



Annual Report
2012

 **British-Irish**
COUNCIL

Contents

Foreword	3
History and Structure of the British-Irish Council	5
Summit Meetings	7
Work Sectors:	
Ministerial Meetings	14
Social Inclusion	14
Misuse of Substances (Drugs & Alcohol)	16
Environment	18
Other Work Sectors:	20
Collaborative Spatial Planning	20
Demography	21
Digital Inclusion	23
Early Years Policy	24
Energy: Marine Energy	27
Electricity Grids	27
Housing	28
Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages	29
Transport: Sustainable and Accessible	30
Secretariat	32
Annex: Extract from the 1998 Multi-Party Agreement establishing the British-Irish Council	35

Foreword

The British-Irish Council (BIC) is pleased to present its Annual Report for 2012, which is the first since the new Secretariat was established in Edinburgh in January 2012. The report aims to provide transparency and further raise the profile of the Council amongst stakeholders and the wider public.

2012 saw significant developments for the Council with a scaling up of activities, supported by the Secretariat. During the year, three Summits and three Ministerial meetings were held in addition to Officials' meetings across the range of Council work sectors.

The British-Irish Council Summits provide a unique space and opportunity for the Heads of the eight British-Irish Council Member Administrations to come together to discuss and collaborate on matters of mutual interest. In 2012, Summits were held in the historic castles of Dublin (January), Stirling (June) and Cardiff (November). Unsurprisingly, given the difficult economic climate the Summit discussions strongly focused on the economy. The issue of youth employment was a particular feature at all Summits and Ministers asked that all the Council work sectors consider how they could progress this issue as part of their forward work plans. Other key topics addressed by Heads of Administration included combating substance abuse, marine energy and early years policy.

Three of the eleven Council work sectors met at Ministerial level. In Edinburgh in September, the Council's Environment Ministers got hands on with biodiversity challenges and agreed increased collaboration to support early warning on invasive non-native species. Ministers responsible for tackling misuse of drugs met in Jersey in June to discuss the challenges of dealing with new and emerging drug trends and agreed to expand their work to cover the increasing problem of use and misuse of alcohol. Social Inclusion Ministers convened in Cardiff City Hall in March and adopted an important report on the Contribution of the Third Sector to Social Inclusion.

Other work sector areas ranging from indigenous and minority languages to energy continue to make significant progress in sharing best practice and developing practical collaboration. The breadth of work undertaken in the Council continues to develop.

The Secretariat looks forward to continuing to working closely with all Member Administrations in 2013 to further discussions and collaborations on areas of mutual interest of benefit to all the citizens of these islands.



Ciarán Byrne (Irish Government)
Joint Head, Secretariat



Jeremy Martin (UK Government)
Joint Head, Secretariat

History and Structure of the British-Irish Council

The British-Irish Council was established on 2nd December 1999 on the entry into force of the British-Irish Agreement signed by the UK and Irish Governments as part of the agreement reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations in Belfast on Friday, 10th April 1998, hereafter referred to as “The Agreement” (*see Annex A for the text in the Agreement establishing the British-Irish Council*).

The Council comprises the UK and Irish Governments, the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the Isle of Man Government, Government of Jersey and Government of Guernsey.

The aim of the Council as set out in the Agreement is to “*promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships amongst the people of these islands*”. It is a forum for members to exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant administrations. To date, the Council has undertaken co-operation on a wide range of diverse issues covering social and environmental topics common to all Member Administrations.

The Council held its inaugural meeting in London on 17th December 1999, a fortnight after the establishment of the devolved government in Northern Ireland. The meeting was attended by the then Prime Minister, Taoiseach and Heads of each of the other Council Member Administrations. Since the inaugural meeting there have been a total of nineteen Summits and thirty-one Ministerial meetings at work sector level.

Structure of the British-Irish Council

The Council meets in different formats; at Summit level normally twice per year, and in specific work sector formats on a regular basis with each Member Administration being represented by the appropriate Minister.

The biannual Council Summit is normally chaired by the Head of the host Member Administration, and attended by Heads of Member Administrations and Ministers. At the Summit, Ministers consider the work of the Council in its entirety, including recommendations arising from progress in the work sector groups. In addition Ministers focus on key topics of current relevance.

A “Senior Co-ordinator” from each of the eight Member Administrations provides a central, strategic oversight to the activities underway in the different work sectors and co-ordinates the Council activity within their own Administration. They also play a key role in preparations for the Council’s Summits. The Council is supported by the new Secretariat based in Edinburgh. More details on the role and functions of the Secretariat are provided later in this report.

All Member Administrations participate in the eleven work sectors. Officials from all eight Member Administrations’ relevant departments meet on a regular basis to progress the work of the sectors.

Summit Meetings

The British-Irish Council met three times at Summit level in 2012 including in Dublin (Ireland), Stirling (Scotland) and Cardiff (Wales).

British-Irish Council Summit, Dublin, Ireland – January 2012

The 17th Summit of the Council was held in Dublin on 13th January 2012 having been postponed from November 2011 and was chaired by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD. The British-Irish Council focused on the misuse of drugs and youth employment. A summary of the discussions and conclusions is outlined below.

Misuse of Drugs: Recovery from Problem Drug Use

The Council welcomed and discussed the paper on *Recovery from Problem Drug Use*, which had been prepared by the Council's work sector on the Misuse of Drugs. Ministers discussed drug treatment measures and strategies that have been put in place in Member Administrations to facilitate the path of recovery. Ministers discussed the need for a more ambitious approach to involving individual care plans and inter-agency working to better address the holistic needs of clients. The Council also noted the Misuse of Drugs work sector's commitment to include a renewed focus on recovery from drug dependence in any future drugs strategies. The Council agreed that Member Administrations would actively encourage the renewed focus on recovery and work together to evaluate and share successful approaches.

Youth Employment

Ministers discussed youth employment outlining the related challenges in their respective administrations, the factors which influence its rise, and explored policy implications for each Member Administration in dealing with this problem. Heads of Member Administration shared details of the initiatives which they had introduced to reduce youth unemployment levels within their own jurisdiction. The Council agreed to continue to focus on youth employment, to explore how best this might be advanced through the Council, and that the impact of initiatives in respect of youth employment would be reported on at the next Summit.

Other issues

The Council noted the progress made in the eleven work sectors and welcomed the establishment of the new Secretariat and its commitment to produce a Business Plan to be submitted to the next Summit in Scotland for approval.



The heads of delegations were welcomed by An Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny TD.

The principal delegates at the British - Irish Council Summit, Dublin, Ireland, January 2012.

- 1_Chief Minister, Hon. Allan Bell, MHK, Isle of Man Government;
- 2_First Minister, Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond MSP, Scottish Government;
- 3_First Minister, Rt. Hon. Peter Robinson MLA, Northern Ireland Executive;
- 4_Deputy Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Nick Clegg MP, UK Government;
- 5_Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD, Irish Government;

- 6_First Minister, Rt. Hon. Carwyn Jones AM, Welsh Government;
- 7_Deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness MP MLA, Northern Ireland Executive;
- 8_Chief Minister Ian Gorst, Government of Jersey;
- 9_Home Department Minister, Deputy Geoff Mahy, Government of Guernsey.



British-Irish Council Summit, Stirling, Scotland – June 2012

The 18th Summit of the British-Irish Council was held in Stirling on 22nd June 2012 and was chaired by the First Minister of Scotland, Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond, MSP. The Council focused its discussions on marine energy and youth employment.

Marine Energy

The Council reviewed in detail the work undertaken by the Council's Marine Energy work sector and welcomed the progress on advancing marine energy co-operation since the issue was last discussed in 2010. It noted the excellent progress that had been made in negotiations with the European Commission since 2010 to include marine energy in the EU's Strategic Energy Technology plan, and endorsed the formalisation of an EU-wide partnership for marine renewables through establishing an Ocean Energy ERA-NET collaborative action during 2012 between Member States and the Commission. The Council also considered how marine energy could be progressed at European level during Ireland's Presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2013.

Youth Employment

Ministers exchanged views and examined early progress on the various initiatives aimed at helping young people into employment in each Member Administration. In order to sustain and develop this important work, the Council agreed to consider at its next summit in Wales specific proposals to develop further its work on youth employment.

Other issues

The Council noted the good progress made in each of the eleven work sectors and briefly discussed the possibility of collaboration around the creative industries. The Secretariat was tasked with producing a scoping paper on the potential benefit of Member Administrations co-operating on creative industries. The Council also endorsed the Secretariat Business Plan.





The heads of delegations were welcomed by First Minister, Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond MSP.

The principal delegates at the 18th British Irish Council, held in Stirling Castle.

- 1_Chief Minister, Hon. Allan Bell, MHK, Isle of Man Government;
- 2_First Minister, Rt. Hon. Carwyn Jones AM, Welsh Government;
- 3_Deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness MP MLA, Northern Ireland Executive;
- 4_Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD, Irish Government;
- 5_First Minister, Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond MSP, Scottish Government;

- 6_Secretary of State for Scotland, Rt. Hon. Michael Moore MP, UK Government;
- 7_First Minister, Rt. Hon. Peter Robinson MLA, Northern Ireland Executive;
- 8_Chief Minister Ian Gorst, Government of Jersey;
- 9_Chief Minister, Deputy Peter Harwood, Government of Guernsey.



British-Irish Council Summit, Cardiff, Wales – November 2012

The 19th Summit of the British-Irish Council was held in Cardiff on 26th November and was chaired by the First Minister of Wales, Rt. Hon. Carwyn Jones AM. The Council focused on early years policy and the economy. Ministers considered the economic challenges facing Member Administrations and in particular considered the role of capital infrastructure development in supporting growth.

Early Years Policy

The Council reviewed in detail a report on the work undertaken by the Early Years Policy work sector. The Council acknowledged the critical importance of early years in creating strong foundations for children and families to thrive; and recognised the importance of investment in early years in terms of generating better value for money in the public sector by moving from curative to preventative models of service delivery.

The Council endorsed the principles that should underpin an approach to Early Years, namely improved educational attainment, health and later life chances, while respecting that each Member Administration will approach implementation in their own way and at their own pace. The Council noted the significant benefits gained by officials from all Member Administrations participating in the Council's work sector and from sharing knowledge, challenges, best practice and research outcomes relating to Early Years. The Council welcomed the continuation of the Early Years work sector and supported the focus on improving quality, including the critical role of the workforce.

The Economy

The Council discussed the current economic situation in the different Member Administrations with a particular focus on the important role of investment in capital infrastructure to support and promote economic growth. The Council also noted the latest figures on youth unemployment and agreed that all Council work sectors should consider the issue of generating employment opportunities for young people in their work programmes where appropriate.

Other issues

The Council noted the progress made in each of the eleven work sectors. The Council reached broad agreement that creative industries was an appropriate area for co-operation and requested a final report be prepared on the priority areas of most interest and value to all Member Administrations with a view to adopting it as a new work sector at the next Summit.



The heads of delegations were welcomed by First Minister, Rt. Hon. Carwyn Jones AM.

The principal delegates at the British Irish Council Summit, Cardiff, Wales – November 2012.

- 1_Chief Minister Ian Gorst, Government of Jersey;
- 2_Chief Minister, Deputy Peter Harwood, Government of Guernsey;
- 3_Deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness MP MLA, Northern Ireland Executive;
- 4_Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD, Irish Government;
- 5_First Minister, R. Hon. Carwyn Jones AM, Welsh Government;
- 6_Secretary of State for Wales, Rt. Hon. David Jones, MP, UK Government;
- 7_First Minister, Rt. Hon. Peter Robinson MLA, Northern Ireland Executive;
- 8_Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Scottish Government;
- 9_Chief Minister, Hon. Allan Bell, MHK, Isle of Man Government;



The communiqué from each of the Summits can be found on the British-Irish Council website:
<http://www.britishirishcouncil.org/communiqu%C3%A9s/summits>

The Work of the British-Irish Council

The British-Irish Council provides valuable opportunities through its work sectors for Member Administrations to explore areas for co-operation, exchange information, share best practice and discuss matters of mutual interest.

The Council currently has eleven work sector areas of focus, each of which is led by one or more Member Administrations.

Work Sector	Lead Administration
Social Inclusion	Scottish and Welsh Governments
Misuse of Substances (formerly Misuse of Drugs)	Irish Government
Environment	UK Government
Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages	Welsh Government
Transport:	
Sustainable Transport	Northern Ireland Executive
Accessible Transport	Northern Ireland Executive
Energy:	
Electricity Grid	UK Government
Marine Energy	Scottish Government
Collaborative Spatial Planning	Northern Ireland Executive
Early Years Policy	Welsh Government
Demography	Scottish Government
Housing	Northern Ireland Executive
Digital Inclusion	Isle of Man Government

Over the course of 2012, these groups have taken forward their work programmes and a summary of their key activities follows.

Work Sectors: Ministerial Meetings

Social Inclusion (Led by Scottish and Welsh Governments)

Social inclusion is about reducing barriers which may exist for people when accessing services or participating in the community. The Social Inclusion work sector was established at the first British-Irish Council Summit held in 1999 and was the theme of Summits in 2002 and 2009 focusing on financial exclusion and on voluntary and community activity.

Building on the conclusions of the 2009 Summit in Cardiff, in March 2010, Ministers asked the work sector to examine in detail how the Third Sector working together could make communities more sustainable and socially cohesive; to enable wider civil activity and integrate the Third Sector into mainstream service delivery.

Ministerial Meeting

The Social Inclusion work sector held its fifth Ministerial meeting hosted by the Welsh Government at the City Hall in Cardiff, on 7th March 2012. The meeting was chaired by Mr Carl Sargeant AM, Minister for Local Government and Communities, and Ministers reviewed the report *Contribution of the Third Sector to Social Inclusion*.

Ministers discussed the contribution of the Third Sector across all Member Administrations and the key role it was playing, given the current economic climate, in delivering flexible and inclusive services within communities. They acknowledged the work being done to actively engage the Third Sector from an early stage in policy discussions and development within each Member Administration. Ministers commended the willingness and commitment of the Third Sector to support the resilience and sustainability of communities, and the mobilising of voluntary effort, to meet the big challenges facing people in their everyday lives.

The work sector has now refocused its activities into the area of preventative spend as a tool of social policy and a work programme for 2013-15 has been agreed.



*Extract from British-Irish Council report on
the Contribution of the Third Sector to Social
Inclusion*

In response to “how the Third Sector working together can make communities more sustainable and socially cohesive” the benefits of volunteering on the community perspectives are strongly evident in Northern Ireland where the years of civil unrest gave way to a significant growth in the number of voluntary and community groups including groups directly involved in peace and reconciliation and cross community work.

Looking at “how we can enable wider civil activity”, volunteering remains deeply embedded within the social policy agenda and has been seen as a key element of strategies to promote social participation and increase individual and collective citizenship.

Misuse of Substances, formerly Misuse of Drugs (Led by the Irish Government)

Tackling the Misuse of Drugs is an ongoing challenge for all British-Irish Council Member Administrations. Heads of Administrations decided on the inclusion of Misuse of Drugs as a topic at their inaugural summit in December 1999, with the Irish Government as the lead Administration. Since then the challenges posed by drug use and the impact of new drugs continue to present difficulties for citizens and society as a whole.

The work sector endeavours to cover a wide range of issues concerned with drug misuse in its annual work programme. Meetings are regularly attended by professionals and academics in the relevant field which greatly adds to the discussion. The ongoing regular contact between Member Administrations on a range of drug related issues has contributed to broader co-operation and exchange of information across the Council area.

As highlighted earlier in this report, Misuse of Drugs was a theme of the January 2012 Summit held in Dublin at which the Council discussed “*Recovery from Problem Drug Use*”.

Ministerial Meeting

A Misuse of Drugs work sector Ministerial meeting was held in Jersey on 29th June 2012, hosted by the States of Jersey Minister for Health and Social Services, Deputy Anne Pryke. The meeting was chaired by Ms Róisín Shortall TD, then the Minister of State with responsibility for Primary Care in Ireland. The key thematic discussion at the meeting focused on “*Young People and Drugs – Breaking the Cycle*”. The Ministers agreed that the promotion of healthier lifestyle choices for young people through an improved focus on personal development and life-skills was key to breaking the cycle of problem substance use and focused particularly on family situations, especially on addressing the increased risks for children in families that are experiencing problem substance use. Ministers discussed recovery from problem drug use and agreed to encourage a renewed focus on recovery and to share successful approaches in this regard.

At the Ministerial meeting, Ministers also took the opportunity to discuss the use and misuse of alcohol in their jurisdictions. Ministers exchanged information on the extent of problems pertaining to alcohol and the various approaches that were being taken to address these issues, including through legislative measures which are being explored in a number of Member Administrations. Ministers agreed to include the use and misuse of alcohol in the work of the British-Irish Council. This decision was subsequently endorsed at the November 2012 Summit held in Cardiff and the work sector has now been renamed “Misuse of Substances”.

During 2012 the work sector also covered issues such as (i) developing methods of assessing progress of local drugs programmes to inform wider policy development; (ii) the development and implementation of Naloxone programmes to reduce deaths from heroin overdoses; and (iii) issues around the misuse of prescription drugs, in particular Benzodiazepines.



The principal delegates at the Misuse of Substances Ministerial Meeting (Led by the Irish Government)

1_Junior Minister, Jennifer McCann, MLA, Northern Ireland Executive;
2_Health Minister Anne Pryke, Government of Jersey;
3_Minister of State with responsibility for Primary Care, Ms Róisín Shortall TD, Irish Government;
4_Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, Ms Roseanna Cunningham,MSP, Scottish Government;

5_Minister for Home Affairs, Senator Ian Le Marquand, Government of Jersey;
6_Minister for Home Affairs, Honourable Juan Watterson, MHK, Isle of Man Government;
7_Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services, Constable John Refault, Government of Jersey;

8_Minister of State for Crime Prevention and Antisocial Behaviour Reduction, Lord Henley, UK Government;
9_Minister of Home Department, Mr Jonathan Le Tocq, Government of Guernsey;
10_Junior Minister, Jonathan Bell, MLA, Northern Ireland Executive;
11_Director of Corporate Services and Partnerships, Ms Joanna Jordan, Welsh Government (not in picture).



In 2013, the work sector will continue its work on sharing latest trends around the misuse of drugs and appropriate responses and will take forward co-operation and the sharing of best practice around tackling the growing social, health and economic impacts surrounding the use and misuse of alcohol.

Environment (Led by the UK Government)

Pollution, climate change, invasive species and other environmental hazards and threats do not respect borders making intergovernmental co-operation vital to protect and improve the environment across these islands.

The Environment work sector was established at the first British-Irish Council Summit in 1999 and is led by the UK Government. Ministers have discussed a very broad range of environmental topics since then, including sustainable development, marine management, waste management, adaptation to climate change and most recently biodiversity.

Ministerial Meeting

The Council's Environment Work Sector held its latest and twelfth Ministerial meeting, hosted by the Scottish Government, at the Vogrie Country Park, Midlothian on 7th September 2012. The meeting was chaired by Mr Paul Wheelhouse MSP and focused on biodiversity, and covered strategies, awareness campaigns, managing invasive species, ecosystems approach, public engagement and strategies used to monitor and survey habitats and species. Before the meeting, Ministers took part in a 'BioBlitz' with local school children to gather information and boost records of species in Vogrie Country Park. Ministers welcomed the news that as a result of the Council's work, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) would be enhancing the existing network to allow the Channel Islands to share their monitoring and surveillance data with the wider society through the National Biodiversity Network Gateway (NBN). Ministers also recognised the threat that invasive species pose to the island ecosystems which make up the Council's membership. Ministers discussed existing awareness campaigns, how to improve monitoring, warning systems and risk assessment across Member Administrations and the potential for an expert meeting in the run-up to the planned related EU Strategy.



Vogrie Country Park

Channel Islands to join the UK's National Biodiversity Network

The UK's National Biodiversity Network Gateway acts as a "data warehouse" for biodiversity information, which can be quickly and easily accessed to understand the distribution of particular species in the UK. Individual records, covering plants, mammals, birds and invertebrates, are stored on the NBN Gateway and these can then be displayed on a map of the UK in a number of different ways.

In late 2012 the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) enhanced the National Biodiversity Network Gateway to include the Channel Islands allowing them to share their monitoring and surveillance data on invasive species with the UK. By widening the scope of the gateway, to include other BIC Administrations and relevant stakeholders, it provides more parties with access to a shared data pool allowing for better assessment of the risk of the arrival of a particular invasive species and the impact once established.

As a next step, officials are hoping to use investment in the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) to share data at broader scales including between the NBN Gateway and the equivalent mechanism in Ireland (National Biodiversity Data Centre) to provide a wider picture of the distribution of species across the British-Irish Council region and beyond into Europe.

In 2013 the work sector will hold an experts' workshop on Non-Native Species as well as focusing on Sustainable Consumption and Production, which will be the main topic for the next Ministerial meeting to be held on the Isle of Man.

The full communiqués from all BIC Ministerials can be found on the website:
<http://www.britishirishcouncil.org/communiqu%C3%A9s/ministerial-meetings>

Other Work Sectors

Collaborative Spatial Planning (Led by the Northern Ireland Executive)



Collaborative Spatial Planning explores how British-Irish Council Member Administrations can work together across borders to plan for and implement key infrastructure. The Council agreed at its twelfth Summit in Cardiff in February 2009 to ask the Northern Ireland Executive to lead a work sector to examine the benefits that could be gained from collaboration on Spatial Planning.

The work sector brings together officials from each of the Member Administrations who are responsible for national, island and regional development strategies. The group meets biannually to exchange information and perspectives on current spatial planning challenges.

The work sector continues to meet at official level to discuss and exchange experiences of legal and policy development, and to share best practice and information on emerging issues such as measures aimed at speeding up the planning processes to support economic recovery and growth; unfinished housing developments including associated public safety issues; onshore wind turbine development; and European Observation Network on Territorial Development (EPSON) and Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) Projects.

Bearing in mind the cross-cutting nature of spatial planning policy, the work sector has recently decided to explore the development of linkages with other work sectors. This highlighted the degree of synergies with other work sectors (e.g. Transport, Energy, Environment and Marine Planning) and the need to feed spatial planning perspectives into these work sectors.

Demography (Led by the Scottish Government)



Demographic changes are being faced by all British-Irish Council Member Administrations. By 2035 the number of people aged 50+ is projected to rise by 28% and the number aged 75+ is projected to increase by 82%.

A changing society has implications across a wide range of areas. These include the demand for, and provision of, public services such as health, education and transport including their scale, type and location. It also has implications for the size and composition of the working population and the creation of the wealth necessary to provide public services and fund future pension contributions.

Demography was adopted by the Council as an area of mutual interest at the eighth Summit in London in June 2006. In March 2008, Ministers supported, in principle, a work plan for the work sector centred around key themes on understanding migration and its impact; healthy independent living, investigating policy interventions, fertility, and student flows.

The work sector's most recent area of focus on understanding the implications of wider student flows amongst the Council's Member Administrations concluded with the publication of a report on Student flows between Member Administrations. The full report is available at <http://www.britishirishcouncil.org/news/demography-work-sector-report-higher-education-student-migration-flows>

Extracts from BIC report on Student flows between BIC Member Administrations.

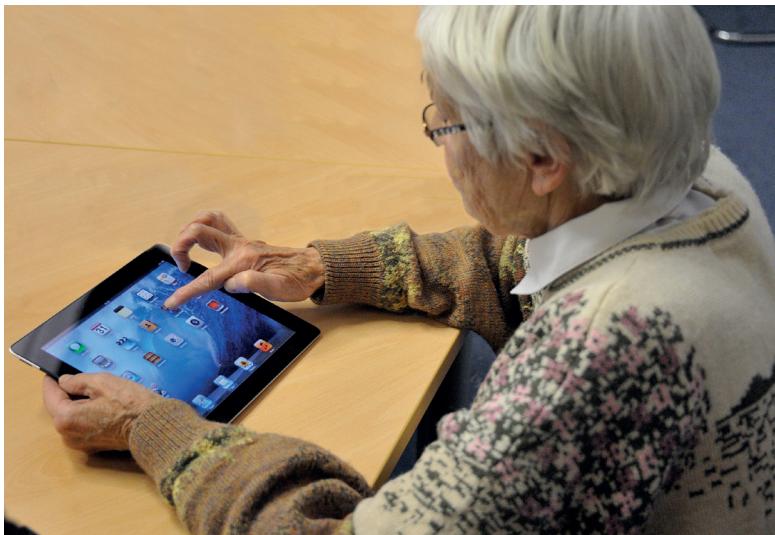
Student mobility is an important component of the migration flows of the BIC Member Administrations. Each year a substantial number of young people will leave home to take up a place at university. At the end of the course many will move again, usually to take up employment or to continue their studies at another higher education institution.

Nearly all (97%) first-year English-domiciled students went to Higher Education Institutes in England, compared with about three-quarters of students domiciled in Northern Ireland (75%) and Wales (77%) who went to institutions in their home country. Around one-fifth of students domiciled in Northern Ireland (19%) and Wales (22%) went to HEIs in England. Three-quarters of first year students enrolled on courses at HEIs in Scotland were UK-domiciled, 9% were EU students (including Ireland) and 15% were from the rest of the world.

Various policy initiatives exist to encourage international students to study in the UK and Ireland. In 2009/10, around 1.1 million first-year students enrolled on courses at HEIs in the UK. Of these, 79% were UK-domiciled students, 6% were EU students (including Ireland), and 15% were from the rest of the world.

There are also schemes to encourage home students to study abroad, and to attract graduates back to their original country of domicile. Of those graduates who are employed six months after graduation, the majority are employed in the same country where they studied. Graduates of English HEIs have the lowest migration rates while graduates of Welsh HEIs have the highest. Graduates of Northern Irish HEIs have the highest international migration rates. The European Union is the most popular destination region for international movers, with the United States also being important.

Digital Inclusion (Led by the Isle of Man Government)



Source: DVLA.

Developments in digital technology have generated a period of massive social and cultural change, affecting all aspects of society. However, there is an overwhelming correlation between digital and social exclusion – three-quarters of socially excluded people are also digitally excluded. Those who are or become digitally excluded are not only denied easy access to information and services, but also find they are penalised financially by not being able to use the internet.

At the twelfth Summit in Cardiff in February 2009, the British-Irish Council agreed that the Isle of Man Government should take the lead on a Digital Inclusion work sector. The focus of the Digital Inclusion work sector is on identifying common areas and themes across Member Administrations through the comparison of statistics, policy and strategy. The work sector has also shared information on key events and initiatives in order to ensure better co-ordination of national and local campaigns.

As more Member Administrations look to drive down service delivery costs through the use of online service delivery, a key focus of the work sector at the moment is co-operation around the economics (costs and benefit) and removal of barriers to adoption of the ‘digital by default’ agenda. The UK Government’s approach to online Universal Credit is a useful case study for the Group.

Early Years Policy (Led by the Welsh Government)



The early years are fundamental to a child's life chances. During a child's early years his/her physical, cognitive, social and emotional development is most susceptible to influence, both positive and negative. At the eleventh Summit in September 2008, the British-Irish Council adopted Early Years Policy as a new work sector with the Welsh Government as the lead Member Administration.

This area of work brings together officials from each Member Administration who are responsible for national, island and regional policy on early years. The work of the group encompasses, amongst other things, early years education, childcare, health and support for parents.

There are currently four areas of focus within the work sector:

- Collaboration between all agencies concerned with health, education and social services to provide a "joined-up" service for children and their parents or carers and to make better use of resources;
- Transition arrangements (between home and child care settings, and then to school) to improve outcomes;
- The Early Years work force; and
- Evaluation and obtaining better value for money.



The work sector led on the development of an Early Years discussion paper for the Summit held in Cardiff in November 2012 where Heads of Administration and Ministers agreed of the fundamental importance of Early Years in creating strong foundations for children and families to thrive.

In future, the work sector will continue to co-operate and share best practice on the topics listed above and on European developments, data sharing and examining equity of provision within each Member Administration.

Energy (Electricity Grids led by the UK Government and Marine Energy led by the Scottish Government)



Wind Turbines

Exploitation of renewable energy resources, for instance wave and tidal, to generate electricity, represents a significant opportunity for Member Administrations to meet both growing energy needs and climate change goals. However, exploiting this potential involves overcoming technological and economic challenges and requires Governments to provide support by creating the right investment environment.

At the twelfth Summit in February 2009, the Council agreed to the establishment of the Council's Energy work sector with two groups focused on addressing these challenges: Marine Renewables (led by the Scottish Government) and Electricity Grids (led by the UK Government).

Marine Energy (Led by the Scottish Government)

The **Marine Energy subgroup** has been working with the EU's Ocean Energy Association (EU-OEA) and the EU Marine Energy Interest Group to raise the profile of marine renewables with the European Commission. Recognising the importance of this topic to Member Administrations, it was also chosen as a theme for the Summit in Stirling in June 2012. The group is continuing to work collaboratively across borders to maintain momentum, to further develop the marine renewables industry and tackle the ever growing need for energy whilst meeting the challenging climate change goals.

A marine energy action plan, developed by the wave and tidal power industry in Scotland to accelerate electricity generation from the sea, was unveiled at the Summit. The plan outlines progress made since the launch of the 2009 Marine Energy Road Map and makes recommendations to help improve access to finance, grid development, infrastructure and supply chains, the planning regime and engagement with Europe, to ensure Scotland and other nations seize the huge potential for clean energy from the world's seas and oceans.

Electricity Grids (Led by the UK Government)

The **Electricity Grids subgroup** has been focused on the potential for renewable energy trading between Member Administrations. This has involved identifying the costs and benefits of doing so, along with the barriers. Work has also been undertaken to look at how 'joint projects' between Member Administrations would fit into the different regulatory regimes prevailing and this will continue into 2013.

Housing (Led by the Northern Ireland Executive)

Meeting the housing needs of citizens in these islands is a challenge faced by all Council Member Administrations. Accordingly, the Council, at the Summit in Cardiff in 2009, established the Housing work sector with the Northern Ireland Executive as Lead Member Administration.

The work sector has focused on sharing information, knowledge and best practice between Member Administrations on a number of areas including, supply and allocation of social housing, housing benefit issues and affordable housing.

This has been particularly beneficial to Member Administrations given the volatility in the housing market in the wake of the global economic downturn. Officials in the Council's Housing work sector have met to discuss arrangements for the next Council Housing Ministerial meeting. During those discussions common issues of concern emerged including the need to stimulate the housing supply.

It has been proposed, subject to Ministerial agreement, that the theme of the Ministerial Plenary should be "Housing Supply: The Opportunities and Challenges".

This will allow jurisdictions to share their experiences of developing policy to increase housing supply and to learn from each other on possible alternative ways to overcome obstacles such as availability of land or new forms of funding. It is hoped that a leading academic will deliver a presentation at the Ministerial meeting.

The Ministerial Meeting will be held in the second half of 2013.



Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages (IML) (Led by the Welsh Government)

The rich linguistic heritage of the Council's Member Administrations is an important part of the culture of these islands. In recognition of the desire to support indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages (IMLs) the topic was added to the Council's portfolio of work sectors at the third Summit in June 2002 under the leadership of the Welsh Government.

The IMLs covered are Irish, Welsh, Gaelic, Scots, Ulster Scots, Manx, Jèrriais, Guernèsiais and Cornish.

The work sector helps to identify and share best practice across the Member Administrations and amongst IML communities. The work sector is particularly interested in the key areas of language transmission, community strategies, young people's use of IMLs, broadcasting, the economic impact of IMLs, marketing IMLs, ICT and IMLs, the development of legislation to protect and promote IMLs, and education through the medium of IMLs.

Annual seminars for policy makers and practitioners are held to help share good practice amongst stakeholders in the IML sector. Each seminar focuses on a different area of the work sector's remit. A seminar held in November 2012 in Cardiff focused on promoting indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages through early years education. The findings from this seminar will form part of the agenda of the next Ministerial Meeting to be held in the second half of 2014.

Transport: Sustainable and Accessible Transport (Led by the Northern Ireland Executive)



The geographical area covered by the Council is diverse and unique, consisting of hundreds of islands. This presents its own challenges to the movement of people, goods and services. Whilst there are for the most part excellent road, rail, sea and air links in place there are significant challenges faced by travellers with disabilities. There is also a need to consider how to make the transport infrastructure more sustainable to meet environmental aims.

Transport was agreed as a work sector at the inaugural meeting of the Council in December 1999. The Transport work sector has two sub-groups on Accessible Transport and Sustainable Transport which consider how to improve transport policy and practice.

At the 18th Summit held in Stirling in June 2012, the Council welcomed the work of the group on developing a common web approach towards accessible journey planning, which is continuing to evolve.

The work sector is also now considering the role of Smartcard Technology; the use and mutual recognition of Blue Badge schemes; and how to support the introduction of more sustainable modes of transport.

Common web-page format adopted by Member Administrations to provide travel information for people with mobility difficulties.

A cross-cutting barrier identified by the BIC Accessible Transport subgroup was the lack of information available to disabled people about accessible travel in other Member Administrations. Where that information did exist it was not in a common format or clear. A number of disability advisory groups confirmed the value of improving this situation for disabled people. It resulted in the development of common web-pages to direct disabled people to existing information on accessible travel and allowed BIC Member Administrations to review their own provision of such information.

The template used and indicated below brings together common headings and symbols for use throughout BIC Member Administrations when displaying information about accessible transport online. An important element of the development of the web based travel information has been the connections to other Member Administrations to help facilitate easier travel across these islands.



Home



Ferries and Ferry Ports



Airlines and Airports



Car Travel



Bus Travel



Rail Travel



Taxi Travel



Community Travel



Accommodation



Other Information on Accessibility



Further Advice



Comments

Secretariat

British-Irish Council Secretariat

The 2006 St Andrews Agreement stated that: “*Following consultation with its other members, and with a view to giving further impetus to its work, the two Governments would facilitate the establishment of a Standing Secretariat for the British-Irish Council.*” The decision to set up a Secretariat in Edinburgh was taken at the Guernsey Summit in 2010.

The Secretariat became operational on 4th January 2012 based in offices in Edinburgh. The Secretariat is jointly staffed by officials on temporary assignment from Member Administrations and comprises the UK and Irish Government Joint Heads, three Policy Officers and an Office Manager.

Functions

The Secretariat has a cross-cutting function, which includes:

- Supporting individual Work Sectors through preparing or commissioning relevant papers, taking minutes, advising on procedures, communications activities and providing logistical support where needed.
- Supporting host Member Administrations in preparations for the biannual Summits through commissioning or preparing relevant papers, taking minutes, advising on procedures, communications activities, drafting communiqués and providing logistical support.

- Supporting the Administrations' Senior Coordinators' Group through convening and chairing the meetings, preparing relevant papers and taking minutes.
- Leading and facilitating internal and external communications, including amongst other issues, liaising with officials in each Member Administration, production of an annual report, production of a quarterly newsletter for officials and appropriate use of social media to publicise the work of the British-Irish Council.
- Managing and promoting relationships with key stakeholders including but not limited to officials in all Member Administrations, the British – Irish Parliamentary Assembly and interested NGOs.
- Advising on, and co-ordinating the scheduling of, all British-Irish Council meetings.
- Communicating decisions of the British-Irish Council and monitoring their implementation.
- Responding to media and general public queries related to the work of the British-Irish Council.
- Ensuring proper accountability to the British-Irish Council and Administrations through the production of the annual reports for the biannual Summits and through the Senior Co-ordinators' Group.
- Carrying out such other tasks as the British-Irish Council may direct.



Secretariat Funding

Costs for individual Secretariat staff are met by their parent Member Administration. The running costs for 2012 totalling £61,000 were shared between the eight Member Administrations using an agreed set formula.

Contact Details

For further information please see the website of the British-Irish Council at:
www.britishirishcouncil.org

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You can also follow us on Twitter and Flickr:



<https://twitter.com/BICSecretariat>



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/82474374@N03/>

Annex: Extract from the 1998 Multi-Party Agreement establishing the British-Irish Council

1. A British-Irish Council (BIC) will be established under a new British-Irish Agreement to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands.
2. Membership of the British-Irish Council will comprise representatives of the British and Irish Governments, devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, when established, and, if appropriate, elsewhere in the United Kingdom, together with representatives of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.
3. The British-Irish Council will meet in different formats: at summit level, twice per year; in specific work sectors on a regular basis, with each side represented by the appropriate Minister; in an appropriate format to consider cross-work sector matters.
4. Representatives of members will operate in accordance with whatever procedures for democratic authority and accountability are in force in their respective elected institutions.
5. The British Irish Council will exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant Administrations. Suitable issues for early discussion in the British-Irish Council could include transport links, agricultural issues, environmental issues, cultural issues, health issues, education issues and approaches to EU issues. Suitable arrangements to be made for practical co-operation on agreed policies.
6. It will be open to the British-Irish Council to agree common policies or common actions. Individual members may opt not to participate in such common policies and common action.
7. The British-Irish Council normally will operate by consensus. In relation to decisions on common policies or common actions, including their means of implementation, it will operate by agreement of all members participating in such policies or actions.

8. The members of the British-Irish Council, on a basis to be agreed between them, will provide such financial support as it may require.
9. A Secretariat for the British-Irish Council will be provided by the British and Irish Governments in co-ordination with officials of each of the other members.
10. In addition to the structures provided for under this agreement, it will be open to two or more members to develop bilateral or multilateral arrangements between them. Such arrangements could include, subject to the agreement of the members concerned, mechanisms to enable consultation, co-operation and joint decision-making on matters of mutual interest; and mechanisms to implement any joint decisions they may reach. These arrangements will not require the prior approval of the British-Irish Council as a whole and will operate independently of it.
11. The elected institutions of the members will be encouraged to develop inter-parliamentary links, perhaps building on the British-Irish Inter-parliamentary Body.
12. The full membership of the British-Irish Council will keep under review the workings after the Agreement comes into effect, and will contribute as appropriate to any review of the overall political agreement arising from the multiparty negotiations.



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