

COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND CULTURAL ISSUES**Community Relations****Introduction**

Northern Ireland society is deeply divided along religious and political lines which reflect conflicts dating back centuries. Division between the Protestant majority, which is overwhelmingly Unionist and British in cultural identity and the Catholic minority, largely Nationalist and Irish in identity, extend beyond politics. They are evidenced in residential segregation (particularly in urban, working class districts), in parallel education systems (a State system catering largely for Protestant pupils and a church-run system for Catholics) and in the persistence of socio-economic differentials (with the Catholic population on the whole, being more disadvantaged). Social interaction between the communities is in many areas extremely limited, outside the work place. Social, sporting and cultural networks often closely reflect the basic communal division.

2. Notwithstanding the Good Friday Agreement, communal divisions remain sharp, particularly during the summer marching season. Disputes over parades, always a source of background tension, have become the focus of community confrontation in recent years, often spilling over into outright sectarianism and acts of violence.

Community Relations Movement

3. Over several decades, a voluntary community relations movement has developed, seeking to maintain contact between both sections of the community, to offer an alternative to segregation and to promote the peaceful

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resolution of political difference. In the late 1980s a more coherent community relations policy was developed by Government in response to this movement and to the development by academics and practitioners of a theoretical basis for community relations work. The Government also adopted a more proactive policy of promoting integrated education.

Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU)

4. The Central Community Relations Unit was established in 1987 with a remit of advising the Secretary of State on all aspects of community relations. Over the years, this remit has been extended to include the development of policy on equality and equity (including the New Targeting Social Need Initiative and statutory equality obligation) and to issues of cultural identity, notably policy towards the Irish language. CCRU's financial resources are currently £5.35m annually and this is applied to funding for voluntary CR organisations (largely via the Community Relations Council), grants to District Councils for local community relations programmes, the provision of cross-community facilities in rural areas and research.

Department of Education

5. The Department of Education has its own community relations programme for schools and young people. Community relations objectives are promoted through aspects of the compulsory curriculum, notably the cross-curricular theme of Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU). A Cross-Community Contact Scheme also provides grants for establishing links between the different elements of the segregated education system. £3.4m is spent annually by DENI on its community relations programme. This is in addition to expenditure on integrated education.

Community Relations Council

6. The Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (CRC) was established in 1990, with Government encouragement, as a charity and

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limited company. It is not a statutory body. It has up to 24 Council members, of whom up to $\frac{1}{3}$ are appointed by the Secretary of State. Its current Chairman is Jonathan Bardon, a well known local historian and teacher, and its Chief Executive is Will Glendinning. Most of CRC's funding comes from the CCRU budget, over £2.5m in 99/00, though voluntary trusts and the European Union also contribute. It has established itself as a centre of expertise on community relations in Northern Ireland, co-ordinating and advising the voluntary CR movement.

Other Funding

7. In addition to over £9m annual Government expenditure on community relations managed by CCRU and DENI, there are two significant external sources of financial assistance for CR projects: under the European Union's Structural Funds programme over £16m is available in the period 1994-99 and since 1995 the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation has provided funding for community relations; the International Fund for Ireland supports community relations projects under its Community Bridges Programme.

New Targeting Social Need TSN

8. The Targeting Social Need (TSN) initiative was launched under the previous administration in 1991. It was triggered by statistical evidence of continuing socio-economic inequality between the two main sections of the community, with Catholics, on the whole, faring worse on most major indicators, particularly unemployment. TSN did not seek to discriminate positively in favour of Catholics, but to target resources on individuals, groups and areas objectively identified as being in greatest need. It was assumed that an effect of this would be the erosion, over time, of differentials between the two communities.

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9. Following criticism from SACHR and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, the TSN policy was reviewed and as a result, the initiative has been relaunched as New TSN, with particular focus on unemployment and employability, continuing targeting of other inequalities and a special Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) initiative which aims to identify and tackle factors which could contribute to social exclusion and which need a cross-Departmental response.

10. New TSN is not a spending programme in its own right, rather it is a theme that runs through spending programmes and which requires Departments to target their efforts and available resources on people, groups and areas in greatest objective social need. Much of New TSN's success will depend on the vigour and effectiveness with which it is pursued by Departments. Each Department has drafted new TSN Action Plans on which progress will be reported annually.

11. Following consultation with external interests and the First and Deputy First Ministers Designate, the first issues to be tackled under PSI will be: the problems of minority ethnic people, the specific needs of Travellers, teenage parenthood and ways in which the organisation and delivery of services could be made more responsive to the needs of people at risk of exclusion. Working Groups comprising representatives of Departments and other relevant interests have been set up to tackle each of these priorities.

12. There has always been a controversial edge to TSN, with Nationalists and the Irish Government being strongly in favour, while Unionists have been worried that it was really about redistributing resources from Protestant to Catholic areas.

13. DENI recently introduced changes to ensure that nursery education was targeted firstly on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. These changes

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were criticised, and it is likely that targeting on other areas signalled in the draft Annual Report will also be criticised.

14. In addition, there are some perennial issues which TSN has always thrown up:

- how to ensure appropriate expenditure on disadvantage, especially if there are no additional new resources;
- apparent resistance, both among some members of the public and parts of the public sector, to TSN monitoring i.e. asking the beneficiaries of public services voluntary questions about their community background.

15. Following Devolution, responsibility for New TSN will rest with the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers.

Linguistic Diversity

16. A new Linguistic Diversity Branch was set up in CCRU and began work in February 1999. The Branch has responsibility for language policy involving Irish, Ulster-Scots (a local variety of the Scots language) and the languages of the ethnic minority communities of Northern Ireland. It has also been involved in the preparatory work for the North-South Language Implementation Body. Language is a very political issue in Northern Ireland with Nationalists identifying with the Irish language and some Unionists promoting the claims of Ulster-Scots.

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

17. Irish and Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland are to be recognised as a language for the purposes of Part II of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and Irish is to be specified for Part III of the Charter in

this calendar year. Part III requires adherence to specific measures taken to promote the use of Irish in public life. Linguistic Diversity Branch has a key task in identifying the progress that must be made for Irish to be specified.

Good Friday Agreement

18. The Good Friday Agreement recognised the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance for linguistic diversity. Specifically it commits the Government to actively promote the Irish language and facilitate its use. There are other specific commitments on Irish in education and broadcasting.

North-South Language Implementation Body

19. The Body will be established under Article 1(8) of the Agreement signed by the two Governments on 8 March 1999 and will come into operation after devolution. The new Body will have the following functions:

Irish Language

- promotion of the Irish language;
- facilitating and encouraging its use in speech and writing in public and private life in the South and, in the context of Part III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, in Northern Ireland where there is appropriate demand;
- advising both administrations, public bodies and other groups in the private and voluntary sector;
- undertaking support of projects, and grant aiding bodies in groups as considered necessary;

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- undertaking research, promotional campaigns and public and media relations;
- developing terminology and dictionaries;
- supporting Irish-medium education and the teaching of Irish.

Ulster Scots

- Promotion of greater awareness and use of Ullans and of Ulster-Scots cultural issues, both within Northern Ireland and throughout the island.

20. **Key Issues**

- Specification of Irish for Part III of the European Charter in this calendar year.
- Pressure from the Irish language lobby to establish a fund for Irish TV and Film production.
- Pressure from Ulster-Scots lobby for parity of status and funding with Irish (currently some £3m pa for projects with an Irish language dimension).