



Communiqué

The British-Irish Council (BIC), established under the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday, 1998, held its thirteenth Summit meeting today at the Radisson Hotel, St Helier, Jersey.

The heads of delegations were welcomed by the Chief Minister for Jersey, Senator Terry Le Sueur. The Irish Government delegation was led by An Taoiseach, Mr. Brian Cowen TD, and the British Government delegation was led by the Rt. Hon. Peter Hain MP. The Welsh Assembly Government delegation was led by the First Minister for Wales, the Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan AM. The Scottish Government was led by the First Minister for Scotland, the Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond MP MSP. The Northern Ireland Executive delegation was led by the First Minister, the Rt. Hon. Peter Robinson MP MLA, and the Deputy First Minister, Mr. Martin McGuinness MP MLA. The Guernsey Government delegation was led by the Chief Minister, Deputy Lyndon Trott and the Isle of Man Government was led by the Chief Minister, Tony Brown MHK. It was noted that this was Rhodri Morgan's last meeting after 10 years of attendance at the BIC and the Council paid tribute to the contribution he had made over the years.

A full list of delegation members is attached.

The BIC is a forum for its members to exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest.

Discussion of Economic Issues

The Council reviewed the current status of the global economic downturn and the impact it has had on their respective Administrations since the Cardiff Summit in February 2009. Ministers discussed the impact of the economic downturn; ongoing pressure on public expenditure; measures to ameliorate unemployment; and efforts to ensure resumption of bank lending to small businesses. The Council explored what immediate steps might be taken to ensure that Member Administrations are well placed to take advantage of any future global economic recovery. The Council also acknowledged the serious challenges currently faced by all Member Administrations and agreed that sharing knowledge and information on best practice was invaluable. The Council noted the conclusions of the independently commissioned report from Michael Foot CBE which states that the Crown Dependencies, Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man, provide a significant net economic contribution to the City of London and ultimately to the broader UK economy.

Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages

The main focus of the Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages theme was Language Planning. The Council had an extended discussion on four key areas: Adult Education; Family Support; Young People; and Local Language Initiatives and Resource Centres.

The Council noted that the availability and expansion of adult education provision for the teaching and learning of the indigenous, minority and lesser used language is an important element of the process of acquisition language planning. They also noted that adult education had an important role to play in improving and expanding the skills base. Member Administrations have discussed, and a number have committed, to developing their capacity to provide bilingual public services, as well as encouraging other organisations to work and provide services through their respective minority, indigenous or lesser used language as well as through the medium of English. The Council considered encouraging individuals who move into communities to learn the indigenous language and putting in place effective adult education delivery mechanisms, both of which are essential components of arresting decline in usage at community level.

The Council considered Language Transmission within the family as a key issue in enabling indigenous, minority or lesser used languages to flourish. Ensuring intergenerational transmission of a language was a crucial element in the process of its development and its maintenance. However, the Council noted that the home, family and community were not easily accessible to social planners and that families in indigenous or minority language situations needed advice and guidance on how to raise their children as balanced bilinguals.

The Council further noted that for a language to flourish and survive it must be spoken by its young people who need to develop a sense of ownership of the language. The Council discussed the importance of providing young people with the relevant support and social opportunities to enable them to use their language in all aspects of life. Ministers further discussed ways of promoting the use of indigenous, minority and lesser used languages amongst young people. Further analysis of the economic benefits associated with minority languages was proposed and Ministers agreed to take this work forward in the Minority Languages workstream.

The Council examined the threats surrounding communities with a high density of indigenous, minority and lesser used language speakers. Halting the decline in these communities is a crucial target in various national strategies tasked with language planning at a community level. The Council explored the benefits that dedicated resource centres and local language initiatives can play in preserving indigenous, minority and lesser used languages.

The Council noted and acknowledged the benefits in sharing knowledge, ideas and best practice and the diversity in approaches to community language planning. The Council encouraged the use of the language in the community through projects that reflect the linguistic nature of the various communities.

The Council tasked the Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages working group to explore areas of possible co-operation with the European Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (ENPLD) and other organisations to learn from experiences elsewhere. The Council endorsed new work on themes such as legislation, where appropriate, immersion education and strategic planning and economic benefits in the ongoing work programme of the group.

Update on the Strategic Review of the Council

The Council considered the paper setting out the progress on the review of the arrangements of the BIC Standing Secretariat which had been commissioned at the Belfast Summit in July 2007.

It was agreed at the Cardiff Summit in February, that the Chief Minister of Jersey would take informal soundings from Ministers of the Council with a view to identifying a consensus on the location of the Standing Secretariat. The Council thanked the Chief Minister of Jersey for his serious efforts on its behalf. It noted that it has not yet been possible to reach consensus on the location for the Standing Secretariat and that a further round of consultations would be necessary.

The Council approved a legal framework for the Standing Secretariat which would achieve the desired result of strengthening the administrative identity of the BIC and strengthening the administrative support available to it.

The Council noted that Co-ordinators have identified possible cost sharing models but agreed that final agreement on a cost sharing model would emerge once the location of the Standing Secretariat has been decided and on foot of that agreement, exact costs identified.

Update on Work Sectors

The Council noted the progress of the work sector based upon the following reports:

Collaborative Spatial Planning

The Collaborative Spatial Planning group held an inaugural meeting in Belfast in June 2009 and a second meeting in Dublin in October 2009, where it considered papers on likely themes and a future work programme.

The workstream brings together officials responsible for regional development strategies, national planning strategies and frameworks in each Member of the Council. The group is in the process of considering how Member Administrations can work together for mutual benefit, subject to Ministerial approval, through a more collaborative approach to Strategic Spatial Planning on issues which cross over boundaries.

Demography

The Demography workgroup continues to be committed to the workplan endorsed by a Ministerial meeting in March 2008. The main focus is on understanding migration and its impact.

Northern Ireland commissioned research into the area of the "Impact of Migration" and hosted an event in Belfast in June 2009 on the outcome of this research. The presentations were: The Experiences of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland; The Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impact of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland; The Impact of Migration on the Labour Market in Britain; and Recent Migration in to Scotland - the Evidence Base.

The Demography workstream will now take forward work in the area of "understanding the implications of wider student flows amongst the BIC Administrations". Plans are being developed to identify appropriate policy leads in the Administrations, with a view to discussing this at the next Ministerial meeting.

Digital Inclusion

The Digital Inclusion workgroup held its inaugural meeting in the Isle of Man in September 2009. The meeting proved a useful opportunity for Member Administrations to discover common themes and shared understandings in the work they are doing individually on digital inclusion. The workgroup decided to focus on the following broad areas: Content; Outcomes; Trust; Engagement; and Skills and Training.

The group's focus is to deliver a report on sharing best practice on the 'Maximisation of Engagement in a Knowledge Society'.

Early Years Policy

Officials from the Early Years Policy workstream have met on three occasions in 2009 and the work group remains committed to driving forward work on early years childcare, education and health, within which interventions are key in improving children's life chances particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and to support families in challenging economic times.

The work group initially focused on the work force where significant common themes have emerged amongst the eight BIC administrations. These are: ensuring a more child-centred approach, with better integration across services including integration of workforce planning; assuring the quality of provision across the sector, wherever the child is receiving care and/or education; promoting appropriate recognition and career progression opportunities for the early years work force, with suitable qualifications to accredit their skills and knowledge; and addressing issues of diversification, retention and sustainability, recognising economic realities.

Energy

The Scottish Government led Marine Renewables workstream held its inaugural meeting in June 2009 where Member Administrations explored their marine renewable strategies and priorities. The group agreed that the initial focus would be on sharing updates on experience and policy development in the areas of Marine Spatial Planning and related legislation, the development/establishment of test facilities and issues relating to grid access, capacity and investment. The group also intends to focus on raising the profile of marine renewables as an emerging viable renewable energy resource within the European Union.

The first meeting of the UK Government led electricity grid workstream was held in June 2009. Presentations were given by participants on the current challenges that electricity networks in the British Isles face in accommodating significant amounts of new renewable and other generation energy on the system to meet renewable energy targets and increase security of supply. Participants also set out current or planned projects and proposals to meet these challenges. This included proposals to significantly increase the capacity of the existing grid network through use of new technology and the building of new transmission lines. This discussion established a common understanding of the issues across the British Isles and it was widely acknowledged by the group that the challenges faced were common to all.

Environment

The Environment group continues co-operation and exchange of information between the Member Administrations in areas such as: understanding extreme weather events; Integrated Coastal Zone Management; Fishing For Litter; and managing radioactive waste. Additionally, the group submitted a discussion paper to the second European Climate Change Programme to inform the development of the EU's Green Paper on Adaptation.

The ninth Ministerial meeting was held at Mont Orgueil Castle, Jersey in April 2009. Ministers reflected briefly on the creation of the Energy workstream and received a presentation from the Hadley Centre on extreme climate events.

Housing

An initial meeting of BIC officials took place in Belfast in June 2009. The following issues were agreed as being pertinent across the jurisdictions: Changing demographics; Greening the housing stock; Affordable Housing; and Investment in Housing.

The Northern Ireland Department for Social Development is currently drafting papers on the above topics which will examine the issues, consider what lessons can be learnt from other areas and seek the approval of BIC Housing Ministers to take forward further work on these areas. The papers will be circulated to all BIC Housing Ministers in advance of the Ministerial meeting which is planned for December 2009.

Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages

The group is continuing to focus their discussions in the following priority fields: Community Development; Young People; Legislation; Immersion Education; and Strategic Planning.

The Legislation sub group intends to hold a seminar concentrating on Language Rights and Legislation for practitioners in February 2010.

The Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages work group intends to create a sub group to examine and discuss the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Dublin in December 2009.

Misuse of Drugs

The Sectoral Group on the Misuse of Drugs has held three Senior Official meetings in 2009, through the co-operation of the eight BIC Member Administrations.

In March, Guernsey briefed the group on the introduction of their new legislation to ban Spice and other psychoactive substances. The aim of this legislation is to disrupt the commercial importation and sale of such substances (as opposed to criminalising users). The issue of Legal Highs and Spice is one which has now come to prominence in at EU level. Given the ongoing developments, the BIC Sectoral Group is in agreement that the issue should remain as a standing agenda item for discussion in future meetings.

In May, Dr Suzi Lyons of the Alcohol and Drugs Unit of the Health Research Board in Ireland gave a presentation to the group on the development and the content of the country's National Drug-Related Deaths Index, which was launched in late 2008. The Index gives Ireland an accurate picture of the levels of drug-related deaths, thus facilitating policy development in the drugs area.

A meeting held in September focused on prevention and how Scotland was raising awareness to the overall population of the dangers of drug use through their national *Know the Score* campaign.

The next Ministerial meeting will be held in 2010 and Ministers will discuss Substance Misuse in the Prison Setting and the responses necessary to address this issue, along with how best to provide effective treatment and rehabilitation options to this cohort.

Social Inclusion

The group continues to focus on the theme of "The Contribution of the Third Sector to Promoting Social Inclusion" under the following main topics: Responding to the Effects of the Economic Downturn; Developing the Roles of the Third Sector; and Broadening the Appeal of Volunteering and Citizen Involvement.

Work is progressing well with administrations sharing information and lessons on best practice. The officials group has now met five times and has seen in operation a wide range of third sector organisations.

A final report concluding the Contribution of the Third Sector in Promoting Social Inclusion theme will be the subject of discussion at a Ministerial meeting planned to be held in March 2010.

Transport

Work in the Transport Sector has continued to focus on the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications; the mutual recognition of driving offences that attract a penalty less than disqualification, and research into drugs and driving.

The Accessible Transport sub group continues in their work to improve the information provision for disabled people who wish to travel from one administration area to another, through the development of a common Webpage, sharing standards of disability training schemes, scoping the current level of concessionary travel across administrations while also examining the potential for their mutual recognition.

Knowledge Economy (Workstream closed at Edinburgh Summit 2008)

The Council noted the important work that has been taken forward in the area of Business Continuity Management of Small Businesses. The Knowledge Economy workstream, led by Jersey, specifically sought to promote and develop the sustainability of business in the context of potential serious threats, such as those arising as a result of terrorist attacks or natural disasters. The focus of this work was in the area of small to medium sized enterprises which are believed to be most at risk.

Possible preventative measures and business continuity planning were developed to strengthen business sustainability, through a common set of best practice guidelines. Following consultation with the Business Continuity Institute, the Institute asked for assistance from the Group in making recommendations for an updated copy of its "Pocket Sized Good Practice Guidelines", which has now been completed.

With the completion of the final copy for both the BIC website and the hard copy "Business Continuity Management for Small Businesses" the group's work has now concluded.

The Council agreed that the "Business Continuity Management for Small Businesses" paper should be published on the BIC Website and agreed that the Best Practice Guidelines could be used in the eight Member Administrations.

Next Summit

The next BIC Summit will be held in June 2010 and will be hosted by Guernsey. The Isle of Man offered to host the subsequent Summit.

Any Other Business

The Council considered the relationship between the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and requested the preparation of a report for its consideration at the next Summit in Guernsey.

BIC Secretariat

13 November, 2009

www.british-irishcouncil.org

List of Delegates

<u>Irish Government</u>	
An Taoiseach	Mr. Brian Cowen TD
Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	Mr. Éamon Ó Cuív TD
<u>British Government</u>	
Secretary of State for Wales	Rt. Hon. Peter Hain MP
Minister of State for Northern Ireland	Rt. Hon. Paul Goggins MP
<u>Scottish Government</u>	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond MP MSP
Minister for Culture, External Affairs and Constitution	Mr. Michael Russell, MSP
<u>Welsh Assembly Government</u>	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan AM
Deputy First Minister	Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones AM
Minister for Heritage	Mr. Alun Ffred Jones AM
<u>Northern Ireland Executive</u>	
First Minister	Rt. Hon. Peter D Robinson MP MLA
Deputy First Minister	Mr. Martin McGuinness MP MLA
Junior Minister	Mr. Robin Newton MLA
Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure	Mr. Nelson McCausland MLA
Minister of Education	Ms. Caitríona Ruane MLA
<u>States of Jersey</u>	
Chief Minister	Senator Terry Le Sueur
Minister for Education, Sport and Culture	Deputy James Reed
<u>States of Guernsey</u>	
Chief Minister	Deputy Lyndon Trott
Minister for Culture and Leisure	Deputy Mike O'Hara
<u>Government of the Isle of Man</u>	
Chief Minister	Hon. Tony. Brown MHK
Minister of Education	Hon. Anne Craine MHK