



British-Irish COUNCIL

Annual Report 2015



8 Member Administrations

Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, Ireland, United Kingdom, Wales, Guernsey, Jersey

12 Work Sectors

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On behalf of the British-Irish Council, the Secretariat is pleased to present the Annual Report for 2015.

The highlights of this year’s activities were the Summits hosted by the Irish and UK Governments, two Ministerial meetings in Edinburgh and one in Jersey, and a seminar on IML Languages, which was held in Dublin.

Since its establishment, the Council has provided a unique framework within which Governments and Administrations across these islands can meet and cooperate through discussion, information-sharing and collaboration. It is a practical forum where representatives of the Member Administrations come together regularly to address issues of mutual interest.

People living across the BIC Administrations face many similar challenges in the social and economic issues which affect their daily lives. The Governments and Administrations who serve the peoples of these islands have much to learn from each other’s experiences in addressing these challenges. We are proud to play our part in this exciting work.

This year a review of the twelve work sectors was carried out. Feedback from policy makers and practitioners was overwhelmingly positive on the value of the work sectors, however, we are conscious of the need for the work of the Council to evolve to ensure continued relevance and topicality.

Looking ahead to 2016, we will be working closely with Member Administration officials to deliver a review of the overall operation of the Council. It is timely, sixteen years on from its establishment, to consider our progress to date and the future direction of the Council so we can continue to deliver for our citizens and stakeholders. Summits in Scotland and Wales in 2016 will progress this reform agenda.

We will also be undertaking a review of our communications strategy to ensure that the values of transparency and accountability are fully embedded in our work, and that the valuable tangible outcomes delivered by work sectors are communicated effectively.

The British-Irish Council (BIC) Secretariat is staffed by seconded officials from member administrations and in 2015 new colleagues joined from the UK and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive. Our thanks to departing colleagues, including Irish and UK Joint Heads Ciarán Byrne and Jeremy Martin, and our Office Manager Gill Waugh (Scottish Government), for their work in establishing the Secretariat and ensuring its successful operation since 2012.



BIC Secretariat Joint Heads - Deirdre Ní Fhallúin (l) and Isabel Conway (r)



British-Irish Council Summit – Dublin, 19th June 2015

In June 2015 the 24th British-Irish Council Summit was hosted by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD on behalf of the Irish Government at Dublin Castle. This was the fourth Summit hosted by the Irish Government since the Council was established.

Economic Discussion

At the meeting, which was attended by Leaders and Ministers from all eight Administrations, the Council discussed the continuing improving economic situation in Member Administrations, recognising the interdependence and links between their economies. The Council also reviewed the latest youth employment statistics across the Administrations and welcomed the further progress being made in this important area.

Misuse of Alcohol

The Misuse of Substances work sector presented a collaborative paper to the Council on the misuse of alcohol, focusing on the economic and social implications of alcohol abuse and the various measures planned to tackle the problem of excessive alcohol consumption.

Responding to the paper from the Misuse of Substances work sector, the Council had a detailed discussion on the significant harm being caused by alcohol to individuals, families and society. The Council agreed that continuing action was required across Member Administrations to protect the health and well-being of the wider public, and especially children, from alcohol misuse.

There was also an exchange of views and information on how Member Administrations are handling issues such as marketing and advertising, minimum pricing and licensing reform.

Main picture above - from left to right - 1 Chief Minister, Hon Allan Bell MHK, Isle of Man Government. 2 Chief Minister, Senator Ian Gorst, Government of Jersey. 3 First Minister, Rt Hon Carwyn Jones, Welsh Government. 4 First Minister, Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Scottish Government. 5 An Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny TD, Irish Government. 6 Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Rt Hon Phillip Hammond MP, UK Government 7 First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson MLA, Northern Ireland Executive. 8 deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MLA, Northern Ireland Executive. 9 Chief Minister, Deputy Jonathan Le Tocq, Government of Guernsey.



Dublin Castle

Review of Future Direction & Working of the BIC

All Member Administrations also took the opportunity of the Summit meeting to reaffirm their commitment to the Council and to its key principle of facilitating the development of mutually beneficial relationships between these islands.

Members recognised the many positive achievements of the Council to date and agreed that it was timely to update its working to ensure it best reflects the shared priorities of the Member Administrations. They requested that officials, working closely with the Secretariat, review the work sectors' activities and report back on progress at the London Summit, which followed in November 2015.

‘Members recognised the many positive achievements of the Council to date..’

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British-Irish Council Summit – London, 27th November 2015

The British-Irish Council held its 25th Summit meeting in November 2015, hosted by the UK Government in London. This was the fourth BIC Summit to take place in London. The heads of delegation were welcomed to Lancaster House by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, on behalf of the UK Government.

Council Members took the opportunity to welcome the agreement published on 17th November, A Fresh Start: the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan, following ten weeks of cross party talks involving the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK and Irish Governments.

Domestic Resettlement of Refugees

At the Summit the Council reflected on the effects of the conflict in Syria and the refugee situation in the Middle East and the impact this was having within Europe. It noted the efforts across the eight BIC Member Administrations and internationally to help those refugees. Specifically, Ministers noted the value of joint working and cooperation between Member Administrations on the domestic resettlement of refugees.

Economic Discussion

The Council discussed the economic situation across the Member Administrations and considered the continued improvements in their respective Administrations. All administrations reaffirmed the value of the Council's discussions in this matter. The Council also reviewed the latest youth employment statistics across the Member Administrations and they welcomed the progress in this area.

BIC Work Sectors

The Council discussed the twelve BIC work sectors and noted the positive achievements since the last Summit took place in June 2015. This included Ministerial meetings held by the Creative Industries and Housing work sectors.

Main picture above - from left to right - 1 Chief Minister, Deputy Jonathan Le Tocq, Government of Guernsey. 2 Chief Minister, Hon Allan Bell MHK, Isle of Man. 3 deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness MLA, Northern Ireland Executive. 4 Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, UK Government. 5 An Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny TD, Irish Government. 6 First Minister, Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Scottish Government. 7 First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson MLA, Northern Ireland Executive. 8 Chief Minister, Senator Ian Gorst, Government of Jersey.

All Member Administrations reaffirmed the importance they attach to the British-Irish Council especially through the valued work undertaken by the work sectors. The Council agreed various principles (within the parameters set out in Strand 3 of the 1998 Agreement) to reinforce the sectors' work and ensure BIC continues to deliver value for all Member Administrations.

Environment:

Protecting our Natural Capital and Resources

The BIC Environment work sector presented a collaborative paper on Natural Capital and resources. The paper explored the challenge of safeguarding Natural Capital with a particular focus on pollinators, and discussed the value of a strategic and collaborative approach.

Responding to the paper, the Council had a detailed discussion on the need for continued collaboration to attain maximum impact, especially given the cross-border implications of the decline of Natural Capital. Member Administrations discussed the role of a natural capital framework in deepening understanding of the value of the environment and managing it better. The Council recognised that combining resources across BIC Administrations in this matter also allows for valuable efficiency gains.

The Council agreed that Member Administrations would work together to further their knowledge and understanding of Natural Capital and the benefits it provides.

BIC Secretariat

The Council agreed a new Secretariat Business Plan for the period 2015-18.



Ministers in discussion at the London Summit



Ministerial Meeting - Edinburgh, 11th March 2015 Social Inclusion (Led by Scottish and Welsh Governments)

In March the Social Inclusion work sector held its sixth Ministerial meeting hosted by the Scottish Government at St. Andrew’s House, Edinburgh. At the meeting Ministers adopted a new report *Spend to Save – Innovative Approaches to Preventative Spend* which had been prepared by officials in the eight Member Administrations.

In March 2012, Ministers had agreed that preventative spend, in particular in the context of an ageing population, should be the focus of the work programme for the Social Inclusion work sector. At their meeting in March Ministers discussed and reviewed the report prepared by Social Inclusion officials who visited all eight Administrations to research the different approaches to tackling this key generational issue.

They noted the many different, creative and community-based approaches to supporting older people across these islands. The evidence gathered in the report provided valuable and practical examples of ways to optimise the independence of older people and allow them to remain

in a place they can call home, in a community they feel connected to, for as long as possible.

Ministers thanked the many voluntary and community organisations in each of the Administrations for their active engagement with officials in the preparation of the report. Ministers commended the report as a rich contribution to the shared learning at the heart of the work of the Council.

The full report is available on the BIC website:
www.britishirishcouncil.org/areas-work/social-inclusion

Main picture above - Ministerial discussion in Edinburgh chaired by Shona Robison MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, Scottish Government and Mark Drakeford AM Minister for Health and Social Services, Welsh Government.

Ministers confirmed their interest in the issue of Carers and how they can become socially isolated as the new focus of work sector activity. They tasked officials, working closely with the BIC Secretariat, to begin consideration of how best Member Administrations can support carers by looking at best practice, new and creative policy responses and community actions across the eight Administrations.





Ministerial Meeting - Jersey, 30th October 2015 Creative Industries (Led by Government of Jersey)

The first British-Irish Council Creative Industries Ministerial meeting was held at the Jersey Museum in October 2015. The delegates were welcomed to the Island on behalf of the Government of Jersey by the Minister for Economic Development, Senator Lyndon Farnham. The meeting was hosted by Assistant Economic Development Minister, Deputy Murray Norton, who leads on the Culture portfolio.

The meeting discussed how the skills capacity of the creative industries can be developed; it also considered examples of creative collaboration and the impact of the creative industries on the wider economy.

After receiving a presentation from the Jersey Arts Trust, Ministers then discussed and welcomed the report *A Creative Collaboration: Creative Industries Sector Report 2015* which sets out examples of best practice across all of the BIC member administrations in encouraging growth and demonstrates ways in which governments have provided support to the sector.

The report focuses on the themes of:

- Developing the skills capacity of the creative industries;
- Creative collaboration; and
- The impact of the creative industries on the wider economy.

Ministers noted that the work sector had identified a range of successful initiatives to develop skills capacity for the sector including: careers guidance linked with work placement opportunities; events for students which apply creative skills in the workplace; educational opportunities associated with film production; online guidance; and a range of programmes to impart creative skills both traditional and digital, often linked to the development of allied business skills.

Ministers also noted instances of creative collaboration within the industries encouraged by a range of different approaches taken by governments. Some have involved the provision of specific funding initiatives to stimulate creative activity while others have involved bringing creative practitioners together, either through cluster groups or by creating specific places or events intended to promote direct exchanges of ideas and practice.

Main picture above - from left to right - 1 Minister for Commerce and Employment, Deputy Kevin Stewart, Government of Guernsey. 2 Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, MSP, Scottish Government. 3 Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, Edwina Hart, AM, Welsh Government. 4 Minister for Economic Development, The Honourable Laurence Skelly, MHK, Isle of Man Government. 5 Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Deputy Murray Norton, Government of Guernsey. 6 Director General, Sarah Healey, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, UK Government. 7 Director, Culture Ireland, Christine Sisk, Irish Government.

Ministers had a wide-ranging discussion on the common challenges and future direction of the work sector and asked that work be carried out on:

- Identification of data which could be used across BIC Member Administrations to determine the financial and well-being benefits of the creative sectors, including details of the number of employees in each industry and an evaluation of that sector's contribution to the economy;

- Engaging with industry to identify how schools, colleges and industry can collaborate to ensure that skills are best aligned with the needs of industry and how industry can contribute to the transition from training into paid employment;
- Examining the links between grassroots culture and the creative industries and measures to safeguard individuals and infrastructure to preserve lifelong involvement in cultural activity.

The full report is available on the BIC website: www.britishirishcouncil.org/areas-work/creative-industries





Ministerial Meeting - Edinburgh, 4th November 2015 Housing (Led by Northern Ireland Executive)

The fourth BIC Housing Ministerial meeting was hosted by Margaret Burgess, MSP, Minister for Housing and Welfare on behalf of the Scottish Government in Edinburgh.

The Housing work sector is led by the Northern Ireland Executive and Minister for Social Development, Mervyn Storey, MLA chaired the meeting which focused on innovative policy interventions to fund housing initiatives.

Ministers received a presentation on the range of policy interventions being adopted across all Member Administrations to fund housing provision.

Ministers discussed housing policy across their respective jurisdictions and noted the significant impact which the global economic downturn had had on the housing market and on the delivery of housing across all BIC administrations. They reflected on developments which meant that governments had faced significantly reduced capital budgets and a rapidly contracted development industry at the same time as demand outstripped supply. This combination of factors was having an adverse effect on the number of new social and affordable homes

being built in the rental and private rental sectors, as well as the number of homes coming to the market for private sale.

Ministers noted that governments across the Member Administrations had developed a range of policies to address this unprecedented situation and discussed the diverse and innovative solutions which had been developed to address the unique difficulties faced by each. They also considered the impact of these approaches on housing providers (public, voluntary or private) and their ability to access new and alternative funding mechanisms.

Main picture above - Ministerial discussion in Edinburgh chaired by Mervyn Storey, MLA, Minister for Social Development, Northern Ireland Executive.

Ministers also received a presentation from Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association on Partnership Working which set out how the sector in Scotland has delivered by developing the relationship between the Scottish Government, the Local Authority, housing associations and stakeholders to deliver projects on the ground.

The productive discussion highlighted a number of areas where the work sector could focus its activity. Specifically, Ministers requested that Member Administrations explore the possibility of a common set of definitions which will enable collection and collation of common datasets to facilitate benchmarking. Ministers further tasked the group to examine how housing policy can continue to

innovate to deliver increased housing supply through alternative funding mechanisms and collaborative relationships, as well as housing policy's role in delivering wider regeneration and social value goals such as inclusive communities, economic development and social enterprise. Finally, they asked that officials look to provide a full report on the impact and future of innovative policy interventions to increase housing supply and an initial report on the possible role housing policy can fulfil in delivering wider government regeneration and social value goals.

‘Ministers asked the group to examine how housing policy can continue to innovate to deliver increased housing supply through alternative funding mechanisms and collaborative relationships’



Members of the Housing work sector visiting a social housing development in Guernsey, September 2015.



Promoting Our Languages Through Technology – Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages Conference, Dublin, 9-10th November 2015 (Led by Welsh Government)

On 9-10th November 2015, the Irish Government hosted BIC's Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used (IML) Languages conference on Promoting Our Languages Through Technology in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. The conference, opened by Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Joe McHugh TD, provided an opportunity, for those working in both the areas of language promotion and in the field of language technology to demonstrate how technology can be used to promote preservation, engagement and the use of each of the IML languages across these islands. Presentations were given by representatives of many of the language groups and bodies across the islands.

In total, 86 delegates attended over the one and a half day event, with representation from each BIC Member Administration as well as USA and Canada. On the first day, sessions focused on current research and development in the area of language technology. Participants highlighted the important role technology plays in making language learning resources accessible to learners and in bringing geographically dispersed linguistic communities together. On the second day, the conference focused on how technology can be used to normalise the use of IML languages in our respective societies, where English is the predominant and easy 'default' language.

A report on the outcome of the conference will be presented to BIC Ministers at their next meeting including details of the common themes: the need for closer collaboration; cross-language sharing and projects; the need to involve SMEs and engage with multi-nationals; development of open source technology/open source licenses; greater use of social media; a dedicated forum for language promoters and technologists to exchange ideas; corporate social responsibility especially from multi-nationals; greater certainty over funding and the need for joint funding proposals.

The work sector helps to identify and share best practice across the member administrations and amongst indigenous, minority and lesser-Used (IML) language communities within BIC Member Administrations.

In 2015 the work sector met three times, most recently in Truro, Cornwall in September where officials discussed the link between IML languages and the economy, as well as an in-depth presentation on proposals for a new strategy for the promotion of Cornish. The group also met with practitioners involved with developing Cornish language learning provision for all ages.

BIC works across twelve work sectors: Collaborative Spatial Planning; Creative Industries; Demography; Digital Inclusion; Early Years; Energy; Environment; Housing; Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages; Misuse of Substances; Social Inclusion; Transport. In addition to the work sector activity detailed on pages 8-14, information on the remaining work sectors is set out on the following pages.

Collaborative Spatial Planning - Led by Northern Ireland Executive

Collaborative Spatial Planning explores how Member Administrations can work together across borders to plan for and implement key infrastructure. This work sector brings together officials from each of the Member Administrations who are responsible for national, island and regional development strategies.

At the Guernsey Summit in 2014 Ministers endorsed a paper by the work sector on Spatial Perspectives and mandated the group to continue to explore opportunities to work more closely with other BIC work sectors, for example in respect of marine spatial planning and infrastructure.

The group has continued to collaborate on this work and at their meeting in Cardiff in May 2015 they finalised a set of high level strategic maps relating to the themes

of economy, environment and infrastructure and an accompanying narrative paper. This strategic work aims to provide a useful reference point for regional strategies by identifying areas of spatial challenge and opportunity including key developments and strategic gaps/overlaps across the BIC administrations.

Having completed the strategic mapping exercise, the group will now focus on sharing experience and reviewing the potential for co-operation on spatial issues of common relevance and challenge.

The group met in London in December 2015 to discuss the Forward Work Plan.

Demography - Led by Scottish Government

Demography is fundamental to planning and delivery of public services for citizens for all member administrations, and Member Administrations largely share similar demographic pressures. Since 2006, the Demography work sector has focused on these shared challenges, and its early programme of work delivered insights on key topics: migration and its impact; healthy independent ageing; investigating policy interventions; fertility; and student flows.

In 2015 the work sector agreed a fresh work programme and has met twice: at the Office of National Statistics, Fareham in March, and in Edinburgh in November. In addition to considering the demographic data and

trends relevant to the administrations and considering analytical insights from members and elsewhere (e.g. OECD, UNECE), the group is undertaking a project to understand the demographic drivers of the redesign of public services across the eight BIC Administrations, with an initial focus on an ageing population. Several aspects of 'redesign' are being explored. The group comprises both analysts and policy officials, and will use a number of innovative approaches in their work with the aim of presenting findings and recommendations to Ministers in 2016.

Digital Inclusion - Led by Isle of Man Government

Developments in digital technology have generated a period of massive social and cultural change. However, there is an overwhelming correlation between digital and social exclusion – three quarters of socially excluded people are also digitally excluded. This work stream looks at areas of commonality between different Administrations and collaborates to share best practice and information.

Digital Inclusion was the focus of the Isle of Man Summit in 2014 where it was agreed that the work sector should progress its collaboration, particularly around

improving wellbeing and reducing loneliness through digital inclusion. The sector collaborates on identifying both deliverables from research across administrations and also best practice approaches to engaging with the private sector to support inclusion work.

The work sector last met at in Belfast in October 2015 and agreed progress in relation to improving wellbeing and loneliness as well as partnerships. While in Belfast the group was also able to attend a Google Digital Garage event in Belfast City Hall in October 2015.

Early Years - Led by Welsh Government

The work sector provides a platform for sharing best practice on early years childcare, education and health. These areas are critical to improving children's life chances, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and are also key to supporting families in these challenging economic times.

The Early Years work sector met in November 2015 in Glasgow to consider Early Years Education and Childcare and to progress its work programme. The work sector also had the opportunity to attend the Early Years Collaborative in the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, Glasgow. This conference is organised three times a year by the Scottish Government working in

partnership with local authorities, NHS Scotland and third sector organisations. It brings together hundreds of early years professionals from all disciplines and agencies across Scotland together to improve performance, share best practice and provide change management toolkits and framework. The work sector found the conference beneficial in terms of hearing from a range of speakers in the early years sector and engaging with practitioners delivering services on the ground.

In 2016 the work sector will be looking at childcare and early years provision across BIC administrations and preparing for a Ministerial meeting

Environment - Led by UK Government

The Environment work sector is one of the longest standing BIC work sectors and continues to consider a wide range of environmental issues across the Member Administrations.

Work sector officials came together three times in 2015 where they discussed issues relating to the Guernsey Ministerial meeting in 2016 and also developed a Ministerial discussion paper in advance of the Summit meeting in London. The paper focused on Protecting Our Natural Capital and Resources with a case study

on Pollinators. The group will be taking forward actions from this paper in 2016, including a series of workshops for officials working on aspects of Natural Capital and resources.

The group also brings together experts in collaboration on measures to address invasive non-native species and are preparing for a workshop which will be held in Ireland in Spring 2016, following a similar successful workshop in 2013

Energy - Marine Energy led by Scottish Government & Grids led by UK Government

The work sector was previously split into two subgroups. However, following agreement by the Council at the London Summit in November 2015, the two groups merged to form the BIC Energy work sector which reflects the more closely aligned policy focus of both groups.

The group is committed to sharing best practice and exploring areas for collaboration between Member Administrations to make the most of the substantial energy opportunities that widely exist across the eight Administrations.

The Scottish and UK Governments remain as joint Chairs of the group which will continue to look at both Marine Energy and Electricity Grids. Both subgroups met in October to review their work to date and agree areas for future work, which will focus on collaboration and knowledge sharing in relation to research and funding.

Misuse of Substances - Led by Irish Government

A number of Member Administrations have combined Drug and Alcohol Strategies in place or are in the process of developing them. The Misuse of Substances work sector comes together to consider programmes and policies to tackle drugs and alcohol misuse. The work sector continues to discuss emerging drugs trends, including issues such as the increased levels of poly-substance use among drug users, the emergence and spread of new psychoactive substances and the problem of high strength cannabis.

The misuse of alcohol was the main subject for discussion at the Summit held in Dublin in June 2015. Officials from this work sector met three times in 2015, in Cardiff, Guernsey and most recently in Belfast in October 2015. The meeting examined a number of policy developments including on addiction work with older people, community response protocol for drug-related deaths, alcohol brief interventions, alcohol-related brain damage and alcohol outlet density.

Transport - Led by Northern Ireland Executive

The Transport work sector is comprised of two sub-groups which deal with accessible transport and sustainable transport issues across the Member Administrations.

The Transport work sector focuses on a range of transport matters, in particular the role of Smartcard Technology and journey planners to assist citizens to move more freely and easily between administrations as well as the promotion of more sustainable modes of transport including strategies for ultra-low emission vehicles.

Officials continue to share best practice and a range of reports and website information on issues of interest to the work sector, both at meetings and via the BIC extranet. While meeting in the Isle of Man in 2015 work sector officials received presentations on the redevelopment of the Douglas promenade and how it would improve traffic flow, and on Smartcard Technology.

As part of the 2006 St Andrews 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 five full-time staff on assignment from BIC Member Administrations.

The Secretariat running costs for 2015 were £109,000. These costs were shared between the eight Member Administrations using an agreed set formula. With the exception of the general office manager, costs for individual Secretariat staff are met by their parent administration as they are on loan to the Secretariat. Funding for Summits and Ministerial meetings is provided by the host Member Administration.



Musicians dominate the Edinburgh skyline

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

Or contact the Secretariat at:
British-Irish Council Secretariat
First Floor, Thistle House
91 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh EH12 5HE

T: (+44) or (0)131 244 1935
E: Secretariat@britishirishcouncil.org

You can also follow BIC on Twitter & Flickr:
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The British-Irish Council was established on 2nd 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.britishirishcouncil.org/about/multi-party-agreement-1998

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.

