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Noonan flies to US amid fears of job losses

Minister to hold talks with US multinationals over Trump impact

Fiachra O'Connell and Caroline O'Doherty

Finance Minister Michael Noonan has flown to the US to hold crisis talks with leading Irish-based multinational firms as fears grow of an exodus of jobs from Ireland under Donald Trump's presidency.

Mr Noonan last night flew out for a week-long series of meetings in Washington DC and Silicon Valley in California amid increasing concern over how the incoming US president's corporate tax regime will impact on this country.

The trip was scheduled before Mr Trump's election win and officially involves Mr Noonan meeting US Treasury, IMF and World Bank representatives for an update on the impact of Brexit, after he was unable to attend a previous event as it clashed with the budget.

However, the Department of Finance stressed last night that Mr Noonan will also use the trip to "highlight Ireland's enduring investment appeal in the US" and will "meet with a number of the large US companies based in Ireland" which are facing increasing pressure to return jobs to the US.

While a spokesperson declined to name the companies he will meet, US technology and IT powerhouses such as Google, Apple, Facebook and LinkedIn all have bases here, where they employ thousands of people and are central to our tentative economic recovery.

In a statement last night, Mr Noonan said he is meeting officials and companies to "emphasise that, as a common law, English-speaking, and business-friendly jurisdiction, we will continue to be an attractive destination for US companies".

News of the Finance Minister's trip — which comes just a month before Taoiseach Enda Kenny makes a similar US visit — emerged as a close financial adviser to Mr Trump's successful election campaign repeated his view that the incoming US president will slash corporate taxes and force foreign-based US firms to return home.

On RTE Radio, Stephen Moore said Mr Trump wants

to "emulate" Ireland's 12.5% corporate tax regime and cut the equivalent rate in the US to as low as 15%.

"We want to emulate Ireland," said Mr Moore. "You have one of the lowest, if not the lowest, business taxes in the world. We want to be competitive with Ireland."

"We're very excited about this idea and we do think a lot of companies that have left the US will come back. They will come back from China, Canada, Mexico, Ireland. We learned it from Ireland."

Although Mr Moore has not been appointed to any post-election adviser position as yet, Mr Trump has reportedly said he will reduce corporate tax from 35% to 15-20% within 100 days of entering office.

In recent days, several Government ministers have moved to calm fears over the potential impact such a move could have on this country, with Public Expenditure Minister Paschal Donohoe stressing last week he does not believe jobs will be lost.

IDA Ireland chief executive Martin Shanahan repeated the view last Friday, saying he does not expect to see a "flood" of companies departing, while Central Bank governor Philip Lane similarly sought to downplay concerns.

However, despite the positive take being echoed by Foreign Affairs Minister Charlie Flanagan, who said at the weekend that Mr Trump will be a "friend" to Ireland, the fact that Mr Kenny and opposition leaders' concern of his election down on previous accusations of racism and sexism against Mr Trump underlined the concern of his election's potential impact here.

Meanwhile, Jobs Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor will visit this week to Japan and China in a bid to encourage fresh investment in this country, while Mr Kenny will meet Northern Ireland first minister Arlene Foster tomorrow for post-Brexit protection talks.

EU foreign ministers also held an emergency meeting last night on the impact of Mr Trump's election.

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Starters' orders



Olympic rowing heroes Paul and Gary O'Donovan switch on the Christmas lights in Cork last night, marking the start of the festive season in the city. Gardaí estimate 20,000 people turned out — one of the biggest-ever attendances for the event.

Picture: Daragh Kane

HSE may be forced to release Grace reports

Fiachra O'Connell, Daniel McConnell, and Noel Baker

The Government is unlikely to accept a partial publication of two HSE reports into the Grace foster abuse scandal and may attempt to force their immediate and full release if they are not made public this week.

Pressure is building on the HSE to publish the reports ahead of a coalition-imposed deadline of Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the whistleblower who first highlighted the case has said the reports must be made public.

In response to the state-commissioned Conor Dignam report late last month, Disabilities Minister Finian McGrath said he was giving the HSE until this Wednesday to release its own inquiries into what happened. While the HSE-commissioned reports — by Conal Devine Associates and Resilience Ireland — have been completed since 2012 and 2014, the HSE has repeatedly said it would not publish them until it has concluded its own investigation. McGrath said the reports would not "fatally" wound any

criminal cases, a view that led Mr McGrath to impose this week's deadline. A senior government figure said at the weekend the Coalition will "not accept" any refusal to release the documents or any partial publication and will attempt to force their release if the matter is not resolved. The draft terms of reference for the now-inminent state inquiry into the Grace foster home abuse are due to go before cabinet in two weeks' time. Mr McGrath and attorney general Máire Whelan met to discuss the terms last

Thursday and are due to meet again this week. While allowing a wider-ranging inquiry, the terms are likely to seek an interim report within months, specifically on what happened to a woman given the pseudonym Grace, who, for still unknown reasons, remained at the home from 1989 to 2009, despite the fact that all placements at the home were meant to end in 1995 due to serious abuse concerns. Speaking to the *Irish Examiner*, the whistleblower who first raised the concerns said an interim report would

be welcome and called on the HSE to adhere to this Wednesday's deadline to release both unpublished reports. Meanwhile, it has emerged the child and family agency Tusla found substance to at least 33 allegations of abuse by foster carers in the past 15 months. Figures provided by Tusla show 24 abuse allegations nationwide last year were "found to have substance", while in the first quarter of this year, there were another nine allegations — including three in Cork alone.

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Mental health biggest issue for disability pay recipients

Noel Baker

The majority of people who receive a disability allowance are less likely to express an interest in either part-time or full-time work.

Almost a third (31%) said they had never worked; 59% said that they had previously worked either part-time or full-time; 13% said they were currently working.

Of those currently working or with past work experience, 37% said it was in community, voluntary or 'occasional' work, while 63% said it had been in paid employment or self-employment.

The survey also showed that when it comes to education, only a minority of recipients reported educational attainment beyond junior secondary education or 'special school', with fewer than 10% having a degree and just 2% having a post-graduate qualification.

While 13% said they were attending an education or training course, 67% said it was more than five years

since they last took part in education or training. And while 44% said they were not interested in education or training, 66% said they were interested or a little interested in doing so.

When asked to rank the health issues that affect them, 50% said mental health issues, while 49% said mobility issues. Just over 30% said it was intellectual disability and more than 20% said it was heart and breathing problems. When it came to difficulty with everyday tasks, 83% said they had moderate or severe difficulty in completing, or being unable to complete, everyday tasks. Three-quarters of respondents said their disability affects them all the time.

Regarding what supports are important in helping them achieve their employment ambitions and goals, the medical card was the most often mentioned support, cited by 64% of respondents, with family, mentioned by 59% of respondents, in second place.

Those longest in receipt of disability allowance are less likely to express an interest in either part-time or full-time work. Almost a third (31%) said they had never worked; 59% said that they had previously worked either part-time or full-time; 13% said they were currently working. Of those currently working or with past work experience, 37% said it was in community, voluntary or 'occasional' work, while 63% said it had been in paid employment or self-employment. The survey also showed that when it comes to education, only a minority of recipients reported educational attainment beyond junior secondary education or 'special school', with fewer than 10% having a degree and just 2% having a post-graduate qualification. While 13% said they were attending an education or training course, 67% said it was more than five years

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Kinsale Youth Support Services

FREE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS TALK

Adolescent Development and Substance Misuse Issues in the 21st Century

GUEST SPEAKER
Cognitive Behavioural Therapist/Clinical Manager
Matt Talbot Adolescent Services
EDEL FOLEY

Acts on Hotel, Kinsale
Wednesday, November 22
8.00pm

Promoting Mental Health Awareness in Young People

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French Muslim praises countrymen

Catherine Wylie

A French Muslim has said he is thankful for the respect shown by the French people following last November's terrorist attacks.

Thierry Kponov, 38, from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association — which has the slogan 'Love for all, hatred for none' — was outside the Bataclan theatre yesterday as mourners marked a year

since Islamic extremists killed 130 people in Paris. Mr Kponov said: "We just want to pay homage to the victims and their families and, as French citizens, we just want to show our support. And also to show that Islam is in no way linked to those terrorist attacks."

He said Islam "brings peace" and, asked if he had experienced any animosity in the wake of the attacks last

year, he said he had not. "The French people understand that these attacks had nothing to do with religion," he said, adding: "The French people showed brotherhood and I'm proud to be a Muslim in my country for that."

Mr Kponov said he hoped to introduce French people to what Islam truly is, describing it as "living together and helping each other."

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News
Five years after she contracted Lyme disease, Shradh Kearney is struggling off chest pains and muscle weakness thanks to innovative therapies. **Page 2**

Arts
Great as put-upon dad Hal in 'Malcolm in the Middle' and incendiary as Walter White in 'Breaking Bad', now Bryan Cranston tells all in his autobiography. **Page 15**

Grace scandal

Timeline

1983-95

A total of 46 children and young adults, most with intellectual disabilities, are placed with foster family in Waterford.

1992

South East Health Board becomes aware of concerns about the standards of care in foster home, but continued to send children to home.

1995

Following concerns raised by the Brothers of Charity in the UK, who also used the home for foster care, placements by the then health board stop. The concerns centre around allegations of sexual abuse of the children. However, one child, 'Grace' who was placed there full-time, remained in the home.

1996

SEHB decides to move Grace from home.

1996

The foster father writes a letter to then health minister Michael Noonan, who then referred the matter to his officials and junior minister Austin Currie.

1996

Following the intervention, Grace is ultimately left in the home and remains there until 2009.

2009

On foot of whistleblower concerns about Grace's care, in which she displayed sexually abusive behaviour, she is removed from the foster home and moved to an "appropriate" care setting. Gardai and HSE begin investigations.

2012

Conal Devine is commissioned to conduct an investigation into the foster home and Grace's care and produce a report. His €100,000 report has not yet been published.

2013

Another child is only finally removed from the home in 2013, despite all of the concerns and investigations. It is later claimed that the child is a private patient.

2014

The PAC first hears of issues around the procurement of services relating to reports into foster home.

2015

Documents obtained by the PAC allege some of the most "savagely rape and abused" of those in the care of the home. Grace was found to be adopting sexual positions on the command of a phrase.

2015

Calls for a commission of investigation come as PAC hears a "clique of HSE managers" covered up allegations of abuse.

Jan 2016

Irish Examiner reveals the HSE finally admitted liability in relation to failures of care at foster home. However, claims of an apology given to Grace are contested.

Feb 2016

HSE is caught misleading Irish Examiner and PAC over apology claims, and eventually apologises for doing so.

Feb 2016

After 10 days of controversy, health ministers Lou Varadkar and Kathleen Lynch recall and announce commission of inquiry.

Jun 2016

Conor Dignam scoping report due to Government on foster home allegations.

Nov 2016

Dignam report is published by Disabilities Minister Finian McGrath.

Key questions in Grace abuse

Last month's long-awaited independent report into the HSE's handling of the Grace foster abuse scandal has given Government a clear blueprint for what its state inquiry into the case must examine, writes Political Correspondent **Fiafra Ó Cionnaith**

“Both documents were ultimately ‘inadequate’, due in part to the terms of reference.

FEARS that files may have been “deliberately destroyed” amid persistent cover-up claims. Calls for two unpublished inquiries to be released immediately, as doing so will “fatally” wound future criminal cases.

Potential conflicts of interest from officials now in senior positions, who were central to the scandal when it first occurred.

A still-unexplained two-year block on releasing Freedom of Information documents on her own daughter to the mother of the woman allegedly forced to endure two decades of physical and sexual abuse in a foster home.

And, crucially, fresh questions over whether it allowed all to happen and why at least four opportunities to remove a vulnerable woman from a dangerously abusive situation in 1996, 2001, 2004-05, and 2007 were delayed, not acted upon, and ultimately ignored.

Despite the legal jargon peppered throughout his report, you cannot accuse senior counsel Conor Dignam of pulling any punches.

Last month, after almost a year and a half of issues, the Government made a significant step closer to beginning a long-awaited state inquiry into an issue that, despite alleged attempts by those involved, is simply not going to go away.

A full 16 months after it was first called for by his predecessor and former leader TD Kathleen Lynch, Disabilities Minister Finian McGrath published the lengthy 309-page report by Mr Dignam into the Grace foster abuse scandal.

The document is couched in carefully chosen legal phrases which on the surface appear to simply skirt around the reality of what took place.

In addition, it understandably takes no risks in over-stepping its terms of reference — which were specifically focused on how the HSE handled its investigations into what happened — meaning evidence of the alleged abuse itself has not been detailed.

However, despite its legally necessary limitations, the Dignam report is nothing short of a blow-by-blow account of the serious issues behind a scandal whose true scale has yet to be fully dragged out into the public spotlight.

The airing of these issues last month has now cleared the way for a long-awaited inquiry into what happened to finally be set up as planned by the start of December.

But just as importantly, it has provided a detailed blueprint for what this state inquiry needs to examine, not only in terms of the alleged abuse but how and why it was able to occur and seemingly remain hidden for two decades.

The Dignam report was requested by the Government in summer 2015 in response to disturbing allegations of serious sexual and physical abuse at a partially hidden foster home in Waterford, where up to 47 children and teens with severe intellectual and physical disabilities were placed from the late 1980s until 2015.

The most high-profile of these incidents relates to a mute woman given the pseudonym ‘Grace’, who was placed at the home between 1989 and 2009 and whose experiences are central to the allegations being made.

After concerns over the foster home were repeatedly raised by the *Irish Examiner*, RTE’s *This Week* programme, and Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil TDs John Deasy and John McGuinness, the previous Dail’s public accounts committee, the then-disabilities minister Kathleen Lynch asked Mr Dignam to

investigate claims of a cover-up of what happened, in June 2015.

While the investigation was asked not to examine the alleged abuse itself, as that had already been the subject of two HSE-commissioned reports, it was specifically tasked with reviewing the credibility of these two reports and the HSE’s own responses to repeated concerns about the home — issues which are now crucial to uncovering what happened.

Although Mr Dignam did not cast any personal claims against the authors of the previous South-East Associates and Resilience Ireland reports into the case, which remain unpublished despite concluding in 2012 and 2014, it said the way in which both documents were procured could not “ensure the independence of those carrying out the review” — highlighting previous concerns over the role of former HSE officials linked to the scandal in the process.

The Dignam report further said both documents were ultimately “inadequate”, due in part to the terms of reference provided in both circumstances by HSE officials in the South-East, a point it said “gives rise to specific issues of concern” and meant “serious issues were not investigated as soon as possible”.

These “issues”, it noted, include

“allegations of a cover-up, the alleged danger of a deliberate destruction of files, allegations the decisions were made by the HSE in the best interest of the HSE and not the service-user” and “an alleged threat to the funding” of an agency which employs the whistleblower who has highlighted the case.

To date, neither the Devine nor the Resilience Ireland report has been published by the HSE due to Garda concerns that such a move may impact on potential future criminal inquiries into the alleged abuse.

However, in a move that has caused fresh difficulties for the HSE and was at the time of going to press still unresolved, Mr Dignam said it is his view that publication would not “fatally interfere with a fair trial” — and crucially noted that while both reports were concluded by 2014 and therefore free to be published, the first time the Garda halting request emerged in files was in 2015, questioning the formal HSE position.

The details contained in the Devine and Resilience Ireland reports, how they were procured by the HSE, and whether they will be published, are crucial issues which the imminent state inquiry must now examine. But so too are the missed opportunities to address the alleged abuse — which are also highlighted in the Dignam document.

Throughout his own review of the previous reports, Mr Dignam notes that the local managers in the HSE and the South Eastern Health Board repeatedly failed to act on chances to move Grace from the alleged abuse, and while not drawing any conclusions specifically, he states this must be examined.

IN 1996, the report points out, a U-turn was made on a decision to remove Grace — who had just turned 18 — along with other vulnerable people placed with the foster family, after the foster father wrote a pleading letter to then-health minister Michael Noonan.

After Department of Health officials asked the South Eastern Health Board’s three-person panel overseeing the move for information on the issue, a decision was made to leave Grace in the home.

Worryingly, however, Mr Dignam noted that no records are available to explain the rationale for this decision.

In 2001, when officials were informed Grace was still at the home a full decade after serious abuse concerns were first raised, a decision

was again made to put her on a priority waiting list for a new home.

However, nothing happened, a situation which was repeated in 2004-05 when the mistake was realised.

Two years later, in 2007, Grace’s birth mother requested her daughter’s files under the Freedom of Information Act, at which point officials are said to have once again realised the vulnerable woman was still at the home.

However, instead of acting immediately, the response to the straightforward Fol request was delayed two full years for unknown reasons.

While insisting the situation demands answers, Mr Dignam did not reference the fact that four individuals who were local health service managers in the South-East in the 1990s had at that time been promoted to senior national positions in the HSE and child protection agency Tusla — roles they continue to hold.

Although for some, the missing records suggest a cover-up over what happened, Mr Dignam’s report is careful not to draw any conclusions on the matter.

However, he pointedly notes that the

cover-up claim itself has not yet been examined and that alleged evidence pointing towards the conclusion must form a central part of the upcoming state inquiry.

What stressing that he is not making any judgment on the issue, one of the most eye-catching of Mr Dignam’s 30 inquiry terms of reference recommendations is for an examination of whether “any deliberate suppression or attempted suppression of information” by HSE officials took place.

He added this should have “particular reference” to the period 2009 to 2016 — the seven years since the whistleblower flagged concerns over what happened, drew high-profile media attention, and demanded clarity on who is to blame.

When it was published last month, Mr Dignam’s detailed report into the Grace foster abuse scandal — and how key sections of the HSE and its predecessor the South Eastern Health Board repeatedly failed to address it — quickly drew attention, before fading just as quickly from public view.

But while that unavoidable news cycle necessity was a cause of concern for some, it is worth stressing that the 309-page document was never intended as a mere media talking point.

The issues highlighted by Mr Dignam, alongside those underlined repeatedly by the whistleblower central to the case, have finally brought clarity for what the inquiry into the scandal must now examine in terms not just of the abuse itself but how the HSE failed to respond to the situation. For now, they remain cloaked in intrigue and unanswered questions.

However, due to Mr Dignam’s thorough examination of the health system’s response to the Grace scandal, there is now not just a reason but a clear blueprint for Government to find the long-delayed answers as part of its imminent state inquiry.



Conor Dignam: Thorough examination of the health service’s response to the Grace scandal.



Kathleen Lynch: Asked Mr Dignam in 2015 to investigate claims of a cover-up.



John Deasy: Raised concerns over the foster home in the Public Accounts Committee.

Foster abuse whistleblower wants reports published immediately

Fiafra Ó Cionnaith Political Correspondent

THE whistleblower who first highlighted the Grace foster abuse scandal has called on the HSE to immediately publish two unseen reports into the controversy.

The individual, who cannot be named due to strict protected disclosure rules, made the comments to the *Irish Examiner* just 48 hours before a Government-imposed deadline for when a decision on the matter must be made runs out.

Since first highlighting the alleged abuse seven years ago in 2009, the whistleblower at the centre of the scandal has repeatedly called for the HSE to publish what happened to Grace and whether 46 other vulnerable people may also have been abused.

After the publication of the Conor Dignam report late last month, Disabilities Minister Finian McGrath said the HSE-commissioned Conal Devine Associates and Resilience Ireland investigations into the abuse must now be published as suggested by Mr Dignam.

Whistleblower at the centre of the scandal has since 2009 repeatedly called for full openness on what happened to Grace

until this Wednesday to act, despite repeated Garda views the documents may impact on possible criminal convictions, the whistleblower said the files now need to be made public in order to allow the full extent of previous inquiries to be made known.

The whistleblower’s call for the release of both reports comes after a number of disputed claims she and her agency have been the subject of attempts to silence their concerns over what happened.

ensure it doesn’t happen again. This is why we sought an inquiry in 2009. The whistleblower added that potential Government plans to hold a short interim inquiry into what happened to Grace before examining wider issues at the foster home deserve consideration to ensure full transparency is achieved. “I would also be open to the suggestion that we [the (imminent Government inquiry) commission might produce an interim report,

after seeking further information about the case in 2011 the whistleblower was the subject of a legal fight in the HSE’s local area in the South-East.

The letter — which was sent to the whistleblower, her agency and another state body — alleged she was unfit to be involved in the Grace case and that her removal from the role, due to concerns raised by a new official with the HSE.

However, when that official was asked about the complaint by the whistleblower, the official said the suggestion was entirely “fabricated” and signed a written letter entirely disputing the legal fight.

“The whistleblower said the files now need to be made public in order to allow the full extent of previous inquiries to be made known.

to her client have been blocked since the first raised concerns in 2009, with only limited information about what happened made available to date. The whistleblower said this underlines the need to publish the Devine and Resilience Ireland reports as soon as possible in order to ensure all information about what happened is released.



