Mr. Billy Hann: Can I make one suggestion?

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Please do. Go ahead.

Mr. Billy Hann: It is an invite more than anything else. We would be happy to have the Chair and any other members of the committee come down to Broadstone depot. We can give a presentation on what we are doing. If they bring down members of the Traveller community, we can show them around our depots and tell them what it is all about. We may even be able to organise a bit of a test drive of a bus around the yard and so on. That invitation is there for the members. If they want to avail of that, they should get back to us and we will arrange it.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): We appreciate that. We will make the committee members aware of that.

Mr. Conor Doolan: With a platform like this, I will take the opportunity to raise an issue. Members asked if there was any way the committee could help at this level. I will raise two points. The first is the lengthy delays for heavy-vehicle mechanics, which I have raised on numerous occasions. There is a four-year apprenticeship but apprentices are not getting called to their second phase for three years. Mr. Hann will be able to elaborate on this. If people are waiting three years to be called for something that they should be called for within six months, they become disheartened.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): Who is meant to be doing the calling?

Mr. Conor Doolan: SOLAS or the ETBs. People are meant to be called in. An apprentice will come in and do the first phase. If everything is running smoothly, that should take six months and then the apprentice goes and does 22 weeks. They then go back to their employer before going back for a further 11 weeks. They go back to their employer again and then go back for another 11 weeks. At the last apprenticeship partners meeting, I was very vocal about this and I said that if apprentices are left hanging and are not called for phase 2 for three years, that will push their apprenticeship out to five years, or even five and a half years. If you do the maths, if they have to do 22 weeks and they are waiting for three years, and they then have to do 22 weeks, followed by a minimum of six months, then a further 11 weeks, a minimum of six months again and then another 11 weeks, that pushes the apprenticeship out to five or nearly six years. We are losing mechanics due to that because they do not want to wait. Every day we are hearing people asking if there is any word of them being called to college. It is very frustrating for them and it has a knock-on affect for the AOs. During Covid, electrical apprenctices had lengthy waits, but all the stops were pulled out and new ETBs and centres popped up left, right and centre to deal with the backlog.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): The committee will write to SOLAS on that.

Mr. Conor Doolan: On the rate of pay for apprentices, there was an additional allowance. They got a travel allowance if they were travelling a certain distance and they also got an accommodation allowance but that allowance has not been updated since I did my apprenticeship nearly 30 years ago.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): We will note that.

Mr. Conor Doolan: The rates of pay are very low. The allowance is between €40 and €80 a week and people will not get accommodation for €80.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: We should also make the Minister aware of that. If we write to SOLAS about it, we should also write to the Minister about it.

Mr. Conor Doolan: I thank the committee for allowing me to mention that.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí): That is no problem. The committee stands adjourned.

Cuireadh an comhchoiste ar athló ar 2.34 p.m. go dtí 12.30 p.m. ar an Déardaoin, 12 Samhain 2026.

The joint committee adjourned at 2.34 p.m. until 12.30 p.m on Thursday, 12 November 2026.