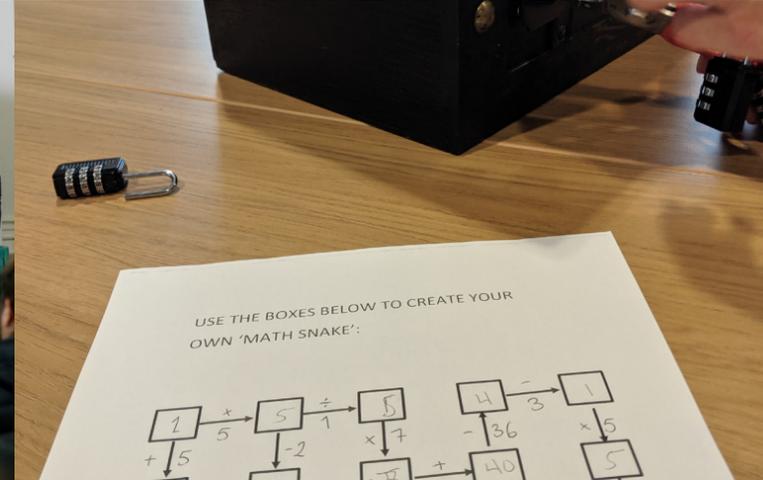


Get Online - Be Safe

Top Tip 3. Take care with what you share online and think about who can see it.



Top Tip 4. Save your important information in more than one place.



The Secretariat, on behalf of the British-Irish Council, is pleased to present the Annual Report for 2019/2020.

This has been a notable reporting year as 2019 marked the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the British-Irish Council and observation of that anniversary is featured throughout this annual report. Since that inaugural meeting of 1999, the Council has continued to fulfil its mandate of promoting positive relations and providing a forum for co-operation on matters of mutual interest across all eight Member Administrations, through an active programme of meeting regularly at Summit, Ministerial and official level.

The Secretariat welcomes the re-constituting of the Northern Ireland Executive in January 2020, as formalised through the New Decade, New Deal agreement. We look forward to supporting Ministers from Northern Ireland in the work of the Council and in particular the upcoming meetings of the Council at Summit and Ministerial level. The United Kingdom left the European Union at the end of January 2020 and is currently in its transition period as the future relationship between the EU and the UK is negotiated. The start of 2020 has also been characterised by the global Covid-19 health pandemic. The Secretariat will continue to support the Council as we all adapt to changing times.

The British-Irish Council met at Summit level twice in 2019: in June the Heads of Administrations gathered in Manchester, where the Summit theme was energy policy, with a particular focus on smart energy systems. In November, the second Summit of 2019 was held in Dublin, with a thematic focus on health and social initiatives to address substance misuse. Critical to the Council's work are the activities of the work sectors across eleven policy areas, which culminate in each work sector meeting at Ministerial level at regular intervals determined by the work sector. Consequently, there were two Ministerial level meetings over this period, discussing a range of common issues in the Early Years Policy as well as the Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages policy areas. Further to this, the Secretariat also supported 29 official level meetings hosted at locations across the eight BIC administrations as well as 34 teleconference or virtual meetings which took place between the eleven work sectors of the Council.

The Secretariat has continued to support and facilitate new ways of working within the Council. A joint sectoral stakeholder meeting was trialed for the first time, organised by the Collaborative Spatial Planning and

Housing work sectors, both of which are chaired by the Northern Ireland Executive. This symposium event, held in Belfast in November 2019, involved over a hundred external stakeholders from across all eight BIC administrations to consider how to better address the policy challenges created by our ageing populations. The event also extensively drew upon the work of a report drafted by the now-defunct BIC Demography work sector. Further external stakeholder events were organised and supported by the Secretariat in relation to policy exchanges on invasive species and supporting the social enterprise sectors in all of the BIC jurisdictions.

Early 2020 has seen the Covid-19 pandemic profoundly affect all members of the British-Irish Council. The Secretariat and for that matter, many of its interlocutors, have switched to a remote working arrangement in response to this situation and have implemented new ways of working remotely, such as regular video and teleconferencing meetings across the Council and its work sectors. These have been swiftly and successfully implemented and have enabled the maintenance of the Council's work. We will continue to facilitate the exchange of insights and initiatives on the most pressing policy challenges and some work sectors have begun to look at how to collectively address the resulting fallout of Covid-19 through the framework of the Council.

This has been a remarkable year and the Secretariat will continue its commitment to facilitating the work of the Council, recognising the fast-moving environment within which we find ourselves and therefore investigating new and innovative ways of working. Now more than ever, the Council provides a useful forum of engagement for its members in uncertain times.



BIC Secretariat Joint Heads - Jerry O'Donovan (l) and Samantha Groessler (r)



Family photograph of Ministers at the 32nd British-Irish Council Summit in Manchester

Summary from Secretariat on impact of Summit

This Summit was hosted in Manchester, an important regional economic and transport hub for many of the Member Administrations of the Council. Manchester is also an important centre for developing smart energy systems, the theme of the Summit. A number of local organisations and companies showcased to Summit attendees the ground-breaking technologies and systems they had developed in this sector.

Manchester, 28 June 2019

The British-Irish Council (BIC) held its 32nd Summit meeting hosted by the UK Government. The heads of delegation were welcomed to Manchester by Rt Hon David Lidington MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and Minister for the Cabinet Office, on behalf of the UK Government. In addition to welcoming all first time attendees to the Council, Minister Lidington extended a particular welcome to Rt Hon Mark Drakeford AM, who attended his inaugural British-Irish Council Summit as First Minister of Wales.

Latest political developments

Ministers reflected that 2019 marked the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the British-Irish Council. Since the inaugural meeting in London, in 1999, the Council has met regularly at Summit, Ministerial and official level to exchange information, discuss, consult and co-operate on matters of mutual interest within the respective competencies of the eight Member Administrations.

Ministers took the opportunity to discuss the latest domestic political developments across their jurisdictions and engaged on topics of mutual interest such as the economy, trade, and ongoing relations with the EU.

The Council received an update on the most recent engagements in Northern Ireland and looked forward to the restoration of the devolved institutions.

Ministers updated the Council on their activity in relation to the UK's exit from the EU, particularly with reference to engagement between Member Administrations. They also discussed the importance of maintaining the constitutional and formal relationships across the United Kingdom and the Crown Dependencies.

The Council agreed that twenty years on, the Council remained a valued strand of the Belfast – Good Friday Agreement. Ministers reflected on the need for this continued engagement and collaboration and the importance of continuing to strengthen the links and relationships between the people of these islands.

Energy

Ministers with particular responsibility for energy policy met in advance of the Summit meeting to consider a paper prepared by the Council's Energy work sector with a particular focus on smart energy systems. Ministers discussed the most effective approaches in realising the transition to smart energy systems and the existing barriers to overcome. They agreed that smart energy systems are crucial in enabling the decarbonisation of energy that is necessary to combat climate change. They also considered how smart systems might be promoted at a local and community level and the key priorities for research and innovation funding. Ministers welcomed the work sector's plans for further engagement on smart energy within their wider Forward Work Plan and encouraged officials to continue to work together to identify and share best practice across the Member Administrations. Ministers agreed to publish the discussion paper on the Council's website and to make it available to interested stakeholders.

Environment

As part of their discussion on the ongoing work of the Council, Ministers welcomed the update on the BIC Marine

Litter Symposium, held in Glasgow in February 2019. Heads of Administration had committed the Council to deliver this event at the Guernsey Summit in June 2018. They noted that the Symposium had brought together Environment Ministers, officials, stakeholders and young ambassadors from across the eight Member Administration, to discuss possible solutions to tackling the issue of marine pollution around these islands. Ministers noted that the Environment work sector continued to collaborate on actions to tackle marine litter as part of their Forward Work Plan and Ministers welcomed the registration of these actions via a joint voluntary pledge in the UN Communities of Ocean Action registry of voluntary commitments for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14. Ministers also welcomed the ongoing collaborative work of the Environment work sector on climate adaptation.

BIC Secretariat

The Council noted the Secretariat's end of year report and welcomed the publication of the Council's Annual Report for 2018/19. The Council confirmed the Secretariat would retain the same budget for the financial year 2019/20.



Ministers with responsibility for Energy policy



Heads of the BIC Administrations



Summit commences



Family photograph of Ministers at the 33rd British-Irish Council Summit in Dublin

Summary from Secretariat on impact of Summit

Attending Health Ministers made a visit to an Inclusion Health Hub in the north-east Dublin inner city. This hub, the development of which was informed from insight gained from similar initiatives in other BIC Member Administrations, in turn provided Summit delegates with an example of a new holistic model for addressing a highly complex challenge faced by all eight of the administrations.

Dublin, 15 November 2019

The 33rd BIC Summit was hosted by the Irish Government. The heads of delegation were welcomed to Dublin by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD.

Twentieth Anniversary Year of the British-Irish Council

Ministers reflected that December 2019 would mark the 20th anniversary of the inaugural meeting of the British-Irish Council. Ministers agreed that twenty years on, the Council remained a valued strand of the Belfast – Good Friday Agreement, offering Ministers and officials regular opportunities to exchange information, discuss, consult and co-operate on matters of mutual interest within the respective competencies of the eight Member Administrations. Ministers agreed that the BIC continued to positively strengthen the links and relationships between the people of these islands.

Latest political developments

Ministers updated the Council on their activity in relation to the UK's departure from the EU, noting the revised exit date and the upcoming general election in the United Kingdom. They took the opportunity to discuss the latest domestic political developments across their jurisdictions and engaged on topics of mutual interest such as the economy and trade and ongoing relations with the EU.

The Council received an update on Northern Ireland and looked forward to the restoration of the devolved institutions. Ministers also discussed the importance of maintaining the constitutional and formal relationships across the United Kingdom and the Crown Dependencies.

Misuse of Substances

In advance of the Summit meeting, Ministers with particular responsibility for health policy, visited the North East Inner City Initiative in Dublin: a project which focuses on the transformation of the delivery of health services for drug users in the city. The health policy Ministers discussed the extent to which supporting and strengthening links, between the management of health and social initiatives and community policing, might offer long-term social and

economic benefits to communities. Ministers also had the opportunity to share experiences of initiatives within their own administrations and the potential relevance of these to the official engagement programme of the BIC Misuse of Substances work sector.



Meeting of Health Ministers



Summit meeting



Press conference of Dublin Summit

Early Years Policy

led by the Welsh Government, Cardiff, 04 October 2020

Summary from Secretariat on impact of Ministerial

Ministers attending the Early Years Policy Ministerial meeting acknowledged the value of working together across administrations as they sought to provide the best possible start in life for all children. The professionalisation of early years work; reducing disadvantage and the continuing need to invest in a range of services and programmes to impact positively on children and their families were important outcomes for the future of this policy area.

The British-Irish Council held its first standalone Early Years Policy Ministerial meeting hosted in T Hywel, Cardiff by the Welsh Government. The meeting was chaired by Julie Morgan AM, Deputy Minister for Health & Social Services in the Welsh Government. Deputy Minister Morgan welcomed Ministers and Officials from across the eight Member Administrations of BIC to Cardiff, emphasising the critical importance of successful early years policy to providing children with the best start in life.

The Irish Government was represented by Dr Katherine Zappone TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Scottish Government was represented by Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Children and Young People. The Isle of Man Government was represented by Hon. Graham Cregeen MHK, Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. The Government of Guernsey was represented by Deputy Rhian Tooley, Member of the Committee for Education, Sport and Culture. The Government of Jersey was represented by Senator Tracey Vallois, Minister of Education. Officials attended on behalf of the United Kingdom Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

Ministers discussed and reviewed the work sector report, 'Early Years – Sharing Policy and Practice Across the Administrations of the British-Irish Council', which outlined the breadth of the official engagement undertaken over recent years, and demonstrated the significant benefit gained by Members Administrations from collective participation in the BIC Early Years Policy work sector. Ministers agreed that the report should be made available on the BIC website for the benefit of interested stakeholders. The report can be viewed in the reports section on the British-Irish Council website: www.britishirishcouncil.org.

BIC Ministers also discussed the Future Work Programme of the work sector. Ministers acknowledged the challenges for the sector in the coming years and agreed that the focus should be on four main themes:

- the Early Years workforce with outcomes focusing on issues of recruitment and retention; qualifications and professional registration;
- narrowing the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged children with a focus on the policy approaches to secure such an outcome;
- the use of language, communication and early literacy skills in children's early years; and
- the quality agenda of the early years offer with an outcomes focus on the benefits of outdoor play and learning.

Ministers thanked the work sector officials in each of the Administrations for their active engagement in the preparation of the report and the briefing and looked forward to receiving regular updates on the progress. The Ministers endorsed the Forward Work Plan for the BIC Early Years Policy work sector and Deputy Minister Morgan closed the meeting, thanking all participants for their contributions to the discussion.



Early Years Family Photo

Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages

led by the Welsh Government, Isle of Man, 22 November 2019



Family photograph of Ministers at the Ministerial meeting in the Isle of Man

Summary from Secretariat on impact of Ministerial

This Ministerial was hosted to coincide with UNESCO's 2019 The Year of Indigenous Languages, a vital global acknowledgment of the importance played by IML languages. The Isle of Man was able to showcase the impressive revival of the Manx language and this story was a core element of the Ministerial programme. Ministers also reflected on the need to continue to collaborate and improve the collective support of our IML languages, and it was noted that this spirit of mutual support pre-dates the Council. It was recalled that the Irish Folklore Commission had been sent to the Island in 1948 by the then Taoiseach Éamonn de Valera, to make recordings of the last native Manx speakers. These recordings are available to be accessed by all via Manx National Heritage and are seen as one of the most significant items of historical interest on the Isle of Man today.

The British-Irish Council Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used (IML) Languages work sector held its fifth Ministerial meeting, hosted by the Isle of Man Government. Ministers were welcomed by Graham Cregeen MHK, Minister for Education, Sport and Culture on behalf of the Isle of Man Government. The IML Languages work sector is led by the Welsh Government and has proved a constructive and unique forum for facilitating evidence exchange and practical collaboration since it was established. The meeting focused on three principal topics: Adult Learning of IML languages; Workforce Planning; and Social use of IML languages, including through the arts and digital technology.

The meeting was chaired by Eluned Morgan AM, Minister for International Relations and Welsh Language in the Welsh Government. The Isle of Man Government was represented by Graham Cregeen MHK, Minister for Education, Sport and Culture. The Irish Government was represented by Seán Kyne TD, Government Chief Whip and Minister of State with responsibility for the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands. The Scottish Government was represented by Kate Forbes MSP, Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy. The Jersey Government was represented by Deputy Montfort Tadier, Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture. The Government of Guernsey was represented by Deputy Rhian Tooley, Member of the Committee for Education, Sport & Culture.

Ministers discussed the report arising from the conference 'Adult Learning of IML languages' which took place on 8/9 March 2018 in Belfast. The focus was primarily on adult learning of IML languages and links with community, workplace and wider society which straddled the three topics of the work sector. In particular, speakers addressed issues such as language learning outside of traditional classroom settings and the role of language in building community cohesion. Approximately 75 delegates and speakers from across the eight BIC Member Administrations attended the event, representing a cross section of the public and community sectors as well as academia.

Ministers noted the report of the conference and agreed to make the report available for public reference. The report of the conference can be viewed in the reports section on the British-Irish Council website: www.britishirishcouncil.org.

Ministers also received a presentation from Phil Gawne on behalf of Jeebin, the Manx Language Network. The presentation outlined the history of the Manx language and celebrated the work of those involved in its remarkable resurgence.

UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages, 2019

The United Nations declared 2019 The Year of Indigenous Languages (IY2019) "in order to raise awareness of our languages, not only to benefit the people who speak these languages, but also for others to appreciate the important contribution they make to our world's rich cultural diversity". It was noted that an important part of the IML work sector's remit is to share best practice, to learn from one another and to celebrate the varied and diverse languages used on these islands. Ministers highlighted a number of activities that have been undertaken by the Member Administrations to partake in this initiative and it has served as a good foundation for more progress on supporting IML languages in the future.



Phil Gawne presentation on revival of the Manx Language

Future work

Ministers agreed that the sixth Ministerial meeting will be hosted by Jersey. In addition to the commitments outlined above, Ministers considered proposals for the future work programme of the IML languages work sector.

Noting the primary importance of facilitating the use of IML languages in social settings, they agreed that promoting the use of IML languages should become a standing item of focus for the work sector. They concluded that the work sector should additionally focus on:-

- Social use of language (standing item);
- Early Years; and,
- Infrastructure/Technology/Economic Impact

The Ministers agreed that these policy areas were worthy and highly interesting work topics and endorsed them as the basis of a future work area subject to agreement by the Council at the next Summit. Once formally approved by the Council, the work sector will report back on progress to the next meeting of IML Languages Ministers.



Pre-meeting networking



Meeting underway

BIC Housing/Collaborative Spatial Planning Symposium

Belfast, 29 November, 2019



Symposium launched by the Permanent Secretaries of Northern Ireland's Departments for Infrastructure and Communities.

Summary from Secretariat on impact of Symposium

This was the first joint sectoral event held within the Council framework, the Symposium was organised by 2 work sectors and drew upon the reports drafted by a third, the now-defunct Demography work sector which was ably chaired by the Scottish Government. A presentation by the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland gave particular insight into the challenges faced by this increasingly large section of society and how we can address these via policy innovation. The subsequent Covid-19 pandemic highlights that older population are a particularly vulnerable cohort and the Secretariat will continue to investigate how the Council can provide a platform to share ideas on how to support this sector of our shared populations.

The Housing work sector, in conjunction with the Collaborative Spatial Planning work sector, staged a Symposium event in Belfast on 29 November 2019 to consider how policy professionals might address some of the key spatial planning and housing challenges which we will encounter in the period to 2040. The Northern Ireland Executive Departments for Communities and Infrastructure in conjunction with the Council organised this Symposium with the title of 'Creating an Inclusive Future Vision for our Ageing Populations'. Over a hundred policy professionals, academics, statutory bodies and external stakeholders from across the eight BIC Member Administrations joined together to collectively address key challenges which might help to better shape future policy making. Presentations, workshop discussions and debate added further context and fed useful insights to our policy makers and the event also drew upon reports generated by the Demography work sector which was wound down in late 2016.

It is planned that outcomes from this Symposium will aid the formulation of future work plans for both the Housing and Collaborative Spatial Planning work sectors, which will be presented at a joint Ministerial level meeting following the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive.



BIC Symposium: Supporting social enterprises across the BIC Administrations

Birmingham, 29/30 January 2020

Summary from Secretariat on impact of Symposium

In addition to the policy exchanges highlighted below, this event was also designed to highlight how the social enterprise sector can engage with the public sector as a service provider: all venues and catering were provided by social enterprises, highlighting the ability of this sector to deliver the quality necessary for public procurement. This event brought together social enterprises, policy makers and other key stakeholders from this sector from across all 8 of the BIC Member Administrations.

The Social Inclusion work sector organised the Symposium on supporting social enterprises across the BIC administrations on 29/30 January 2020 in Birmingham. The event was hosted by the Secretariat with extensive support by the UK's Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). This event was attended by over 60 stakeholders from all eight BIC Member Administrations who were encouraged to think about how we as individuals, as a society and as professional policy makers can address policy challenges and better shape the future development of this important sector. By bringing together external stakeholders from across the eight administrations, further context and useful insights can be fed to the BIC Social Inclusion work sector to assist in their identification of high potential areas for collaboration across BIC administrations.

On the afternoon of Wednesday 29 January, a walking tour was organised through the Digbeth area, which is a major localised centre for social enterprises in Birmingham. The morning sessions set out the wider context of the social enterprise sector, outlining the main high level challenges and issues that need to be addressed, followed by a Q&A discussion before lunch. This section of the programme provided attendees with useful contextual information to better inform participation in the afternoon workshop sessions. Anonymised feedback from the afternoon

workshops will be presented to relevant policy Ministers for their consideration at the next Ministerial meeting of the BIC Social Inclusion work sector.

During lunch on Thursday 30 January, a social enterprise marketplace was organised with around a dozen Birmingham based social enterprises for those who were not able to attend the walking tour. Both initiatives allowed attendees an opportunity to engage with representatives of local social enterprises on their work and experiences.



Collaborative Spatial Planning

Led by Northern Ireland Executive

The Collaborative Spatial Planning (CSP) work sector held a joint meeting with the Housing work sector in Guernsey during May 2019, in addition to a standalone meeting of the work sector in November 2019 prior to the joint Collaborative Spatial Planning/Housing work sector Symposium held in Belfast. The Symposium focussed on the subject of 'Creating an Inclusive Future Vision for our Ageing Populations'. The Symposium enabled key stakeholders to both speak and lead workshops. Due to the close engagement between the Housing and CSP work sectors and reforming of the Northern Ireland Executive, it is envisaged that a joint Ministerial meeting would be held later in 2020. The work sector was due to meet in March 2020 in Jersey, however, due to the Covid19 pandemic this meeting was cancelled.

Creative Industries

Led by Government of Jersey

The Creative Industries work sector held a meeting in Cardiff in June 2019 and in Glasgow in October 2019. Both of these visits by the group involved interesting and engaging insights into the work of the creative industries sector being undertaken in both Wales and Scotland. A teleconference meeting was also held in December 2019. The work sector continues to deliver on its current work programme, focusing on the role of education in encouraging the acquisition of skills relevant to the creative industries: equality, diversity and inclusion in the industries; and programmes to engage new audiences in the creative (cultural) industries.

The group have ensured that the focus of site visits link directly with their work plan. They have continued to discuss forging tangible links with one or more of the other work sectors, including the Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages (IML) work sector. An update was given to Ministers on its work via a written submission during September 2019, and received some constructive feedback from Ministers. The group plan to hold a sectoral Ministerial meeting in early 2021 and were due to undertake a visit to the Wakefield Production Park in March 2020 to be hosted by the UK Government. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this visit and meeting was postponed. It is hoped to re-schedule this visit at a future date.

Digital Inclusion

Led by Isle of Man Government

The work sector met in London in June 2019 to discuss the latest developments in online safety and visited an organisation providing digital skills training to the most excluded members of their community. Following this meeting, they held a teleconference in July 2019 to finalise the wording of their revised forward work plan to include a focus on Online Safety, as agreed by Ministers at the Isle of Man Summit in November 2018. The forward work plan was approved by the Council at the November 2019 Summit in Dublin. The work sector met in October 2019 in Jersey where they attended a number of site visits to organisations leading in digital skills training, and discussions included the development of a BIC Digital Inclusion work sector infographic detailing ways to stay safe online. This was launched on Safer Internet Day 2020, along with a guide of useful links on the BIC Digital Inclusion webpage to organisations across the BIC administrations, providing helpful information to stay safe online. A meeting was held in Cardiff in February 2020 to continue discussing and sharing best practice on the latest developments in online safety. The group attended a local school to hear more about the Digital Heroes programme, and had opportunity to speak with pupils who participated in the programme. The work sector will be developing two further infographics in 2020 and are working towards a Ministerial in 2021.

Early Years Policy

Led by the Welsh Government

Officials of the Early Years Policy work sector held teleconferences in April and September 2019 and a face to face meeting in Guernsey in June 2019 to prepare for a Ministerial meeting in October 2019. At the Guernsey meeting there was a presentation on the 'Early Years Roadmap' - the Guernsey vision across government for early years childcare. The Early Years Policy Ministerial meeting which was held in Cardiff in October 2019 was successful and is reported on elsewhere in this Annual Report. Eager to realise the outcomes of the approved work plan, officials were hosted by the Irish Government in February 2020 to a session on the Irish 'First Five' Childcare strategy. This was followed up in March 2020 when the Scottish Government and their partners Inspire Scotland showcased the opportunities for Outdoor Play & Learning as part of the strong foundations in place for children and families to thrive.

Energy

Led by Scottish and UK Governments

The work sector met in April 2019 to continue work on a discussion paper that was then presented to Ministers at the June 2019 Summit in Manchester. The focus of the paper was Smart Energy and, following the Summit, the work sector held a teleconference in August 2019 to reflect on the Ministers' discussion, including the request by the Guernsey Government to explore options for collaborative work on the topic of green finance. The work sector held an official meeting in September 2019 in Orkney, hosted by the Scottish Government, where the focus was on Local Energy and included a variety of presentations and site visits on the subject. The work sector also discussed the common ambition across the BIC Member Administrations to decarbonise their economies, as highlighted by Ministers at the Manchester Summit, and amended their forward work plan to acknowledge this aim and updated the programme for official engagement throughout 2020. This was approved by the Council at the November 2019 Summit in Dublin. The work sector met in the Isle of Man in March 2020 to discuss shared net zero emissions targets, cooperation on offshore wind generation and the latest updates in Energy policy across the Member Administrations. They received presentations from Manx Utilities on their latest strategy, roll-out of SMART meters, SMART EV charging and their ongoing heat pump trial, and also had the opportunity to tour a renewable technologies centre. The work sector will be meeting next in October 2020 in Jersey and will be working towards a Ministerial in 2021.

Environment

Led by UK Government

The Environment work sector met in London in May 2019, held a teleconference meeting in September 2019 and a further visit and meeting in Belfast in December 2019. The work sector sub groups of Marine Litter, Marine Environment and Climate Adaptation have held a number of teleconference meetings during this reporting period and signed off the terms of reference for each sub group. The work sector held an Invasive Non-Native Species Seminar in Cardiff in January 2020. The Seminar included key officials and stakeholders and involved workshops and presentations. The work sector had been planning for a Climate Adaptation Symposium that would have been convened in the lead-up to the Environment Ministerial meeting that was planned to be held in Jersey in May 2020. However, due to the Covid 19 pandemic

the Climate Adaptation Symposium planned for April in Dublin, and the BIC Environment work sector Ministerial meeting which the group have been working towards have both been postponed. The work sector will look to re-schedule both of these events at a future date.

Housing

Led by Northern Ireland Executive

Preparing a new Work Plan has been one of the key activities of the Housing work sector during this reporting period, alongside joint work with the Collaborative Spatial Planning work sector, delivering a symposium in Belfast on 29 November 2019 (reported on elsewhere in this Annual Report) which considered how policy professionals might address some of the key spatial planning and housing challenges in the period up to 2040. Outcomes from this Symposium will be presented at a future Joint Ministerial meeting. Housing meetings and joint meetings with the CSP work sector were held in May 2019 hosted by the Guernsey Government, in Belfast in November 2019 hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive Department for Communities and in addition a Housing Teleconference in February 2020.

IML Languages

Led by the Welsh Government

The Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages (IML) work sector held a teleconference meeting in June 2019, and met for a visit and meeting in Cardiff in October 2019. The work sector visited various locations including: (i) a Welsh language latecomers immersion centre at Ysgol Gymraeg Glan Ceubal, Gabalfa (where children who enter Welsh-medium education later than reception year learn Welsh intensively in order to enter mainstream provision), (ii) Aelwyd Bro Taf (a club for children and young adults to learn the traditional arts of dance, stepping, cerdd dant and song through the medium of Welsh) and (iii) Urdd Gobaith Cymru (National Voluntary Youth Organisation and Welsh language youth movement with over 55,000 members between the ages of 8 - 25 that provides opportunities through the medium of Welsh for children and young adults to enable them to make positive contributions to their communities). Presentations also included discussions about language technology, corpus and marketing. The work sector held their Ministerial meeting in November 2019 on the Isle of Man where Ministers reviewed the group's work and agreed their next forward work plan with a focus on supporting (i) the Social use of Language (Broadcasting / Social Media), (ii) Early Years and (iii) Infrastructure / Technology / Economic

Impact. Ministers requested that a cultural event should take place during 2020 to celebrate the use of minority languages within the BIC administrations. The group also worked together to produce a playlist to celebrate the European Day of Languages which took place in September 2019 <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3pCrzaOZtcvqYDCJgh5hBt?si=AGkPFqKeTT6W-HruqcXtOQ>. The group was due to meet in Guernsey in March 2020, however due to inclement weather, the group held a productive teleconference meeting instead with all group members.

Misuse of Substances *Led by Irish Government*

The work sector collaborated extensively throughout 2019 to finalise papers in relation to two themes, namely financial mechanisms to reduce the consumption of alcohol and measuring the effectiveness of addiction services and harm reduction. This work assisted in completing essential steps from the work plan, and endowed the work sector with a vital learning and sharing experience, which will assist in future developments in minimum unit pricing, and the monitoring and evaluation of drug services.

Work sector officials were hosted by the Government of Jersey in June 2019. They discussed the two thematic papers and administrations agreed on details which enabled their completion. They also received a presentation on 'Local Perspectives on Drug and Alcohol misuse'. The Northern Ireland Executive Department of Health hosted a meeting in Belfast in September 2019. During this visit officials attended the Belfast Inclusion Health Service to learn about health interventions provided for people who were homeless. Officials also received presentations on initiatives to reduce the misuse of prescription drugs and therapeutic treatment and support to individuals aged 50 plus who are concerned about their alcohol use.

A meeting of health ministers to discuss health and social initiatives to combat substance misuse took place at the Dublin BIC Summit in November. The Ministers considered a paper prepared by the Irish Government entitled, "Transforming the delivery of health services for people who use drugs in Dublin city: the North East Inner City Initiative". In advance of the meeting, Ministers visited the Inclusion Health Hub in Dublin's north east inner city to view first-hand the new services being developed for people who use drugs. The conclusions from the Ministerial meeting were presented to the Summit meeting of the heads of administrations.

Social Inclusion *Led by the Scottish & Welsh Governments*

The work sector met in the Isle of Man in May 2019 to finalise their forward work plan, and they had the opportunity to meet with and learn from a number of social enterprises, as well as discussing the successes that can be achieved for the social enterprise sector through a collaborative approach across the administrations. The forward work plan was approved by the Council at the June 2019 Summit in Manchester. The work sector then met in Glasgow in September 2019 to engage in planning the programme for their Social Inclusion Symposium in Birmingham in January 2020, and to attend a number of site visits to local social enterprises. The work sector were invited to attend the Community Enterprise in Scotland (CEIS) Social Enterprise Policy and Practice Conference which included the launch of their 2019 Census with a plenary discussion, and presentations from a variety of stakeholders.

The work sector hosted their Symposium in Birmingham in January 2020 on supporting social enterprises across the BIC administrations which saw 60 stakeholders and policy makers from all Member Administrations come together to hear presentations, discuss a wide variety of topics, and to participate in workshops. The Symposium looked at promoting collaboration, developing ambassadors, building and sustaining the sector for the future, and raising the profile of social enterprises. The work sector gathered information from stakeholders which was discussed at an official meeting in Jersey in February 2020 to determine the future work of the group, and they also attended a number of site visits.

Transport *Led by Northern Ireland Executive*

The past year has been one of transition for the Transport work sector as the group has sought to re-focus its activities to develop a work programme from which all administrations can derive benefit. With the assistance of the BIC Coordinators a number of teleconferences have been held with officials of each Administration and two topics for collaboration namely climate change & decarbonisation and inter-administration connectivity have been suggested as worthy of examination. Initially the proposed focus will be on climate change and decarbonisation and a work plan is being developed based on 3 areas: modal shift; decarbonisation of public sector vehicles; and decarbonisation of the freight fleet. It is planned to present a draft work plan to a forthcoming Ministerial meeting for discussion and approval.

Communications

As part of the BIC Communications Strategy agreed in 2015, the Secretariat undertook to implement a series of actions designed to:

- Raise awareness of the Council and its activity
- Demonstrate the value of the Council
- Identify learning and opportunities for collaboration and information sharing

The Secretariat organised a series of outreach events/Symposiums in this report period. These events allowed the public and external stakeholders to engage in the activities of the Council, growing their knowledge and appreciation for the work of the British-Irish Council.

Considerable work has been undertaken into growing the social media presence of the BIC Secretariat and to launch a new website that would facilitate these goals.

Social Media presence

Through coordinated efforts with Member

Administrations, third-party stakeholders and direct public interactions, 2019/20 saw a consistent engagement in the Secretariat's social media presence. The number of followers of the Secretariat Twitter account increased by 383 in this period. The account was visited 10,620 times and there were a total of 443,664 tweet impressions arising from Secretariat activity on the platform. The Secretariat will continue to work with administrations to ensure coordinated messaging in advance of all major BIC Summits and events.

British-Irish Council website

In 2019/20, the BIC website was visited by 1,323 unique visitors in total. Analysis shows that the main usage of the website revolved around the Summits in June and November 2019. The Secretariat will continue to drive traffic to the website via social media and press engagement.

www.britishirishcouncil.org

New initiatives

The Secretariat and work sectors of the Council have collaborated on a number of new communications initiatives this year. Officials from all eight BIC administrations collaborated on Safer Internet Day 2020, a collective online safety campaign, sharing standardised info and linking to the Digital Inclusion work sector page on the website.

The active IML work sector also created a landing page on the website, providing over 100 links to free online language resources to help people learn any of the indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages native to these islands. The group also worked together to produce a playlist of various BIC IML language songs to celebrate the European Day of Languages which took place in September 2019.

In response to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, the Secretariat has supported a move towards virtual working through teleconferences, video conferences and facilitated remote working through the use of platforms like Slack. We are currently trialling webinars and other remote events which will allow us to continue working and engaging with key stakeholders and continue to inform and engage with the general public on topics linked to Covid-19, climate change and other complicated policy challenges.

Be Safe, Be Included, Be Connected

Top Tip 1. Always install the latest updates as they help to keep your device secure.



Top Tip 2. Use three random words to create a strong and memorable password. Use numbers and symbols to increase security

Get Online - Be Safe

Top Tip 3. Take care with what you share online and think about who can see it.



Top Tip 4. Save your important information in more than one place.

As part of the 2006 St Andrew's Agreement, the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of Ireland agreed 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, if members agree'. Subsequently, the Council made a decision to create a standing Secretariat in Edinburgh which was formally established in January 2012.

The Secretariat currently comprises six full-time staff on assignment from the Council's Member Administrations.

The Secretariat running costs for the financial year April 2019 to March 2020 were £115,945.49. These costs are shared between the eight Member Administrations using an agreed set formula. With the exception of the Secretariat office manager, costs for individual staff are met by their parent administration as they are on loan to the Secretariat. Funding for Summits and Ministerial meetings is met by the host Member Administration.



Firth of Forth bridges

Contact

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

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You can also follow BIC on Twitter & Flickr:
twitter.com/BICSecretariat
<https://flic.kr/ps/2ft2zH>

8 Member Administrations



The British-Irish Council

The BIC is one of the three institutions established as part of the Multi-Party Agreement reached in Belfast in 1998 representing the east-west dimension of relations in these islands.

It is a unique forum for engagement on matters of mutual interest.

The permanent BIC Secretariat was established in Edinburgh in January 2012 staffed by officials from BIC member administrations.

11 Work Sectors



63 Official Meetings

2019
 34 virtual meetings
 29 physical meetings

2 Ministerial Meetings

2019
 Early Years Policy,
 Indigenous & Minority Languages



32 Summits

The Council held its inaugural meeting in December 1999, since then there have been over 30 Summits

2 Heads of Administration Summits



4 BIC Public events / Symposiums

The British-Irish Council was established on 2 December 1999 on the entry into force of the British–Irish Agreement which was signed by the UK and Irish Governments as part of the agreement reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations in Belfast on 10th April 1998, hereafter referred to as the “Multi-Party Agreement”.

The text of the Agreement establishing the British-Irish Council can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf

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

The aim of the British-Irish Council as set out in the Multi-Party 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 matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant administrations.

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 represented by the appropriate Minister. The 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.

