



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Consider this...

Research reflections for the 2016-2021 mandate

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Foreword

To all returning and new Members

In *Consider This*, the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RalSe) has set out a wide range of issues arising from the last Assembly mandate which I hope will be of interest to both returning and newly elected Members. It does not intend to cover all outstanding matters or set your agenda. It aims instead at engaging you with RalSe, which is an important resource available to you and your staff to support the work that you do in the Assembly and in your constituency.

RalSe employs subject specialists and library professionals to provide you with research and information support across the range of Assembly and constituency activities. RalSe can provide information and analysis to help you and your staff deal with constituency matters; prepare for plenary or media debates; scrutinise the work of ministers and departments; consider legislation as it makes its way through the Assembly, or assist in bringing forward your own legislation in a Private Member's Bill. Whatever your reason for contacting RalSe, we will provide you with a timely, confidential and evidence-based response.

Members are invited to participate in RalSe's Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS) where academics highlight their latest research findings important to Northern Ireland and the Programme for Government. Details of KESS are published on the Assembly's website.

RalSe also includes the Education Service who organise school visits to the Assembly as well as education activities located in constituencies across Northern Ireland. Please feel free to contact the Education Service who can update you on their planned activities and involve you in them.

In the weeks ahead you will be organising and managing party and constituency business. In this time, I hope you will have the opportunity to make contact with us; the staff of RalSe are ready to support you throughout the new mandate.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Power'.

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Research reflections for the 2016-2021 mandate

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Research and Information
Service Directory

Research and Information Service Directory

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Michael Scholes	02890 418320	Finance and Economy
Carrie Smyth	02890 418320	Research Assistant
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Barbara Love	02890 418320	Statistics
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Marina McConville	02890 521833	Education Officer
Connie McGibbon	02890 521833	Education Clerical Officer
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Introduction to the Research and
Information Service (RaISe)

The Assembly Library



Forming part of the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe), the Library is a vital resource for Members, their staff and for the Secretariat. It provides access to authoritative information to support Members in the scrutiny of policy and legislation and to inform debate. The Assembly Library provides a number of key services and resources, delivered by a professional team in a timely, objective, and confidential manner.

Where is the Library, who can use it and when?

The Library is located on the ground floor, just beyond the double doors to each side of the main staircase in the Great Hall. MLAs, their staff and Secretariat staff are the core users of the Library. The Library also deals with Government departments and other legislatures where appropriate. Academics and individual members of the public can visit the Library by appointment.

When the Assembly is in Session, the Library is open Monday to Thursday from 9.00 a.m. until 5.00 p.m. On plenary days the Library will be open until half an hour after the Assembly rises, or until 8.00 p.m., whichever is earlier. During recess, opening hours are Monday to Thursday, 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Although the Library is closed on Fridays, staff will be available in their office (Room 141) to answer queries.

The collection

The Library's core collections of lending, reference and statistical publications reflect and support the work of the Assembly in subject areas such as government and politics, public administration and social policy, constitutional law and the history of Northern Ireland.

The Library holds comprehensive collections of Northern Ireland legislation and official publications as well as regional and national newspapers and a selection of academic journals on a range of policy areas. The Library does not, however, hold local newspapers.

Enquiry service

The Library provides an enquiry service for all Members, their staff and staff of the Secretariat. Requests for named publications, fact-finding, literature searches and legislation tracking are typical of the queries dealt with by our team of professionally qualified and experienced librarians.

Enquiry service - Information Packs

Information Packs are prepared to inform debate on Private Members' Motions and selected Committee Motions. The packs are available electronically and Members are notified by email, usually two Fridays before the debate in question. Hard copies are also made available in the Library.

E-services

The Library subscribes to a range of electronic resources including online databases, e-journals and e-books. The Library has developed a collection of relevant electronic resources. These resources range across subject areas that reflect the work of the Assembly and can be accessed via the RalSe pages on the Assembly intranet (AsslSt).

E-Services – social media

Electronic services maintain a Twitter page: @AssemblyLibrary. This is used as a vehicle to publicise Research and Information Service products and services.

RalSe's research specialists produce publications on topics relevant to Assembly business and also endeavour to anticipate future topics of interest. The Library's Twitter feed allows you to access these publications as soon as they are online, as well as Deposited Papers, which are unpublished Papers placed in the Library at the direction of the Speaker or a Minister.

Library awareness sessions

We encourage Members and their staff to attend Library awareness sessions which provide a comprehensive introduction to RalSe services and resources. To arrange an awareness session, please contact the Library via the details below.

We can tailor these sessions to meet the particular interests of groups or individuals. A presentation on the Research and Information Service is part of the induction programme given to all new Assembly staff.

Library facilities

The Library provides access to a photocopier, printer/scanner, microfiche reader, PCs, study/reading areas, a meeting room and wi-fi.

Contact the Library

Telephone: 028 905 21250

E-mail: library@niassembly.gov.uk

Research Service



The Research Service comprises five professional teams:

1. Health and Social Care, Statistics and Mapping;
2. Political Institutions, Equality, Justice, Families and Education;
3. Communities, Infrastructure and Environment;
4. Finance and Economics, including the Public Finance Scrutiny Unit (PFSU) and the Business and Employment Unit; and
5. Research and Information Service Central Support Unit (RSCU).

What services does the Research Service provide?

The Research Service delivers the following range of services in a timely, objective and evidence-based manner:

- **In-depth, analytical briefings** regarding policy, legislation and public finance, which are relevant to Assembly business, including areas within the Assembly's legislative competence and some other areas. Such briefings may be delivered orally and in writing;

- **Bill Papers addressing Executive and non-Executive legislative proposals**, which provide an analysis of the bill, including: key background information; an overview of the proposed clauses; a review of the costings provided in the bill's accompanying 'Explanatory and Financial Memorandum'; and potential issues arising from the bill that merit consideration;
- **Statistical services** addressing all aspects relating to empirical information, including technical advice, interpretation and analysis;
- **Mapping services** using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) that visualise, question, analyse and interpret data, in order to understand geographic relationships, patterns and trends, including on a constituency basis;
- **Information packs prepared to inform debate on Private Members' Motions and selected Committee Motions**; and
- **Workshops and seminars** on various themes that aim to increase understanding and awareness amongst MLAs and their staff, Committees, as well as Assembly Secretariat and others.

Services to Members are confidential, unless otherwise agreed with the Research Service. They do not include legal advice or opinion.

Who can use the Research Service?

- Assembly committees
- MLAs (including their staff)
- Assembly Commission
- Assembly Secretariat.

How to submit a research request?

Research Service customers are encouraged to use email or complete an on-line 'Research Services Enquiry' form, which is available on the RaISe pages on AsslSt.

Alternatively, customers may contact Research staff, using the contact list provided earlier in this publication.

Please note the services are unavailable for personal, business or commercial enquiries.

Where to locate published RaISe papers?

RaISe pages on AsslSt provide published research papers, including an archive of Research Service publications dating back to 2001.

Education Service

The Northern Ireland Assembly and the school curriculum.

How does the Northern Ireland Assembly support schools to deliver key elements of the Northern Ireland curriculum?

During the 2011-16 mandate, 80,478 young people participated in the Northern Ireland Assembly's Education Programme. The aim of the programme is to inform young people about the work of the Assembly and encourage them to get involved. Over 70% of educational groups are schools and the programme supports Northern Ireland curriculum objectives, particularly in the areas of citizenship, politics, and history.

According to the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), citizenship education is a statutory requirement from Key Stages 1 to 4 (ages 5-16) because of the importance of young people understanding how they are governed, and how to participate in democracy to improve life for themselves and others; and the responsibility of education to support peace and stability in Northern Ireland. In line with this, *Mutual Understanding and Cultural Understanding* are also key elements of the curriculum.

At primary level, citizenship is found within *Personal Development and Mutual Understanding* (PDMU). Pupils learn about the need for rules in society; how laws are created and implemented; and their 'rights and responsibilities' as members of the community.

At post-primary level, Learning for Life and Work (LLW) is compulsory at Key Stages 3 and 4 (ages 11 to 16). It includes *Local and Global Citizenship* - the study of *Diversity and Inclusion*; *Human Rights and Social Responsibilities*; *Equality and Social Justice*; and *Democracy and Active Participation*. All are related to the work of the Assembly: especially relevant is *Democracy and Active Participation*, which requires students to understand key government institutions and how to engage in the democratic process.

Through the Assembly's Education Programme, all pupils learn about the roles of the Assembly and Executive; power-sharing; how laws are made; how government is relevant; and how they can influence decisions. Programmes involve presentations, meetings with MLAs, and activities including mock elections and debates.



The AS Government and Politics course covers the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement; operation and effectiveness of the Assembly and Executive; elections; and political parties. Students visiting Parliament Buildings meet MLAs and Committee Clerks, and observe plenary and committee meetings. A visit is also relevant to the Key Stage 3 History (ages 11-14) study of the partition of Ireland and how it influences Northern Ireland today, and the GCSE History topic of political and civil unrest in Northern Ireland and the search for a solution.

The Education Programme also provides opportunities for students to develop a range of cross-curricular skills, including literacy and numeracy (e.g., through understanding the budget, Single Transferable Vote and D'Hondt). Resources include a curriculum-linked website, developed in partnership with CCEA. A new *Race to Stormont 2016* resource marked the recent election. Annual teacher conferences provide information, lesson ideas and opportunities to meet MLAs.

Special projects allow young people to explore issues and express opinions. Regular 'Let's Talk' events bring students from different schools together for discussions with elected representatives. The Erasmus + 'Connections' project (2015-16) involved young people researching and consulting on the issue of mental health. They presented findings to Assembly Committees and asked them to prioritise the issue in the new mandate.

The Education Service assists Assembly committees to consult young people on legislation and inquiry matters. Recently, young people's opinions were gathered on the Road Traffic Bill, Addressing Bullying in Schools and Shared Education Bills; and on inquiry issues including School Inspections; Shared and Integrated Education, Together Building a United Community Strategy (TBUC) and School Councils.

As a new mandate begins, the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service is committed to further developing engagement with young people through the Education Programme. In doing so, it will continue to support schools as they deliver the key curriculum aim of enabling pupils to be active and effective participants in democracy and society.

Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series

Leading the way in creating effective partnerships that seek to better inform policy and legislation.



Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

The 'Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series' (KESS) aims to promote evidence-led policy and law-making within Northern Ireland. KESS is the first of its kind in the United Kingdom, formally partnering a legislative arm of government – the Assembly - with academia. Seeking to encourage debate and improve understanding, KESS provides a forum to present and disseminate academic research findings in a straightforward format, on issues of relevance to Assembly business. It seeks to bring the findings to the attention of key participants and decision-makers in the policy and law-making processes in Northern Ireland, such as MLAs and Assembly committees, as well as the wider public sector.

Embedded in the KESS model are: the local universities via their academics; Assembly committees via their Chairpersons; RaiSe via its researchers; and, a broad spectrum of attendees - including: MLAs and their staff; political party staff; Assembly and Departmental officials; the wider public sector, including voluntary and community groups; private sector; academics; and, members of the public. KESS creates unique

engagement opportunities; and importantly provides a 'pathway' for more, in-depth discussion at a later date.

Now in its fifth year, KESS is annually delivered by RaISe, in partnership with all three universities located in Northern Ireland – the Queen's University of Belfast (co-founder with RaISe in 2011), Ulster University (Ulster since 2012) and The Open University (since 2013).



Eileen Regan (RaISe), former Assembly Speaker Mitchel McLaughlin MLA, Natalie Jones (ESRC) and Sally Shortall (QUB) pictured at the launch of KESS 2015-16

Seminars are free and are held on **alternating Wednesdays from October through June in Parliament Buildings**, starting at 1.30pm. They cover a range of themes under a single broad heading. On arrival, delegates receive a seminar pack that includes the academics' policy briefings and power point presentations, including contact information. Shortly following each seminar, a video clip of the proceedings is made available on-line, as well as seminar pack. Refer to: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/research-and-information-service-raise/knowledge-exchange/>.

Delivery of the 2015-16 KESS programme is nearing completion, and planning is underway for 2016-17. The new programme will be launched at the start of October 2016, in Parliament Buildings. The launch has become an annual event in the Assembly calendar; normally hosted by the Speaker and addressed by keynote speakers.

To learn more about past, current and future KESS programmes, refer to its webpages or email: raise@niassembly.gov.uk



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Profile of Northern Ireland

A demographic profile of Northern Ireland in 2016

Dr Raymond Russell

This article presents a brief demographic profile of Northern Ireland, showing emerging trends in the population, and comparisons with other UK nations, Ireland, and the EU.

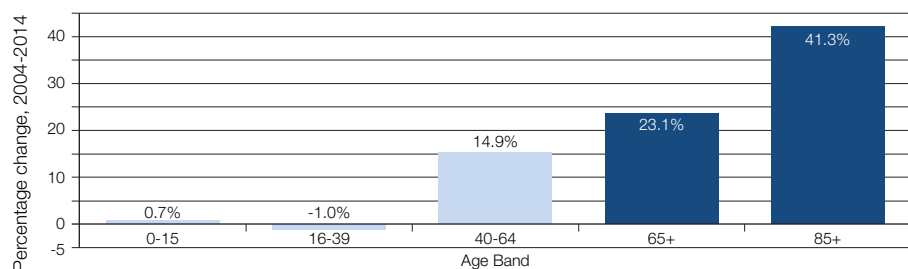
Growing older: demographic change in Northern Ireland

Just before the Great Famine in 1841, the population of Northern Ireland stood at 1.65 million. It fell steadily thereafter, reaching its lowest point in 1891 (1.24 million). Due to continuous migration, the population flat-lined for the following sixty years until 1951, when it made a modest recovery to 1.37 million. Census 1991 recorded a population of 1.57 million, which grew to 1.68 million by 2001, just above the pre-famine figure. In 2014, the population stood at 1.84 million, and is projected to reach 1.94 million by 2024.

Population growth, however, has not been evenly spread, with the largest increases occurring in the older age bands. Between 2004 and 2014, the pension age population (aged 65+) rose by almost a quarter (23%) to 286,000, while the number of those aged 85+ increased by 41% to 34,000 (Fig 1). These trends are expected to continue in the coming decades:

- The latest projections (published in 2015) suggest that the 85 + population will reach 48,000 in 2024 and 67,000 by 2031.
- The average (median) age of the population, which was 38 years in 2014, is projected to reach 40.1 years in 2024, and 41.7 years by 2031.

Figure 1: Population Change by Age, 2004-2014



Source: NISRA (2015) Northern Ireland Population Estimates 2014

In brief, the Northern Ireland population is growing older. The changing age structure has largely resulted from natural growth (the difference between the number of births and deaths). However since 2004, net migration, particularly from the EU Accession countries, has also been a contributory factor.

Prior to 2004, population increase in Northern Ireland was mostly due to natural change (more births than deaths). However, in the year 2006– 2007 the contribution from migration was greater than the contribution from natural change. From mid-2008 onwards, natural change reasserted itself as the dominant factor in population growth. Overall, during the full period 2004-2014, natural change accounted for 79% of population growth in Northern Ireland, with net migration and other factors accounting for the remainder.

Comparisons with other UK countries, Ireland and EU-28

Table 1 presents a number of key demographic comparisons between Northern Ireland and the other UK countries. The table reveals that Northern Ireland:

- Had the *second fastest* growing population in the UK (0.7% annual increase) between 2004-2014;
- Has the youngest population in the UK (average age, 38.0 years in 2014);
- Has the highest fertility rate in the UK (1.97 births per woman in 2014). By 2024, the rate is projected to rise to 2.00, still higher than any other UK country; and
- Has the lowest death rate (8.0 per thousand population in 2014) of any UK jurisdiction.

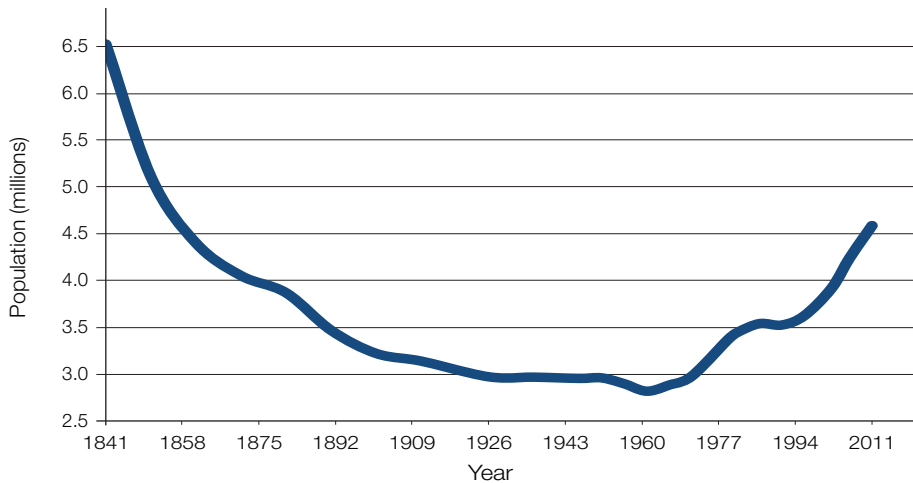
Table 1: Northern Ireland: comparisons with other UK jurisdictions

	United Kingdom	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Population (millions, rounded)					
2011 (Census)	63.2	53.0	3.1	5.3	1.8
2014 (Estimate)	64.6	54.3	3.1	5.3	1.8
2024 (projection)	69.0	58.4	3.2	5.5	1.9
Annual average % growth rate, 2004-14	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.5	0.7
Median Age (years)					
2014	40.0	39.7	42.1	41.9	38.0
2024	40.9	40.6	42.8	42.9	40.1
Total Fertility Rates (children per woman)					
2014	1.82	1.83	1.78	1.62	1.97
2024 (projected)	1.87	1.89	1.88	1.63	2.00
Deaths (crude rate per thousand population)					
1984	11.4	11.3	12.0	12.1	10.1
2014	8.8	8.6	10.2	10.1	8.0

Source: NISRA, ONS

The population of the Republic of Ireland went into a steep decline for over a century after the Great Famine, reaching a low point of 2.8 million in 1961 (Fig 2). However, since the early 1990s, both natural increase and significant net international migration have contributed to record population growth, with the result that the 2006 population of 4.24 million was the highest recorded since 1871. The latest estimate (April 2014) is 4.61 million, and the population of the Republic of Ireland is projected to rise to 5.19 million by 2031.

Figure 2: Population of Ireland, 1841-2011



Source: Central Statistics Office

Although the Republic of Ireland (median age, 36.0 years) currently has the youngest population in the EU-28, the number of older people is projected to rise substantially over the next decade. Depending upon the set of assumptions adopted, the older population (those aged 65 years +) may increase by between 17% and 38% by 2026.

Changing fertility, life expectancy and migration will significantly alter the age structure of the EU population in the coming decades. The total population of the EU-28 was provisionally estimated to be 506.8 million in 2014, and is projected to peak at 526 million by 2050, declining thereafter. Again, trends in the EU-28 are broadly similar to those of the UK and Ireland, i.e. a progressively ageing population. While Europeans are living longer than ever before, they are having fewer children. This means the proportion of retired and elderly people will rise over the next few decades, while the proportion of working-age people will fall. The European migrant crisis, which emerged in 2015, may modify some of the above trends, but not significantly.



Implications of Ageing Population for Spending on Health and Pensions

As the baby boomer generations, born between the late 1940s and early 1960s, approach retirement across Europe, there will be important consequences for public expenditure. Two of the spending areas most likely to be affected are health and pensions.

The relationship between ageing and healthcare costs is not linear. Whilst it is true that older people consume more health services per head than any other group, health care expenditure increases rapidly only in the latter days of life. In particular, it is proximity-to-death that tends to increase costs, rather than age per se. According to the latest projections, the number of deaths is expected to maintain its current level (15,000 per year) until 2023, rising slowly thereafter. In brief, health care costs in Northern Ireland associated with approaching death are likely to rise modestly in the coming decade. However, in the following decades, such costs may rise more steeply in line with the growing number of deaths.

The impact on pension provision of the sharp increase in the projected number of older people in Northern Ireland is likely to be modified by a number of factors. For example, the abolition of the Default Retirement Age (DRA), the gradual rise in state pension age, and the growing tendency for older people to work beyond retirement age, will all serve to reduce the projected number of pensioners and their associated costs.

The use of statistics and mapping in evidence-based scrutiny

Barbara Love

Statistical services offered by the Research and Information Service

The Research and Information Service offers a comprehensive statistical service to Members and to the Assembly secretariat. We provide data and analysis on a wide range of issues such as health, education and employment. We support the work of Plenary, Committees and individual Members in their constituency work. We also provide statistical and research support to the Assembly Commission on issues such as equality and good relations.

As well as providing statistical data, the Research and Information Service provides in-depth analyses such as an examination of trends over time and geographical comparisons from sub-Northern Ireland to international level. The information we provide is tailored to the specific needs of Members, their support staff and the secretariat.

The Research and Information Service has expertise in demography and can provide data and analysis of demographic characteristics, population trends and population projections for Northern Ireland and further afield.

Our Geographic Information consultant provides mapping services to present demographic and other statistical information in an easily accessible format.

In supporting the work of Committees, the Assembly Commission and the secretariat, we can conduct primary research using online surveys and focus groups. For example, information gathered through primary research has proved very useful in assisting Committees to scrutinise Bills such as the Road Traffic Bill.

We are also happy to provide professional statistical advice to Members and their support staff as and when required.

One of the most popular products of the statistics team is the *Constituency Profile* series. We produce statistical profiles of each of the 18 Constituencies in Northern Ireland and update these annually. The following tables provide a flavour of the information available through the *Constituency Profiles* series.

Constituency Profiles

	Population (1,000s), 2014	Life expectancy of males (born 2011 – 2013)	Life expectancy of females	% of school leavers with 5+ GCSEs (A*-C), 2013/14	% of people claiming benefits, February 2015	Unemploy- ment claimant count (%), 2014	Crime rate per 100,000 persons, 2014/15	No. of persons killed in road traffic accidents, 2014
Belfast East	93,941	77.5	81.5	76.6	37.7	4.6	6,562	0
Belfast North	103,115	74.9	80.7	73.3	47.8	7.6	9,809	1
Belfast South	112,544	78.4	82.4	84.9	29.9	3.7	11,910	4
Belfast West	94,639	73.9	79.8	75.7	49.9	7.7	9,376	2
East Antrim	90,065	78.7	82.6	83.5	37.2	3.6	3,657	2
East London- derry	100,279	78.8	82.5	81.9	39.4	4.6	5,303	6
Ferman- agh & South Tyrone	105,496	78.2	83.2	79.6	33.6	4.0	4,348	11
Foyle	102,099	76.5	80.7	76.0	45.4	8.6	7,557	2
Lagan Valley	104,621	79.5	83.5	81.2	34.2	2.9	4,015	8
Mid Ulster	101,724	79.3	83.8	78.9	35.4	3.5	3,486	5
Newry and Armagh	115,999	78.0	81.9	77.3	37.9	4.7	5,135	7
North Antrim	110,225	78.6	83.4	81.8	37.8	3.9	3,940	5
North Down	90,111	79.4	82.7	81.0	38.8	3.4	4,196	1
South Antrim	100,745	78.7	82.7	78.2	34.3	2.9	4,747	2
South Down	110,456	79.1	83.4	77.9	37.5	4.0	4,092	10
Strangford	90,285	79.5	83.0	74.4	38.4	3.9	3,736	5
Upper Bann	122,099	78.2	82.8	74.7	37.3	4.3	5,904	3
West Tyrone	92,055	78.8	83.3	81.2	42.1	5.6	3,983	5

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service.

Geographical Information service in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Anne Campbell, Geographic Information Consultant

Everything happens somewhere. Use the NI Assembly's in-house geographic information service to find the best way to analyse and visualise complex data.

Over 80% of data used by our public sector services – environment, health, education, security, construction, transport, agriculture, heritage, sport and employment has a geographic element e.g. an address or coordinate. All these can be mapped. The advantage of mapping information rather than producing a table of information is that it allows users to easily review, analyse, visualise and understand previously unseen patterns, gaps, issues or problems. Analysing data in this way can lead to improved decision making. Examples of these are in figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 shows the road distance patients need to travel to reach their nearest Type 1 Emergency Care Department. The patients living in the red areas have the furthest distance to travel; 28.6 - 35.6 miles.

Figure 2 displays two sets of boundaries on a single map allowing a direct comparison to be made. The Local Government Districts (Order 1993) are outlined in black, whilst the Local Government Districts (Order 2012) are symbolized using different colours.

The NI Assembly has access to Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland digital mapping data and has a dedicated Geographic Information Consultant to assist Members. Maps can be customised and emailed directly to Members.

Figure 1: Map presenting time travel analysis results

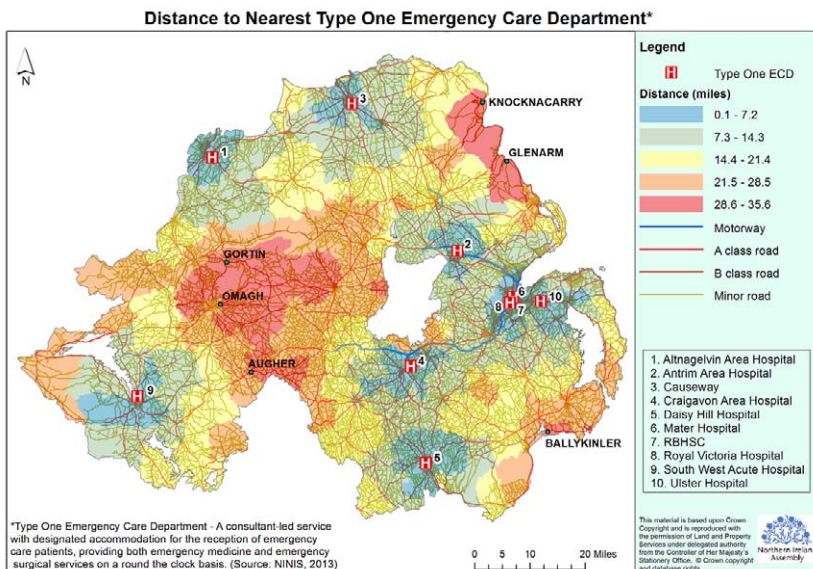
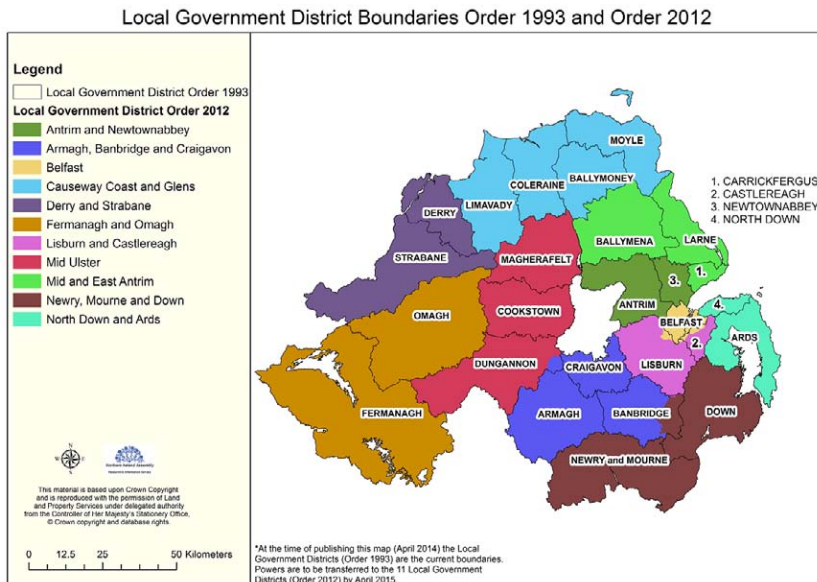


Figure 2: Mapping used to visualise boundary changes



There is an interactive map gallery available via AssISt (see figure 3); allowing Members to filter data, zoom into areas of interest and add or remove map data. The map gallery contains a bank of maps that may be of use to Members for their Constituency business. Maps include: crime and anti-social behaviour rates by ward, locations of various public services, demography and distribution of funding. Members can receive customised maps on request.

Members can also make their own interactive maps using Spatial NI, an online mapping service created by Land and Property Services (see figure 4). The Spatial NI website guides users through a simple step-by-step process in making their own map. There is a wealth of mapping data to choose from. See www.spatialni.gov.uk for more information.

Geographic Information services include:

- Custom-made interactive and static maps (in digital format);
- Training in Geographic Information systems;
- Constituency profiles;
- Provision of Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland historic mapping;
- Calculation of travel times and road distances;
- Finding catchment areas of services;
- Mapping census results by constituency and ward;
- Comparing change over time, e.g. demographics;
- Mapping of boundary changes; and
- Mapping of services and public transport in rural areas.

For more information or to discuss a query please contact the Geographic Information Consultant.

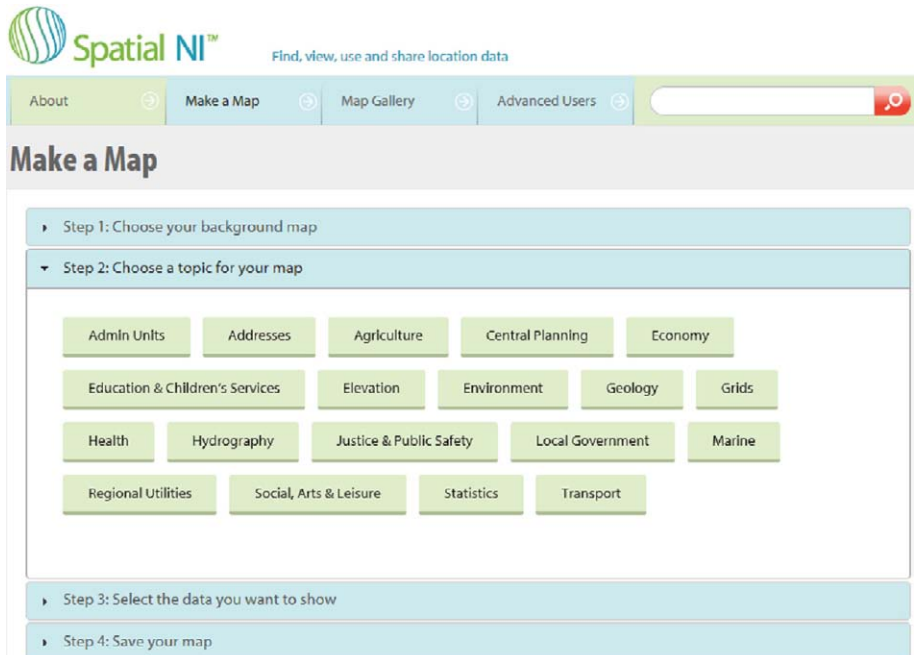
Anne.Campbell@niassembly.gov.uk

028 90521863

Figure 3: Homepage of map gallery available via AssIST



Figure 4: A screenshot of the 'make a map' process on Spatial NI website and an overview of the mapping data available





Northern Ireland
Assembly

Consider this...

Health and Social Care

Outpatient appointments: why are we waiting?

Dr Lesley-Ann Black

Despite recent investment, waiting lists are at an all-time high.

Consultant-led outpatient appointments provide an opportunity for consultation, investigation and minor treatment. Demand is high, with over 1.5 million outpatient appointments occurring each year. Some clinical specialties have long waiting lists, resulting in patients experiencing significant delays to get treatment. This in turn can have a detrimental impact on their health.

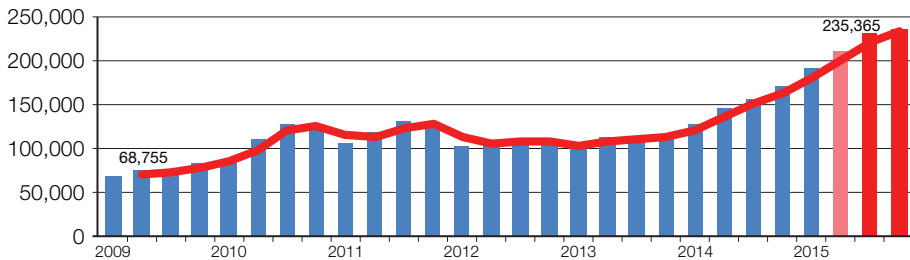
Numbers waiting

The number of people waiting for a first outpatient appointment has been increasing in Northern Ireland. This reached unprecedented levels in 2015 when around 235,000 people were waiting.

Incomplete data

Outpatient waiting times are measured from the date a Health and Social Care Trust receives a referral for a patient, usually from a G.P., and ends when the patient attends their first appointment. Review appointment waiting times are not measured. Instead, a separate waiting time 'clock' begins if the patient requires treatment as an inpatient, for a diagnostic test, or a day case admission. However, this data is not linked. Therefore it is impossible to know if patients are being seen and treated in a timely manner. Likewise, it is not possible to make comparisons against performance across the UK - where more complete outpatient journey times - from referral to treatment, are collected.

Number of patients waiting for a first outpatient appointment 2009-2015 (quarterly data)



Source: DHSSPS: Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics.

Unmet Ministerial targets

Outpatient waiting times in Northern Ireland have targets attached to them in order to monitor the performance and efficiency of outpatient services. These are set annually by

the Health Minister. The targets specify the maximum amount of time that patients should expect to wait for their first appointment. For example, in 2015/16, the target stated that *'at least 60% of patients wait no longer than nine weeks; and no patient waits longer than 18 weeks'*. In December 2015, 122,771 patients were waiting over 18 weeks. Over half were waiting for treatment for one of the following clinical specialities: trauma and orthopaedic surgery; ear, nose and throat; general surgery; ophthalmology; or neurology.

These latest targets, like most from previous years, have not been met. Furthermore, no other jurisdiction in the UK has set targets in this way, nor changed them as frequently. This raises two important questions:

- What is the value of having targets that are repeatedly missed?
- Why are more meaningful targets not adopted?

Factors impacting on waiting times

Several factors have contributed to the high volume of patients waiting and the lengthy timeframe that some patients have to wait. These include:

- Funding constraints, given the current fiscal climate;
- Patient demand outstripping capacity: e.g. ageing population; more chronic conditions;
- Strain on other parts of the healthcare system;
- Reduction in use of the independent/private sector;
- Reliance on monitoring round monies;
- Staff recruitment/retention problems;
- Lost productivity: in 2014/15 hospital providers cancelled 168,555 outpatient appointments; patients missed 147,536 outpatient appointments.

What action is being taken?

In 2014, the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety undertook a Review of Waiting Times. It made several recommendations including:

- Introducing a system to measure Referral to Treatment times and targets;
- New arrangements for managing Trust performance; and
- A clearly defined policy on how compliance against targets will be enforced.

Nevertheless, current outpatient Ministerial targets remain in place and no new system to measure waiting times has been developed. More recently, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has invested over £70m to tackle waiting list pressures. It has also introduced a range of initiatives such as: the prioritisation of patients by clinical urgency; chronological management of non-urgent patients; informing GPs of waiting times; and seeking alternatives to consultant-led outpatient appointments.

Whilst a lack of funding is a large part of the waiting times problem, investment alone will not resolve this issue, nor reduce the significant number of outpatients waiting.

Advance decisions to refuse treatment: where are we now?

Dr Janice Thompson

An advance decision to refuse treatment (sometimes known as a living will) is a decision a person can make now to refuse a specific type of treatment at some time in the future.

The Mental Capacity Act was passed late in the Assembly mandate and with it Northern Ireland (NI) became the first jurisdiction in the world to fuse mental health and mental capacity law. Under the new law, it will no longer be possible to treat a person who retains capacity (for a particular treatment decision) against their will. This principle will apply to both contemporaneous and advance decisions to refuse treatment, and to treatment decisions regarding both physical and mental conditions.

The law regarding ADRTs

Across the UK and Ireland the law, in differing ways, allows people to prepare for a future loss of capacity by making advance decisions to refuse treatment (ADRT). For example, in England and Wales, under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (upon which the Mental Capacity Act was partly modelled), there is provision for adults with capacity to make ADRTs. In NI, ADRTs can also be legally binding, but only in common law providing certain criteria are met.

Many stakeholders, although generally supportive of the Bill, expressed the view that it presented an opportunity to set out ADRTs in primary legislation ('codify'), rather than leaving the matter to case law. They argued the advantages of this included:

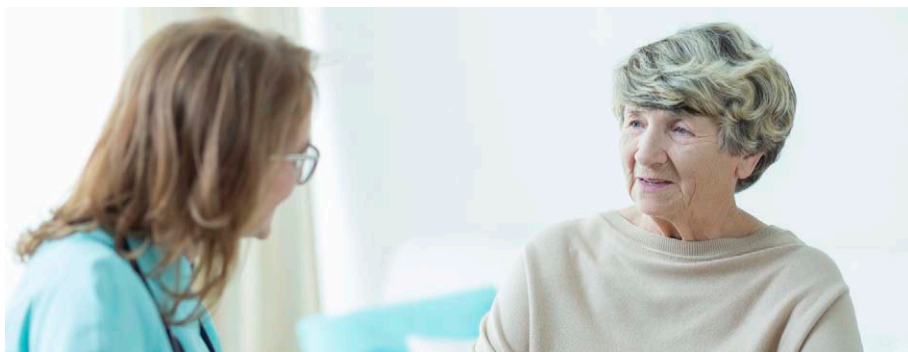
- Making the legal status of ADRTs clear so that people have the best chance of making them, and so that healthcare professionals better understand the law and their responsibilities; and
- Reducing the risk that the recorded will and preference of individuals will be unavailable in crises or emergencies or partially/completely disregarded.

The Department maintained throughout the Bill's process that to 'codify' ADRTs was undesirable, as the case law is evolving. The new law did not put ADRTs in statute, but does provide, what has been termed, statutory recognition for them. The new law contains a protection from liability (or defence) for an act/treatment done in the 'best interests' of a person lacking capacity to make the decision themselves. This 'defence' cannot be used if the act conflicts with an 'effective' ADRT (meaning an ADRT 'effective' in common law). It does not prevent a clinician providing life-sustaining treatment or treatment to prevent a serious deterioration in a patient's condition, while awaiting a court decision.

Following its scrutiny of the Bill, the Adhoc Joint Committee (Mental Capacity Bill) shared the view of the majority of consultees that the legal position regarding ADRTs remained uncertain and needed more clarity. It was concerned with the approach of allowing case law to develop once the law is in place, rather than the policy being set. The Committee, mindful of time constraints, ultimately requested a 'review and report' amendment. The Department then drafted an amendment, with the Health Minister, Simon Hamilton, stating that the DHSSPS had

no difficulty in agreeing to the Committee's very reasonable suggestion to look again at this within a set time frame...

However, the Minister maintained that the Bill created a unique legal framework outside the common law rules and needed time to 'bed-in' before determining rules on ADRTs.



A new clause was inserted ensuring that the Department will review the law regarding ADRTs, produce a report (including proposals for change to the law) and lay a copy before the Assembly. Whilst the main provisions of the Act are unlikely to be commenced in the near future, the review must be undertaken within three years of Royal Assent.

Future policy considerations

If, in the future, advance decisions regarding treatment are to be put in statute in NI, a number of policy questions arise. For example, should such advance decisions be:

- Equally valid in law if oral rather than written?
- Allowed to be made only by adults?
- Limited to refusal of specific treatment or also allow requests for specific treatment?
- Extended beyond treatments to aspects of social care?
- Able to include any treatments or should there be exemptions?
- Confined to an already diagnosed condition or extend to future conditions or future circumstances (e.g. pregnancy)?

Transforming health and social care in Northern Ireland: A recent history

Dr Janice Thompson

In the developed world, increased demand for health/social care services is being driven by factors such as ageing populations, increased numbers of people with multimorbidities, and new health technology

Transformation of service delivery

In Northern Ireland, recent moves to transform delivery of health/social care date back to 2011, when the Transforming Your Care (TYC) panel proposed a mode of:

- care as close to home as practical;
- with a 'shift left' of resources from hospitals to community; and
- a changing role for general practice via 17 Integrated Care Partnerships.

Recommendations included - services for older people encouraging independence; reducing hospital admissions for long-term conditions, more community respite care; re-configuring the acute hospital network and making urgent care locally available. Consultation on implementation of the new model highlighted that: change would require investment; and staff, carers; the voluntary/community sector would need to be supported and consulted in design and delivery of redesigned services.

Reform of governance – *The Donaldson Report*

In April 2014 the former Health Minister, Edwin Poots, commissioned Sir Liam Donaldson, to advise on 'governance'. *The Right Time, The Right Place* report presented ten recommendations, including: appointment of an impartial international expert panel to review configuration of the HSC; redesign of commissioning system; and a new costed, timetabled, implementation plan for TYC.

Governance was the focus but the report recognised that TYC contained good ideas but that stakeholders had lost faith in implementation.

Keeping tabs on progress

Monitoring TYC implementation has been a priority for the Health Committee, which undertook reviews on: workforce planning; supported living for older people; and health inequalities and learning disability.

Its Workforce planning review (2015) showed the vision was still supported by stakeholders but highlighted a lack of: clear performance indicators, implementation detail and resources for the 'shift left'. The DHSSPS advised the Committee,

however that in its view TYC was not a 'plan' to be completed, but an 'ethos' behind commissioning of services.

By November 2015 around £45m of the anticipated £83m had 'shifted left' from hospital to community services, with a large portion being spent on learning disability/mental health resettlements. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, however, following an inquiry into emergency healthcare concluded that in effect TYC had been parked and emergency care departments were continuing to struggle.

Current directions

The picture of transformation on the ground has been unclear to some stakeholders, who highlighted to the Committee that, due to budgetary pressures, Trusts were reducing services that should be expanding to implement TYC, e.g. decreased number of community nurses and cuts to education/training budgets for nursing/midwifery. Many were unsure where savings on the acute side had been reinvested in community services. However, transformation seemed to be gathering pace in the latter part of the mandate with:

- reform of commissioning - closure of the HSC Board and creation of directorate in the DHSSPS;
- a clinically focused expert panel, with an international perspective, established to lead debate on the configuration of services; and
- in March 2016 – a £30m 'Transformation Fund' for projects focused on innovation, prevention and collaboration - to realise the vision of TYC and develop a world class HSC system.



Recent Departmental press releases sought to highlight the following progress:

- Over the past five years, the number of nurses/midwives has increased by 9%, consultants by 21% and allied health professionals by 18%;
- A 15% increase in the number of pre-registration nurse training places, establishment of a task group on nursing, and £1.25m from the 'Transformation Fund' for District Nursing/Health Visiting services; and
- The 2016/17 GP contract sees development of GP-led services including investment of over £7million, up to £10million in financial loans for infrastructure, an increase in GP training places and up to 300 pharmacists in GP surgeries by 2020/21.

Suicide in Northern Ireland

Claire Milliken

For the second consecutive year, Northern Ireland recorded the UK's highest suicide rate.

In the first nine months of 2015, 246 deaths by suicide were recorded in Northern Ireland. This compared to a total of 268 for 2014. There are many reasons why someone may experience suicidal feelings and suicide is a highly complex issue. So what are some of the risk factors?

Deprivation and Self-harm

Suicide and deprivation are closely linked. Belfast North and Belfast West are the two constituencies with the highest average annual suicide rate. The *Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010* found these to be the two most deprived constituencies.

The rate of self-harm hospital admissions is four times higher in the most deprived areas than in the least deprived areas. Between April 2013 and March 2014 there were 8,453 presentations at hospital emergency departments in Northern Ireland as a result of self-harm, involving almost 6,000 people. A further 3,623 cases attended emergency departments with suicidal ideation. A recent Ulster University study commissioned by the Public Health Agency reviewed over 1,660 records of suicide and probable suicide from the Northern Ireland Coroner's database. It found that around half of the deceased had made previous suicide attempts or had a record of suicidal thoughts.

Gender

In Northern Ireland, men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women. This has been partly attributed to differences in methods used, as men tend to use more lethal methods such as hanging. Cultural perceptions of masculinity, which define men as competitive and strong, are also thought to impact negatively upon help-seeking behaviours in men.

Employment status

Unemployment is another potential factor contributing to suicide, particularly for younger age groups and men. Data from the recent coroner's database study showed that at least half of the deceased were known to be unemployed.

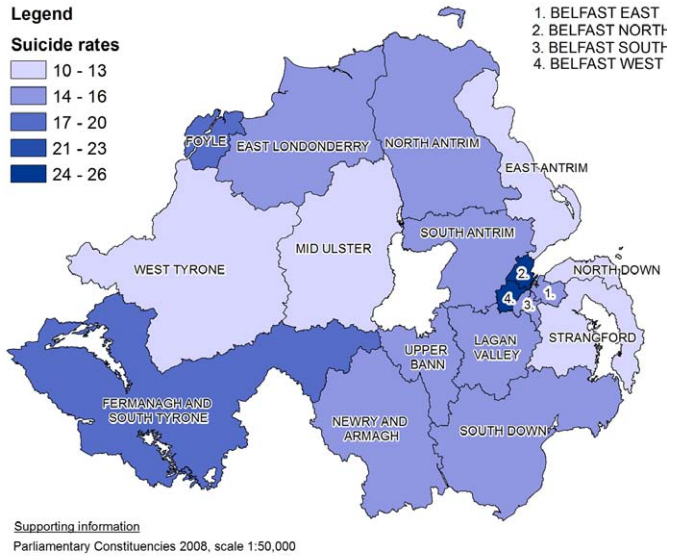
Alcohol and substance use

The misuse of substances is closely linked with self-harming and suicide. Alcohol is a key area of concern. For example, *The Adult Drinking Pattern Survey* (2013) reported

that while 73% of adults in Northern Ireland drank alcohol, 31% engaged in at least one weekly binge drinking session and 11% were identified as problem drinkers.

Bereavement

Research has shown that more than one in ten of those who died by suicide had been affected by experiences of death, grief or illness of somebody close to them. It is suggested an average of six people suffer intense grief as a result of suicide bereavement. Furthermore, there is also a 'ripple effect' for families and communities - with up to 60 people being affected by each death.



**Suicide rate per 100,000 persons
(2012-2014 annual average)**



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Legacy of conflict

Research has also shown that 'the Troubles' may be a key factor in rising suicide rates. For example, children caught up in difficult or violent situations may be less 'psychologically resilient' in later life. This risk factor has not been addressed in current suicide prevention strategies.

Prevention

Effective suicide prevention relies on identifying factors involved in vulnerability and providing opportunities for intervention. Stigma is a major barrier to seeking help. Despite the wide range of suicide prevention services available, many of those who die are not known to health and social care services beforehand. Prevention is not just a health matter, as suicide is a behavioural outcome which results from a combination of social, psychological, and biological processes, together with the ability to carry out the act.

In 2012, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety published its refreshed Protect Life Strategy (2012-2014). Although still applicable, a new suicide strategy for Northern Ireland is anticipated for public consultation in the next mandate.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Consider this...

Equality, Youth, Justice and Government

A new era for the Assembly and Executive

Ray McCaffrey

The 2016-21 mandate begins in the midst of significant institutional reform.



Background

The 2016-2021 mandate marks a new era in the history of the devolved institutions. For the first time provision has been made for an officially recognised opposition, the Executive has been restructured from 12 to nine departments and Assembly committees have been changed to reflect this.

Opposition – enhancing scrutiny?

The desirability or otherwise of an official opposition within the Assembly has been the subject of much debate, especially during the previous mandate, when the Assembly and Executive Review Committee examined the issue in detail.

Discussions around opposition in the context of the Northern Ireland Assembly most often centred on comparisons with the Westminster model and its capital ‘O’ Opposition. But this system is the exception rather than the rule in most European countries. In fact, the reality in most European parliaments is governing coalitions and opposition blocs, within which the parties might have very different opinions and strategies.

The basis for the new model stems from the *Fresh Start Agreement* of November 2015. The provisions of the Assembly and Executive Reform (Assembly Opposition) Act 2016 may be implemented at a later date. Parties who choose to go into opposition can avail of the following:

- The opportunity to ask the first question at topical questions to the First Minister and deputy First Minister;
- Designated days for opposition business;
- Additional financial assistance.

Fewer departments, better government?

Like the Assembly, the shape and size of the Executive has been an area of discussion for some time, but it was only in November 2015 that legislation was brought forward to reduce the number of departments and rename others.

So what has changed? The Departments of Culture, Arts and Leisure; Employment and Learning; and Environment have been abolished with their functions transferred to the remaining nine departments. Beyond this, the traditional structure of one minister for one department has been retained with the nature of the political settlement in Northern Ireland probably limiting the scope for radical reform of the Executive.

Often, the key consideration in designing an Executive is political expediency rather than detailed planning as to which arrangement would deliver the most effective method of policy implementation. But can simply reducing departments and transferring functions provide a comprehensive, flexible, and efficient operating model that will enable the Executive to effectively realise its policy goals?

OECD review

The Northern Ireland Executive agreed in June 2014 to commission the OECD to conduct a strategic review of public sector reform in Northern Ireland. The aim of the review is to bring forward recommendations to maximise the impact of current reform across the Northern Ireland public sector on both the quality of public services for citizens and value for money. The draft report is expected to be published in due course.

Fewer committees, but a heavier workload?

The current structural relationship between the Northern Ireland Assembly's statutory (departmental) committees and Northern Ireland departments is straightforward – there is one committee for each department, reflecting the need to ensure balanced representation for political parties. A move to cross-cutting committees was considered by an Assembly Committee Review Group in 2013, but the current structure was perceived to be working well and remained in place.

From May 2016 there will almost certainly be nine statutory committees to reflect the new departmental structure. Excluding the Speaker, ministers and two junior ministers, there will be 95 MLAs to fill 99 statutory Committee places – an almost one-to-one ratio. Members will still have to fill positions on standing committees, but the requirement to sit on multiple committees will be reduced.

The functions of the old departments have not been abolished – they have simply been transferred and one of the challenges for those committees that now shadow larger departments will be to ensure that some subjects are not subsumed by others. There may be an increase in the use of sub-committees, something provided for in Standing Orders but not used up to this point.

The potential for a new dynamic within the Assembly now exists and it will be interesting to see how this plays out in the coming years.

Dealing with the past

Michael Potter

How far is Northern Ireland from an agreed approach to deal with the events of the conflict?

One area that has created considerable political division in Northern Ireland is how to deal with a contested past. Broadly, 'dealing with the past' tends to refer to issues relating to people affected by the conflict, how the past is commemorated or remembered and truth recovery and justice.

The current framework

Issues relating to the past are managed through the following processes:

- **Parades:** The Parades Commission adjudicates on potentially contentious parades. Draft legislation proposals in 2010 to replace this system were not progressed.
- **Flags:** Separate pieces of legislation prohibit the placing of flags on Roads Service property (such as lamp posts), regulate the flying of flags on public buildings, and prohibit the display of paramilitary emblems. The 2005 joint protocol on flags prioritises negotiation and local agreement regarding the taking down of contentious flags.
- **Victims and Survivors:** A Commission for Victims and Survivors was established in 2006 and the Victims and Survivors Service took over the task of distributing funding to individuals and groups in 2009. A Private Member's Bill in 2010 sought to narrow the definition of 'victim and survivor' (defined in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), but this was not agreed at Second Stage.
- **Transitional Justice:** There have been various official processes for investigating the past:
 - Government-appointed inquiries and investigations
 - Police Ombudsman
 - Legacy Investigation Branch of the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI), which replaced the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) in 2014
 - Inquests
 - Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains.

Processes for dealing with the past

The Bloomfield Commission, which investigated issues for people affected by the conflict, concluded in 1998 with the report *We Will Remember Them*. Among the recommendations were increased support to victims of the conflict through funds

and services, a Victims Commission or equivalent and consideration of a truth and reconciliation commission. While recommendations for support to victims and a Commission for Victims and Survivors have been acted upon, there has been no truth and reconciliation commission.

In 2007, the Secretary of State appointed an independent group to look at ways forward for dealing with the past in Northern Ireland. The *Report of the Consultative Group on the Past* was published in 2009. Among the recommendations were the establishment of an independent Legacy Commission, support to victims of the conflict, recognition of those who have suffered (including a one-off payment) and a Reconciliation Forum. These recommendations were not taken forward.



The *Together: Building a United Community* strategy committed to establishing an All Party Group to consider and make recommendations on matters including parades and protests; flags; symbols, emblems and related matters; and the past. Cross-party talks were chaired by Senator Richard Haass and Dr Meghan O’Sullivan. A proposed agreement was published in December 2013, which included alternative measures to take over from the Parades Commission and HET and bodies to look at information retrieval and cultural issues such as flags. This was not endorsed by all parties.

The *Stormont House Agreement* in 2014 included a range of measures associated with dealing with the past, including:

- A Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition;
- Responsibility for parades to be given to the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- An Oral History Archive;
- An independent Historical Inquiries Unit to take over from the HET and take on legacy cases from the Police Ombudsman; and
- An Independent Commission on Information Retrieval.

The 2015 *Fresh Start Agreement* included an implementation plan for the measures concluded in the *Stormont House Agreement*.

There remain significant issues to be addressed regarding the past, such as the balance between disclosure and national security in legacy cases. In addition, issues relating to flags and parades remain unresolved.

An equal start? Overcoming early disadvantage

Caroline Perry

How can we ensure that children's early years lay firm foundations for the future?

During the first five years of life children develop at a rapid rate, and their experiences during this period profoundly influence their life chances.

Socio-economic background has a strong influence on outcomes for children...

Poverty, inequality and social disadvantage help to shape our children's future, with socio-economic background a key predictor of academic performance at school. Differences between disadvantaged children and their better-off peers are apparent even at an early age. Research suggests that by the age of two, there is a six month gap in the language processing skills of children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, what parents do is more important than who they are...

The link between socio-economic background and success at school is not absolute. Parents are critical in influencing outcomes for children, particularly in relation to the home learning environment. Health factors during pregnancy and in the early years, such as pre-natal care, smoking, nutrition and overall health, also play an important role.

Early intervention can be crucial in improving outcomes...

Effective early intervention can help to mitigate the effects of disadvantage and inequality, and to reduce the gap in outcomes for children from different backgrounds. As such, they can also generate long-term savings in public spending. However, to be effective, interventions should begin at an early age. Key areas for early intervention include:

- Maternal and child health;
- Parenting; and
- Early education and care.

Sure Start provides early intervention in Northern Ireland, but challenges exist...

Sure Start provides a wide range of services to support children and their families in the 20% most disadvantaged wards in Northern Ireland, expanding to the top 25% by 2016/17. Over 32,000 children are registered with Sure Start projects. However, a number of challenges exist in relation to the programme, with evidence showing that:

- Most providers believe that their catchment area is not appropriate and misses areas of need;
- The Department of Education collects limited data on participants, preventing an assessment of whether the programme is reaching families most in need; and

- A much lower proportion of Protestants than Catholics avail of Sure Start services (18% compared to 62% of registered children at March 2015).

Delivering Social Change programmes also provide early intervention activities, although their effectiveness is yet to be determined...

The OfMdFM *Delivering Social Change* framework provides for a number of early intervention programmes, including the Early Intervention Transformation Programme which focuses on support for parents and families. Many of its initiatives are entering the pilot phase.

The framework includes 30 nurture groups in primary schools. These provide tailored intervention for young children showing signs of emotional stress or behavioural difficulties, in a supportive environment staffed by a teacher and classroom assistant. A forthcoming evaluation may provide useful evidence on their effectiveness and potential for expansion. Funding for the existing groups is secured until March 2017.



Nurture room at Blackmountain Primary School, Belfast.

Pre-school is particularly beneficial for disadvantaged children; however there is room for improvement in current provision...

High quality pre-school provision has positive outcomes for children, particularly in relation to the school readiness and achievement of disadvantaged children. A study in Northern Ireland has found that high quality provision influences children's academic attainment at the end of primary school, but that low quality provision does not have benefits.

Around 93% of all eligible children in Northern Ireland attend one year of Department of Education funded pre-school provision. In the period 2012-2014, 23% of voluntary and private pre-school settings and 10% of statutory settings were not evaluated as good or better. There were also variations in the quality of leadership, with improvement required across a third of all settings.

Monitoring the effectiveness of early interventions will play an important role in the coming years...

While tackling wider deprivation and social inequalities is not within the gift of the education system, it is evident that early intervention can help to reduce their effects on children's lives. In the new Assembly mandate, scrutiny of the effectiveness of existing initiatives, together with monitoring the extent to which such services are cohesive and reaching those most in need, will help to inform this fundamental area of social policy.

'Good Relations' in Northern Ireland

Michael Potter

Are we still sectarian, or the 'race hate capital'?

Community cohesion issues in Northern Ireland encompass the 'traditional' divide of Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist and minority ethnic and majority communities. In their negative expression, relations between these groups are manifested as sectarianism and xenophobia or racism. Increasingly, the terms 'community relations' (relations between the majority communities) and 'race relations' (relations between majority and minority ethnic communities) have been conflated as 'good relations'.

The term 'race' is no longer recognised as a valid term to describe ethnic differences between groups within the human race. However the terms 'race relations' and 'racial equality' are still often used in policy.

Attitudes and trends

Figures from the Police Service of Northern Ireland over ten years (2004/05 to 2014/15) suggest there has been an increase in reported racist-motivated incidents and crimes (813 and 633 to 1,356 and 920 respectively) and a decline in sectarian incidents and crimes (1,701 and 1,469 to 1,517 and 1,043 respectively), although sectarian motivation remained more common than racist motivation.

According to results from the *Northern Ireland Life and Times survey* from 2004 and 2014, attitudes to mixing by religion in terms of work, housing, education and personal relationships have changed little or hardened over the ten years.

	2004	2014
Would prefer a workplace with own religion only	8%	16%
Would prefer children went to school with own religion only	34%	34%
Would prefer to live in a neighbourhood with own religion only	19%	25%
Would mind (a lot or a little) if a close relative married someone of a different religion	13%	19%

Source: NILT

However, the *Peace Monitoring Report* for 2014 records a steep decline in 'single identity' wards (i.e. 80% of one religion) from 55% to 37% between 2001 and 2011, although there is evidence of patterns of segregation within wards. The same report states that 93% of children are educated in separate schools.

Policy

Following a consultation paper in 2003, *A Shared Future* policy was published in 2005. The *Racial Equality Strategy 2005-2010* was published in the same year.

In 2010, the Executive consulted on the *Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI)*, which was to replace *A Shared Future*. The text of CSI stated that it did not replace the *Racial Equality Strategy*, but it included measures to deliver aspects of that strategy, such as bringing the Racial Equality Forum into the CSI framework.

A separate follow-on racial equality strategy did not initially emerge, but *Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC)* was published in 2013 as the successor community relations strategy and this contained a commitment to publish a new racial equality strategy by the end of that year. T:BUC contains seven 'headline actions':

1. Establishing ten new shared education campuses;
2. Getting 10,000 young people on the new United Youth volunteering programme;
3. Establishing ten new shared housing schemes;
4. Developing four urban village schemes;
5. Developing a significant programme of cross-community sporting events;
6. Removing interface barriers by 2023; and
7. Pilot 100 shared summer schools by 2015.

These 'headline actions' have been allocated to the relevant departments to implement.

The new *Racial Equality Strategy 2015-20* was published in December 2015. The strategy contains a series of actions aimed at: tackling racial inequalities; eradicating racism and hate crime; and promoting race relations and social cohesion along with T:BUC.

Where T:BUC is aimed at promoting community cohesion through community relations and racial equality, the *Racial Equality Strategy* focusses on issues for minority ethnic identities. A Racial Equality Subgroup will operate under the auspices of the Ministerial Panel of T:BUC to advise government departments on implementation of the Strategy.

Community relations and minority ethnic relations

Rather than fusing community relations and relations with minority ethnic communities into a new 'good relations' paradigm, the five year delay in introducing the new *Racial Equality Strategy* has led to accusations that relations between the two majority communities take precedence. In a context of transition from conflict, the charge is that 'community relations' trumps 'race relations'.

Future challenges for relations between communities in Northern Ireland are likely to be, not just tackling racially motivated hate crime, but also demonstrating that minority ethnic communities have roles to play in society on an equal basis to the majority communities.

Modernising equality legislation

Jane Campbell

Following decades of piecemeal development, governments are increasingly seeking to address the common problem of fragmented, uneven and incoherent equality legislation.

Great Britain's Single Equality Act

The word equality has the power to stimulate much debate. The term is entwined with ideas such as fairness, freedom, justice and disadvantage yet there is significant variation across nations in how it is defined and how it is supposed that inequality can be addressed.

Great Britain's single Equality Act of 2010 was greeted by many with delight and by others with disappointment and even hostility. Some believed it would herald an aggressive era of political correctness while others suggested it did not go far enough.

The Equality Act harmonised, simplified and updated the diverse range of equality laws introduced in Great Britain since the 1970s. Devised by the Labour government, and attracting intense scrutiny and debate along the way, the Act was finally passed at Westminster with cross-party support for almost all of its provisions.

The Act replaced nine previous major pieces of legislation and over 100 supporting regulations and sought to implement four EU equal treatment Directives. As well as a harmonised approach towards anti-discrimination, the Act aimed to strengthen progress on equality by enhancing existing levels of protection or introducing new measures.

The task of bringing together the previous separate pieces of legislation was acknowledged as a significant achievement. Whilst running to some 238 pages (in its printed form) and containing a total of 218 sections and 28 schedules, it was welcomed by individuals and organisations as a simpler framework that provided more consistent levels of protection for different groups.

Harmonisation of the existing legislation was guided by four key principles. It was agreed that existing protections should not be lost or reduced and wherever feasible, common approaches should be adopted. All legal definitions, tests and exceptions were to be practical and reflect the realities of how discrimination is actually experienced by individuals. Finally, it was agreed that the Act should be compliant with the requirements of EU law.

A global challenge

Although the development of equality policy and law varies significantly throughout the world, many governments are seeking to address the common problem of fragmented,

uneven and incoherent legislation. Inspired by important new legislation in the last decade, particularly in the European Union, some countries have begun to consider that the governing principle of equality will be strengthened if the different strands of their equality legislation are brought together and that law and policy are best pursued from a coherent, unified equality framework. This has resulted in new, higher standards of protection.



A Single Equality Bill for Northern Ireland?

Northern Ireland's patchwork of equality legislation now stands in stark contrast to Great Britain's Equality Act 2010 and similar developments elsewhere in the world. This is the view of the Equality Commission and others having observed that the unevenness in provisions across the various equality strands results in confusion for individuals, employers and service providers. The Equality Commission has a statutory duty to keep Northern Ireland's equality legislation under review. It has stressed that the current law is hard to understand and to benefit from, whereas a Single Equality Bill would provide clarity, consistency and equal protection regardless of the grounds concerned. The bill would also provide an opportunity to rectify some deficiencies in the current legislation as well as address new and emerging forms of discrimination where individuals currently have no or limited protection.

Although options for a bill were consulted on during direct rule, and revealed public support for harmonisation of existing equality law, there remains a lack of political consensus in Northern Ireland around the introduction of a Single Equality Bill.

Human rights in Northern Ireland

Michael Potter

What if the Human Rights Act were repealed?

The Belfast Agreement in 1998 contained a comprehensive suite of human rights safeguards. These include: access to the *European Convention on Human Rights* (ECHR) in Northern Ireland courts; the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; consultation on rights supplementary to the ECHR to constitute a Bill of Rights; and prohibition of the Northern Ireland Assembly to legislate in any way contrary to the ECHR or any Bill of Rights.

The Human Rights Act

The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) brings the substantive articles of the ECHR into UK law, which means those rights can be directly evoked in UK courts. The Act places a duty on public bodies not to act in contravention of the ECHR.

Human Rights and the Northern Ireland Assembly

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 sets out the legislative competence of the Northern Ireland Assembly and prevents the Assembly from legislating in conflict with the ECHR. The passage of a Bill through the Assembly therefore has a series of checks for human rights compliance and for legislative competence, which incorporates human rights standards:

- Prior to introduction, by the sponsoring minister
- Prior to First Stage, by the Speaker
- On introduction, a copy is sent to the Human Rights Commission, which may comment or be asked to comment on human rights compliance
- Prior to Final Stage, by the Speaker
- Prior to Royal Assent, by the Secretary of State
- The Attorney General may also refer the Bill to the Supreme Court when passed.

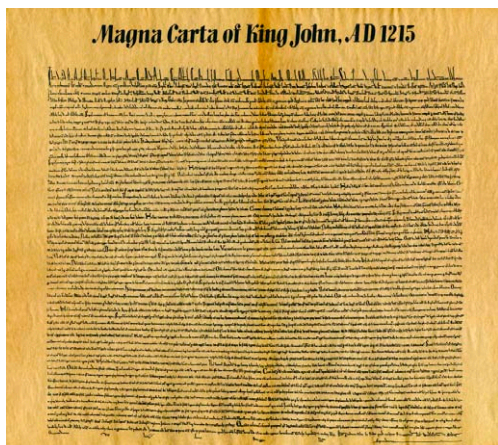
'Convention rights', meaning the rights contained within the ECHR, are explicit in the Northern Ireland Act. The Act also refers to an obligation on the Secretary of State to ensure that actions taken by a Northern Ireland Minister or Acts passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly comply with the 'international obligations' of the UK. This may include other human rights instruments ratified by the UK.

Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

The Human Rights Commission first consulted on a potential Bill of Rights in 2001. Following the *St Andrews Agreement* in 2006, a cross-party, cross-sectoral Bill of Rights Forum met and published its report on a potential Bill of Rights in March 2008. The Human Rights Commission published its advice to government in December of that year and in November 2009, a government response outlining potential additional rights and considerations for Northern Ireland was published for consultation. There has been no significant movement on the issue since then.

Repeal of the HRA and a 'UK Bill of Rights'

In 2011, the UK Government established a Commission on a Bill of Rights, which considered a range of options, including repealing the HRA and replacing it with a Bill of Rights. The Commission did not agree on an outcome, but a majority was in favour of reform. Advisory panels from Wales and Scotland were opposed to repealing the Act (Northern Ireland did not appoint a panel), but the Commission's conclusions stated that there would be no interference with any Northern Ireland Bill of Rights process.



The Minister of Justice, giving evidence for reform to the Lords in February 2016 stated that:

- Human rights have developed a 'bad name' with the public;
- The HRA pays too much deference to the European Court of Human Rights;
- UK courts and the UK Parliament should take precedence over the European Court; and
- There could be more balance between absolute rights and public interest.

What would happen in Northern Ireland if the HRA were repealed?

Any reform of the human rights legislation in the UK may have impacts on obligations under the *Belfast Agreement*. Points for consideration might be:

- If the HRA were repealed, how might Convention rights remain accessible in courts in Northern Ireland?
- If there were a UK Bill of Rights, would Northern Ireland be included, or have a separate Bill of Rights?

There has been no report of any intention to remove the Convention rights obligations from the Northern Ireland Act.

Changes ahead for special educational needs

Caroline Perry

The growth of special educational needs and the implementation of new legislation point to challenges ahead.

There has been a steady increase in the prevalence of special educational needs (SEN) in Northern Ireland over the past ten years, rising from 16% of all school pupils in 2005/06 to 22% of pupils (73,435) in 2014/15.

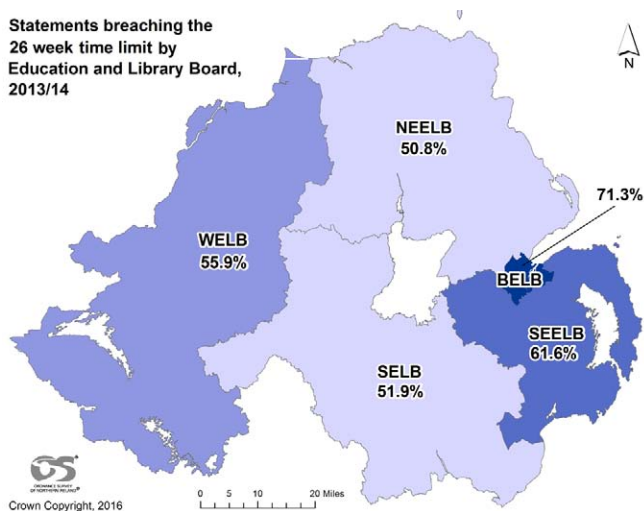
Implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Act and its forthcoming subordinate legislation, together with a revised statutory Code of Practice which will place greater emphasis on in-school support, present a number of challenges for the new Assembly mandate.

Existing delays in statutory SEN identification and assessment call into question a planned reduction in timeframes...

The Education Authority has 26 weeks in which to issue a final statement of SEN, which will reduce to 20 weeks under the new framework. However, a majority (59%) of statements

breached the current time limit in 2013/14. Of these, three-quarters (75%) were issued in six to nine months, while a further 22% were issued in nine to 12 months.

A broad range of 'valid exceptions' are permitted, including late receipt of advice from a Health and Social Care Trust; this accounted for almost three-quarters (74%) of delays in 2013/14. Nonetheless, 9% of delayed statements were not subject to a valid exception.



The SEND Act will require education and health authorities to cooperate, although challenges are likely to remain...

Evidence points to inadequate joint working between education and health bodies in relation to SEN assessment and provision in Northern Ireland, with mounting pressures on health budgets presenting a further challenge. While recent legislation requires education and health bodies to cooperate in relation to SEN and provides for oversight roles, these long-standing issues may be challenging to resolve.

A number of rights will transfer from parents to children, but draft regulations do not require support or advocacy for young people...

The SEND Act transfers a number of rights from parents to children over compulsory school age, including the right to request an assessment and to appeal to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST).

Evidence suggests that support, advocacy and access to legal advice and representation play an important role in promoting capacity to exercise legal rights. This is particularly important for young people in light of their age, vulnerability and lack of income. However, the draft SEN regulations do not require the Education Authority to arrange or fund support or advocacy for young people.

The draft regulations also detail the procedure for determining whether a child has the capacity to exercise their rights within the framework. While the recent Mental Capacity Act requires that all practicable help and support are provided prior to determining incapacity under its provisions, the draft SEN Regulations do not provide for any such support or advocacy.

Existing concerns around the appeals process raise questions around the participation of young people...

Research highlights a perception of inequality between parties at SENDIST hearings. Parents are not entitled to free representation, and may not understand the legislation or their rights; while the Education Authority is well-versed in the tribunal processes and has access to legal expertise and professional witnesses. This raises questions about the participation of young people with SEN, including issues around access to justice, meaningful participation and the provision of support, advocacy and legal advice.

As such, there are a number of challenges ahead...

It is clear that the new Assembly will face a number of challenges in relation to the SEN framework, particularly around: the greater emphasis on in-school support; waiting times for statements; joint working across education and health; provisions for determining mental capacity; and access to justice. A forthcoming regional plan for special schools will also influence the shape and structure of SEN provision in the years to come.

Ready for ageing?

Jane Campbell

How are policy makers approaching the challenges of an ageing population?

A common EU challenge

Population ageing has been identified as a major societal challenge common to most European countries, particularly in terms of health and social care provision. In view of this, the European Commission has encouraged Member States to have high-level strategies in place. For example, it recommends policies to improve the sustainability and efficiency of social and health care systems; policies that promote health throughout the life course and encourage prevention and rehabilitation in order to reduce demand for long-term care. Commission initiatives to inspire and support Member States have included the *European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between the Generations 2012* and the *European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing*.

Is the UK ready for ageing?

In 2012 a House of Lords Select Committee examined the implications of an ageing UK population for citizens and public policy in the near future - the decade 2020 to 2030. Its report stated:

The UK population is ageing rapidly, but we have concluded that the Government and our society are woefully underprepared... The Government have not looked at ageing from the point of view of the public nor considered how policies may need to change to equip people better to address longer lives.

In response the government proposed action in four key areas:

- **Extending working lives:** abolition of the state retirement age.
- **Secure retirement income:** introduction of a flat rate, single tier state pension from April 2016.
- **The health and social care system:** a Care Bill (applying mainly to England) to make the care system clearer and fairer and to provide a cap on the costs for social care and a new universal deferred payment scheme.
- **Supporting independence:** funding for local Home Improvement Agencies (England) and a National Planning Policy Framework (England).

Is Northern Ireland ready for ageing?

In 2011, AgeNI called on the newly-formed Executive to put demographic ageing at the heart of budget planning. Referring to the draft budget it stated: *'By 2030, it is projected*

that there will be more than 130,000 people over 80 in Northern Ireland and yet the Executive has failed to demonstrate how it will manage now, let alone in 20 years.'

The *Programme for Government* commitments to extend legislation prohibiting unfair discrimination based on age, and on reforming and modernising health and social care, led to a process of review and consultation. However, by 2014, after delays and financial cutbacks in relation to these commitments AgeNI stated: *'in the context of an ageing society, more needs to be done, not less'*. A year later, a Queen's University study considered that, to date, government policy responses had, in general, been slow to catch up with demographic change. Whilst there was some evidence of constructive planning, the authors stressed that more must be done and soon.



As the 2011-16 mandate ended, proposed age discrimination legislation was still awaited although a long anticipated *Active Ageing Strategy 2016-21* was finally published. This is aimed at supporting the overarching objectives of extending healthy life expectancy, the development of streamlined cost-effective services and the reduction of inequalities. Around this time and following criticism from the Assembly Public Accounts Committee, Ministerial statements reaffirmed the commitment to reform of the health and social care system, building on the directions set in motion by *Transforming Your Care* and the *Donaldson Report*. Ministerial statements also proposed the setting up of an expert panel and a 'Transformation Fund' to guide and implement change.

Despite some promising policy developments to address the consequences of population ageing at national and local level, age sector organisations continue to call on politicians to fully face up to the impact this significant demographic change will have on society and to present a vision and coherent strategy not only for the immediate future, but in the long-term.

Seen but not heard: children 'sexting'

Claire Milliken

Rapid technological changes have caused the norms and methods of children's sexual behaviour to evolve.

Much screen-based media use now involves accessing interactive social networking sites such as Facebook and Snapchat. The access, particularly via personal devices, presents opportunities but also risks.

What is 'sexting'?

'Sexting' is the practice of sending or posting sexually suggestive text messages and images, including nude or semi-nude photographs via mobile phones or over the internet. The definition is subject to debate and studies have found many children (under 18 years old) do not use this term, preferring terms such as 'selfie' or 'dodgy pix'. A range of behaviours can be classed as sexting, from experimental behaviour like flirting escalating to adult involvement. A NSPCC report in 2012, which suggested that problems posed by sexting are a result of peer pressure, highlighted that:

few teenagers wish to be excluded from the sexual banter, gossip, discussion or, indeed, from the flirtatious and dating activity endemic in youth culture. But to take part is to be under pressure – to look right, perform, compete, judge and be judged.

Why do children 'sex'?

It is suggested that because of children's immaturity and lack of future-orientated thinking, they are less likely to fully understand and consider the consequences of sexting behaviours. Associated risks include: loss of control of the image; blackmail; bullying; emotional distress; unwanted attention; revenge porn; and trophy syndrome (where the recipient shows the image to friends to prove possession).

How to deal with new online offences

UK studies have shown that for children, the practice of sexting is neither shocking nor surprising. While not all are engaging in this behaviour, they are aware of those who do. In addition, the various types of sexting make it difficult to identify the resulting harm from a particular act, and so determine the appropriate legal response, if required.

The House of Lords Communications Committee has suggested there are two ways to consider online acts: 'either they are new acts, or they are acts already prohibited by the criminal law but committed in the new forum of social media.' Faced with a high volume of acts which are already prohibited by the law, the committee considered that 'society

has four options: i) do nothing and accept the status quo; ii) add resources so that more allegations can be investigated and prosecuted; iii) change the law so that behaviour is no longer criminal; iv) retain the law and approach to prosecutions, but seek to change behaviour through policy interventions.’

The situation in Northern Ireland

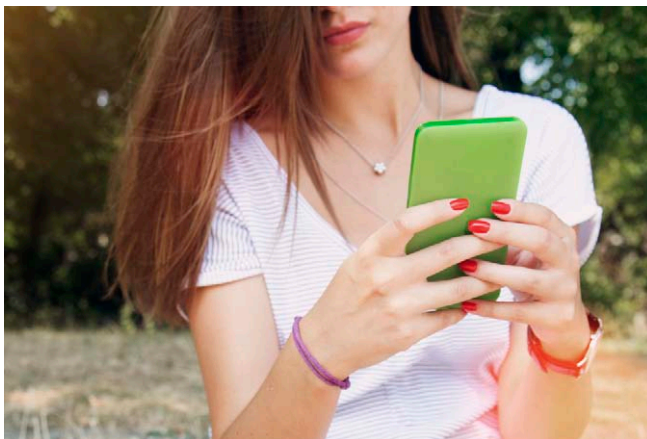
In Northern Ireland it is an offence to take, permit to be taken, distribute, show, possess or publish any indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child (under 18 years old). The maximum penalty for this offence is ten years’ imprisonment, a fine, or both.

Accordingly, a child who takes a sexualised photograph and sends it to another child is potentially guilty of two offences. The legislation creates a paradox whereby a child may have reached the legal age of consent yet cannot engage in sexting behaviours.

The Public Prosecution Service will consider if the public interest requires prosecution. Between the 1st of March 2013 and 31st March 2015, of the 75 prosecution decisions relating to children in cases of indecent images of children and other image offences, one was for prosecution, eight were for non-court diversions while 66 were decisions of no prosecution.

Responses in other jurisdictions

Legislative responses to address these behaviours in other jurisdictions include: decriminalisation of consensual activity; lesser penalties for child offenders; and putting in law the requirement for internet safety education programmes.



Non-legislative responses

Much commentary has argued that using existing legislation to deal with children sharing intimate images is stretching the law beyond its logical use and, as a result, punishment is not proportionate. Some assert ‘sexting’ is a social, rather than a criminal issue which can be addressed through education intervention.

The Department of Justice has plans to consult on future legislative change, as part of a wider review into a number of related areas covering sexual offences and child protection.

Laying the groundwork for STEM growth

Caroline Perry

How well is the compulsory education system supporting demand for STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) skills in Northern Ireland?

Skills development is critical in driving economic growth, and evidence highlights the importance of STEM subjects in contributing to innovation and productivity within economies. However, demand for people with high quality STEM qualifications outstrips supply in Northern Ireland, and employers face challenges in recruiting appropriately skilled STEM workers at every level.

This undersupply is particularly acute in the areas of maths, computer science, engineering and technology, in line with growth forecasts for the ICT, Professional Services and Advanced Manufacturing sectors. Women are notably underrepresented among the STEM workforce.

There are weaknesses in the STEM 'artery'...

Education lays critical foundations for future interest and ability in STEM, and makes up a key aspect of the STEM 'artery' or pipeline. However, evidence in Northern Ireland points to a number of issues which may influence early interest in STEM, and the subsequent uptake in STEM subjects at post-primary and in further and higher education.

Northern Ireland performs among the best countries in the world in primary maths, but significantly less well in primary science and post-primary maths...

Northern Ireland's performance in maths at primary is among the best internationally. However, at post-primary, our students perform significantly below average in maths, and a relatively low proportion of students achieve at the highest levels. In science, our primary pupils perform significantly less well than many other countries, while post-primary students achieve in line with the international average.

Science is not a separate subject at primary, and many primary school teachers lack confidence in teaching it...

The revised curriculum comprises a number of areas of learning. *'The World Around Us'* area comprises science, geography and history, and as such, science is not a standalone subject. This approach is out of step with many other countries that are successful in primary science. Evidence has found that in Northern Ireland's primary schools:

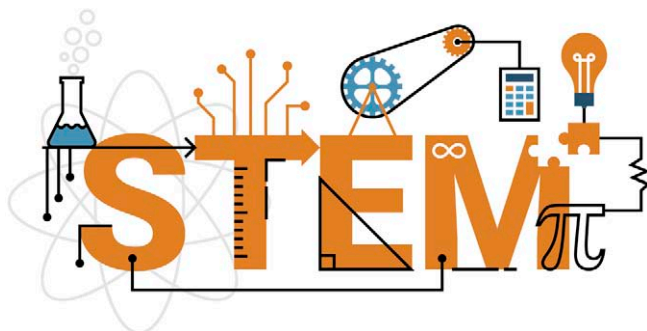
- The science and technology elements were underdeveloped in 54% of schools inspected;
- While 91% of teachers surveyed felt very prepared to teach maths, only 54% felt as ready to teach science; and

- Teaching time was higher than the international average for maths, but below average for science.

A planned review of the curriculum later in 2016 may provide scope for a review of the efficacy of the current approach to STEM in primary schools.

There has been a decline in the percentage of A level students taking STEM exams since 2004/05...

Between 2004/05 and 2013/14, the proportion of students entering one or more STEM A levels decreased from 48% to 45%. Subjects such as biology, chemistry, physics have seen a reduction in uptake, while maths has experienced an increase.



Northern Ireland is out of step with a growing trend towards computer science in schools...

There is a growing trend towards including computer programming in education internationally, and a move away from simply teaching ICT in schools (with its emphasis on *using* software). The revised curriculum in Northern Ireland does not refer to computer programming. While there is flexibility for schools to teach coding if they wish, the numbers doing so are likely to be small. At A level, more students are studying Information Technology compared to ten years ago, while fewer are taking Computer Science.

The reform of GCSEs and A levels in England means that students here will no longer be able to take exams from many awarding bodies. This restricts the subject offering available to students, particularly where the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) does not offer an equivalent exam, such as in the case of GCSE and A level Computer Science.

Strengthening the STEM 'artery' will require a range of approaches...

Compulsory education lies at the heart of the STEM 'artery', laying the foundations for young people's future career choices and success. However, the challenges at different stages of education, from the issues around primary science to decreasing uptake at A level, will require a multi-faceted approach in order to keep up with the demands of an increasingly innovation and knowledge-based economy.

Women in public life in Northern Ireland

Michael Potter

The representation of women: where does Northern Ireland stand?

Following the February 2016 election to Dáil Éireann, the Northern Ireland Assembly had the lowest representation of women of any legislature in Britain and Ireland. At 22%, the Dáil brushed in above the Assembly's 21%. Even then, the number of women MLAs had been increased by more female than male co-options during the mandate: in 2011, 19% of elected MLAs were women.

In 2014, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) concluded that the under-representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland was a serious issue which needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The Committee did not, however, agree on the use of quotas, such as the 30% in force in the Dáil elections. Nevertheless a number of initiatives have proceeded. The Speaker's Reference Group on a Gender Sensitive Assembly and a women's parliamentary caucus were established as an outcome of the AERC review, and the focus has continued with women in public life being a topic for the *North-South Parliamentary Association*.

Prior to the reduction in the number of government departments in 2016, four of the 13 ministers were women and both of the junior ministers in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdFM) were women.

Female representation in local councils has seen a small increase, from 21% in 2005 to 25% in 2014. While two of the three Northern Ireland MEPs are women, two of the 18 Members of Parliament (MPs) representing Northern Ireland constituencies at Westminster are women.

While 36% of public appointments in 2014 were held by women, 21% of chairs were female. A report by the Commissioner for Public Appointments in 2014 found that, despite efforts to increase diversity, there had been little impact on changing the profile of public appointments.

In the field of employment, the 2011 Census indicated that 37% of managers, directors and senior officials were female. While in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, 31% of Grade 5 and above were recorded as female in 2013, there are no female Permanent Secretaries running departments. A survey of the management boards of the top 100 companies in Northern Ireland in 2015 found that 15% of board members were female.

In the judiciary, the Lord Chief Justice and the three Lord Justices of Appeal are all men, but two female High Court Judges were appointed in 2015 out of a total of ten. Five of the eighteen County Court Judges are female.

Percentages of women in public life

Position	% Female	Year of data
Members of the Legislative Assembly	21%	2016
Members of Parliament	11%	2016
Local councillors	25%	2014
Public appointments	36%	2014
Chairs of public bodies	21%	2014
Managers, directors and officials	37%	2011
Civil servants Grade 5+	31%	2013
Permanent secretaries	0%	2016
Ministers and junior ministers	47%	2016
Board members of the top 100 companies in NI	15%	2015
Senior judges	0%	2016
High Court judges	20%	2016
County Court judges	28%	2016

Source: NI Assembly Research Service

Politics can then be seen in a context of general under-representation of women in decision-making roles. So what are the barriers to women's participation in senior posts? Studies over the years have suggested:

- The 'masculine' nature of such sectors, such as the operation of politics;
- 'Traditional' assumptions about what women and men do in work and society;
- Assumptions that women should be the primary carer for the family;
- Discrimination by men (and women) who do not think women should be in senior roles;
- Confidence issues associated with entering a field that is perceived as hostile to women; and
- Popular images of leadership that portray men in decision making roles.

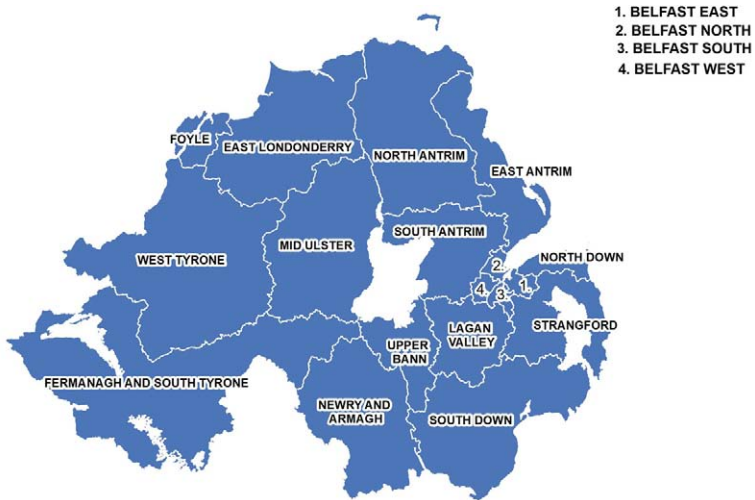
Politics is a high profile occupation that has the potential to produce role models to encourage more women into public life. Measures to increase the participation of women in politics can include party candidate selection processes that favour more women, family-friendly arrangements in the legislature or support mechanisms for women.

Quotas have proved successful in increasing the proportion of female election candidates to the Dáil. In the absence of quotas in Northern Ireland, a start has been made to look at the environment of the Northern Ireland Assembly to establish where it can be more welcoming to women. In addition, the newly-established women's caucus can serve to offer mutual support to women who may feel in a minority.

Should the Assembly break the constituency link with Westminster?

Ray McCaffrey

A decision will have to be made about Assembly constituencies.



Background

The May 2016 election was probably the last at which 108 Members would be returned to the Assembly. The *Fresh Start Agreement* of November 2015 contained a commitment to reduce the number of MLAs from 108 to 90 and this should be implemented through the Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 2016, which reduces from six to five the number of MLAs returned per constituency. These changes should take effect at the 2021 election or earlier if an extraordinary Assembly election is called. But the constituencies used for Assembly elections are defined in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 as those used for UK parliamentary elections. A change to the number of these constituencies would impact, therefore, on the number of MLAs at the time of the next Assembly election.

Boundary Review 2018

In 2011 legislation was passed to reduce the number of MPs from 650 to 600 and it appeared that Northern Ireland would lose two constituencies in time for the 2015 UK Parliamentary election as a result of boundary changes needed to implement the

reduction. However, the 2013 review of constituency boundaries was halted because of disagreements within the previous coalition government over constitutional reform.

In February 2016, with a new Conservative government in power, a fresh boundary review was announced. The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland, on initiation of the latest review, stated that the number of parliamentary constituencies here would decrease from 18 to 17 at the next Westminster elections, expected in 2020. Should other factors remain unchanged, the impact of this change will mean the number of MLAs would, following implementation of the boundary changes, drop not to 90 but to 85.

In Scotland the statutory link between the Scottish Parliamentary constituencies and those for the House of Commons was removed in legislation passed in 2004. A similar decoupling has also taken place in Wales, where constituency boundaries for the National Assembly differ from those for Westminster elections.

Potential impact

When the Assembly and Executive Review Committee looked at this issue, it received submissions from stakeholders that raised the issue of how a reduction in MLAs might impact on inclusiveness and political representation. For example, a move from six to five Member constituencies could, it was argued, make it more difficult for smaller parties and independents to obtain seats.

Furthermore, the potential impact on female representation was raised, with concerns expressed that a reduction could make it more difficult to increase the number of female MLAs. Should further consideration be given to how the proposal to move from six to five Members per constituency could impact on political representation in terms of smaller parties, independents and women?

An opposing argument could be made that separate Assembly constituencies would mean three sets of electoral boundaries – local government, Assembly and Westminster. Could this lead to voter confusion? It shouldn't, as voters in Northern Ireland have been used to elections using the single transferable vote system and multiple elections on the same day.

Another option would be to bring forward the 2021 Assembly election and combine it with the 2020 Westminster election. This would mean that the provisions of the boundary review and the 2016 Assembly Bill could come into force at the same time. But it would go against what appears to be the desirability of trying to keep devolved elections separate from Westminster elections.

When this issue was considered by the Assembly & Executive Review Committee, there was no consensus on the way forward. However, now that a reduction in MLAs will happen in 2021, there may be a renewed interest in the case for decoupling, as doing so would mean that any future changes to Westminster boundaries would not automatically impact on the number of Assembly Members.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Consider this...

Communities, Infrastructure
and Environment

The challenge of implementing welfare reform in Northern Ireland

Eleanor Murphy

The Welfare Reform Bill was undoubtedly one of the most contentious pieces of legislation to come before the Assembly in the last mandate.

The passage of the Bill was protracted and fraught with disagreement, reflecting the scale of concern over its impact on Northern Ireland (NI). The NI Bill was first introduced in October 2012; some two and a half years later, in March 2015, a Petition of Concern ultimately halted the Bill passing its Final Stage. This was an extraordinary development. Even though social security is a devolved matter, the '*parity principle*' and the financial implications of breaking parity have historically provided the Assembly with little option but to pass social security legislation that largely mirrors that in Great Britain. Following the *Fresh Start Agreement*, the welfare reform framework was enacted in Westminster rather than the Assembly via the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015.

There is now little capacity to hold back the tide, at least in terms of the legislative introduction of the reforms, many of which have already been implemented in GB for some time. Although numerous other reforms have been implemented here over a number of years, the 2015 Order represents the largest and most significant tranche of reform:

- Universal Credit will replace six benefits and tax credits;
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP) will replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA);
- There will be a new 'Claimant Commitment' along with a new conditionality and sanctions regime; and
- A Benefit Cap.

Crucially, one of the mitigation measures agreed by the NI Executive is that, at least over the next four years, it will provide funding so that the '*bedroom tax*' will not apply here. The Chartered Institute of Housing (NI), the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) and Housing Rights have consistently opposed the introduction of the bedroom tax, arguing that it would create considerable hardship for social housing tenants. Fundamentally there is an insufficient number of smaller properties in the social housing sector in NI to facilitate the introduction of this measure.

The implementation of the 2015 Order and forthcoming Regulations will be one of the most significant challenges for the Assembly in the new mandate. It will impact upon social housing providers and their associated representative groups, private rented sector landlords, the community and voluntary sector, the Social Security Agency and

most importantly, individuals and families. However, it is important to acknowledge that in many respects much has been gained from the delay in implementing the reforms and the associated negotiations with the UK government. For example:

- **Mitigation:** a package of mitigation measures was proposed by the 'Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group' led by Professor Eileen Evason and agreed by the NI Executive e.g. supplementary payments for those who will be adversely affected by the reforms such as carers, claimants with disabilities and ill health, households affected by the Benefit Cap and changes to tax credits, those affected by the new sanctions regime; a Discretionary Support Scheme to replace the Social Fund; and financial support for the independent advice sector in order to assist people through the change process.
- **'Flexibilities':** including the housing element of Universal Credit (UC) to be paid to the landlord rather than the tenant; claimants to receive fortnightly rather than monthly payments of UC; and payment of UC for joint claims can be split rather than paid into a single back account. These flexibilities will hopefully avoid arrears and provide women, in particular, with financial independence.



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Two issues in particular may be prominent in the new mandate. The first is the status of 'parity'. The Assembly consent for Westminster (albeit temporarily) to legislate for welfare reform, a devolved matter, could be interpreted as an arguably necessary, but retrograde step. This is particularly at a time when other UK devolved legislatures are calling for greater devolution on social security matters. The second issue relates to the scrutiny of the effectiveness of the mitigation measures and the adequacy of its associated budget.

A new mandate, a new environment

Suzie Cave

Local government underwent significant structural change in 2015 with the number of councils reducing from 26 to 11, and the transfer of many functions from central to local government. This has brought changes to the ways in which the environment is managed. In 2016, these changes have continued with a reorganisation of Executive functions.

New structures

In 2016, the number of Executive departments reduced from 11 to nine. The Department of the Environment (DoE) has now been abolished and its functions split between three new departments from May, as follows:

1. **The Department for Infrastructure** (DfI): strategic planning (e.g. planning legislation and regionally significant development); flooding (which was previously the responsibility of DARD through the Rivers Agency); DoE (emergency flooding scheme) and DRD (flooding infrastructure and defences); and vehicle registration and road safety;
2. **The Department for Communities** (DfC): local government, including the new function of community planning, and built heritage from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA); and
3. **The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs** (DAERA): environmental protection and regulation (not including built heritage which will transfer to the Department for Communities).

The amalgamation of departments has been considered an opportunity for more joined up and co-ordinated working across central government, with many functions that had previously been split across different departments, being brought together. However, while many functions have been combined, it is also the case that some that work in tandem with one another have now been separated. As a result effective communication and working between departments will be needed, particularly in the following areas:

- **Planning** has now been separated from environmental protection (DAERA) and moved to a different department (DfI).
- **Local councils** will be responsible for the generation of both local development plans (as part of their planning functions) and community plans (as part of their community planning responsibilities). Both plans must complement one another;

however, the operation of local government (including its relationship with community planning) and planning have been allocated separately to DfC and DfI.

Giving environment its place

Concerns have been expressed across environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) about the amalgamation of some environmental functions, previously split between DoE and DARD, within a single department in the form of DAERA.

For example, there may be a conflict between environmental protection and regulation, versus agricultural production and expansion. Furthermore, given the funding cuts that environmental NGOs faced in 2015, there may be questions about the degree of priority given to environmental protection in this new department. However, the previous Environment Minister informed the Assembly that the new Natural Environment Fund, generated under revenue raised from the carrier bag levy, will provide the sector with some financial assurance.

In the absence of detailed information, it remains to be seen whether equal weight will be given to all responsibilities under the new DAERA. This includes the issue of how environmental functions will be protected to ensure European and *Programme for Government* targets will be met moving into the new mandate.

Independence

In line with these new structures, the previous Environment Minister opened up a discussion about the creation of an independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Minister voiced his support for an EPA in order, he stated, to improve transparency, separate the role of the policy maker and legislator from the regulator and enforcer, bring independence from political influence, and bring NI in line with the rest of the UK and Ireland.

A discussion document in 2015 presented a number of different options for an EPA:

- Retain the status quo;
- Transfer of all NIEA functions to an EPA;
- Transfer of NIEA and other departments' functions related to protecting the environment e.g. inland fisheries; and
- A regulation orientated EPA with policy making retained by the department.

A decision about which of these options to follow will be for the new Minister and Executive to make.



Are current farm incomes sustainable?

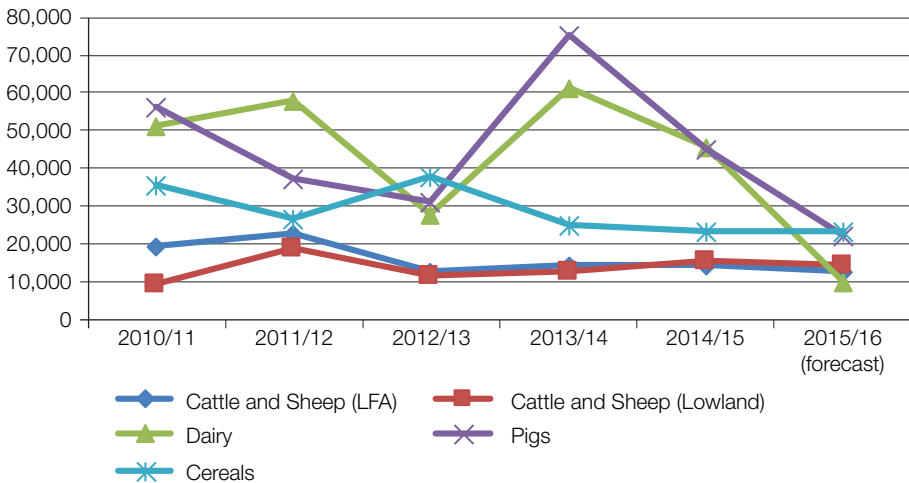
Mark Allen

Farm incomes over the last five years in Northern Ireland have shown considerable volatility and this presents challenges for the long-term sustainability of the industry both within and beyond the new Assembly mandate.

The dairy and pig sectors in particular have experienced considerable income variability. A number of factors have contributed to this, including the costs of inputs, currency differentials between sterling and the euro, the ending of milk quotas and the Russian import ban to name but a few. The impact on farm businesses has been significant.

Whilst the cattle and sheep sectors have not experienced the same extreme rises and falls in income, the fact remains that the incomes for both of these sectors are relatively low and this raises questions around the viability of these businesses. Will it be possible in the future to generate a family income on the basis of cattle and sheep farming alone?

Average Farm Business Income (FBI) for selected sectors, 2010/11 to 2015/16 (forecast)



The reliance on EU direct payments

An additional feature of agricultural incomes within Northern Ireland is how reliant they are on direct payments under the auspices of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) data from 2013-14

reveals that when measured across all farm types the average Farm Business Income with EU direct payments removed equated to £3,780 per farm. Cattle and sheep farms are particularly reliant on EU direct payments with Less Favoured Area (LFA) farms from these sectors recording a Farm Business Income loss of - £15,763 in 2013-14 when direct payments are removed.

Challenging growth targets

Within the context of the Northern Ireland Executive's *Going for Growth* agri-food strategy, highly volatile and perpetually low incomes present a challenge. *Going for Growth* contains a number of key targets for the development and growth of the agri-food sector up to 2020 including:

- 60% growth in turnover to £7 billion;
- 15% growth in employment to 115,000;
- 75% growth in exports (outside NI) to £4.5 billion; and
- 60% growth in total added value to £1 billion.

The achievement of these targets is heavily, and some stakeholders would even suggest solely, reliant upon the maintenance and potential expansion of the farming industry, but the incomes being derived by many sectors must raise questions around how likely some farmers are to remain within the industry going forward. In effect, and ideally, farmers from all sectors will really need to be profitable on an ongoing basis if they are to contribute to the achievement of the sustainable growth for the entire agri-food sector envisioned within *Going for Growth*.

Mechanisms to secure profitability

Ensuring the profitability of all farmers in Northern Ireland may well be an extremely challenging task but there are steps which could potentially be taken that could make this a more realistic goal for many farm businesses. Farmers themselves have a role to play in ensuring that they know their costs and run their businesses efficiently. In this context the supports available within the DARD Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS) such as the Business Development Groups have a critical role to play, as they should enable farmers to both identify and implement actions to improve their efficiency and profitability. More could also be done by farmers and processors to create the conditions for, and encourage uptake of, approaches such as forward selling and margin hedging/protection as these could help to smooth some of the volatility extremes of recent years. What role is there for national and devolved government? There may be grounds for extending the role of the *Groceries Supply Code of Practice* and its associated Adjudicator in order to increase transparency and ensure fairness in the dealings between farmers, processors and retailers. Government could also support farmers in their efforts to access capital for business development from sources beyond our local banks such as the European Investment Bank.

Is Northern Ireland's transport infrastructure sufficient to support growth and competitiveness?

Des McKibbin

As the Northern Ireland (NI) Executive seeks to grow the local economy during the forthcoming mandate, the quality and capacity of NI's transport infrastructure will be a major factor. High quality infrastructure is a critical determinant of economic growth and competitiveness, with a 2015 Confederation of British Industry (CBI) survey indicating that 94% of businesses view the quality of infrastructure as a decisive factor when planning future investment.

There are a number of major road and public transport projects planned that will greatly enhance NI's transport infrastructure in the future, and it will be the Department for Infrastructure (Dfi) and its arm's length bodies which will ultimately be responsible for delivering these. Dfi will, however, face huge challenges as the capital investment required far exceeds the levels of funding that can be expected to be made available during this mandate.

Roads

There have been a number of notable improvements on NI's Key Transport Corridors (KTCs) over the last decade including the M1/Westlink upgrade, the M2 upgrade, the A2 Shore Road and most recently the A8 Belfast to Larne dualling in 2015. However, addressing the escalating maintenance backlog – which now stands at close to £1 billion - on the existing road network has too often been set aside at the expense of these schemes.

A large number of road schemes identified in the three major regional transport plans published in 2005 have failed to progress beyond the planning stage due to a lack of funding. The lifespan of these plans expired in 2015; however, as they are yet to be replaced with similarly detailed (time bound/costed) transport plans, the delivery of these schemes appears to be no less certain in the upcoming *Programme for Government* period.

The budget for 2015-16 indicates that the A5 and A6 schemes, scheduled for completion during the previous mandate, will be prioritised in this period. However, there are other important strategic schemes, such as the York Street Interchange and Sprucefield bypass that those in the private sector believe should be prioritised in order to significantly enhance inter-urban connectivity and address specific bottlenecks on these key strategic routes. Once again, delivery of these will be subject to funding.

Public transport

Northern Ireland's public transport infrastructure has attracted significant investment, some £1.1 billion, since the publication of the *Regional Transport Strategy (2002)* and this has brought improvements with new fleets of trains and buses as well as upgrades to bus and rail rolling stock and terminals.

Despite this investment, modal shift targets have not been achieved with passenger numbers showing only modest increases, and the car remains the dominant mode of transport in NI. A number of key public transport infrastructure projects have not been delivered. These include Phase 2 of the Coleraine to Derry/Londonderry Railway, and most notably, the Belfast Rapid Transit System; originally planned to be operational in March 2012 – this has been delayed until September 2018.

With the operational date for the Belfast Rapid Transit System now agreed, the construction of the Belfast Transport Hub represents the next substantial capital investment in public transport. This scheme has already attracted £2.8m from the European Commission's TEN-T fund to support the design and planning phase. However, it is likely that private sector finance will be required if the scheme is to be delivered by the 2020 target.



Alternative funding

The OECD has noted that despite the recent financial crisis and recession, countries with good planning processes and strategic infrastructure plans linked to assured funding are continuing to successfully build the strategic infrastructure they need. Many countries and regions have been able to do this by adopting alternative funding sources. As NI faces continued budgetary constraints, the range of possible funding sources must be considered in order to deliver the infrastructure required to support economic competitiveness and growth.

Planning in a new environment

Suzie Cave

The planning system has undergone much change recently, so what are the new structures and how has the balance of responsibility shifted between central and local government?

On 1st April 2015 a new planning system came into force under the Planning Act 2011. This introduced a new two-tier system, sharing planning responsibilities between councils and the Department of the Environment (now the new Department for Infrastructure). This replaced the old system under the Planning Order 1991, where the Department of the Environment held all responsibilities for planning in Northern Ireland.

Under the new system, local councils now have these responsibilities:

- **Local development planning:** councils create their own local development plans (LDPs) which set out how the council area should look in the future by deciding the type and scale of development to be encouraged and where it should be located;
- **Development management:** determining local planning applications; and
- **Planning enforcement:** investigating alleged breaches of planning control and determining what action should be taken.

A certain number of responsibilities have been retained by central government and will be the responsibility of the new Department for Infrastructure (DfI). These include:

- Determination of regionally significant applications and 'called-in' applications;
- Regional planning policy;
- Planning legislation;
- Oversight and guidance for councils; and
- Performance management.

All major and local developments are to be dealt with by councils and major developments will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community. Regionally significant development proposals will also be subject to pre-application community consultation and will be determined by the DfI.

Plan-led system

The 2011 Act provides for a new plan-led system meaning that the LDP, produced by councils, will be the primary consideration in the determination of applications by both councils and the Department. LDPs set out how the council area should look in the future, while at the same time protecting the surrounding landscape and environmental features.



The DoE has described the new LDP system as follows:

...a unique opportunity for a council to genuinely shape places for local communities that will enable them to adopt a joined up approach, incorporating linkages to other functions such as regeneration, local economic development and community planning.

In addition to the creation of LDPs, the Local Government Act 2014 also requires each council to form a Community Plan. The duty of community planning requires a council to create a long term vision for the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of their community. This is to be identified in the Community Plan, which must be taken into consideration by councils when developing their LDPs.

New planning policy

In addition to these new responsibilities for local councils, the new planning system involves a move away from the existing suite of Planning Policy Statements (PPS) to a single Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS). The SPPS was published in September 2015 and consolidates the suite of PPSs into one document. It provides the overarching planning principles from which councils should develop their own planning policies within their new LDPs. It will also be material to individual planning decisions and appeals.

A transitional period is currently in operation until councils develop their own planning policies under their LDPs. This means that currently the new councils will apply the policy of the old PPSs together with the new SPPS. However, where there is a difference between the two, the SPPS takes precedence. Once councils have developed and published their own policies, within a timeframe agreed by the Department, the old PPSs will cease to have effect.

New role for councillors

Under the new system councillors make the final decisions on planning applications, albeit with professional advice from planning officials. This being said, small and local applications may be delegated to officials, with major and contentious applications retained by councillors on a council's planning committee.

As these new powers become established, it will be interesting to observe the differences in direction and approach adopted by each council, as well as the establishment of a brand new relationship between the DfI and local government in Northern Ireland.

What lies in store for the objects from our past?

Dr Dan Hull

During the last mandate, it was estimated that almost 1.5 million objects from archaeological sites in Northern Ireland lie in temporary storage, uncurated and inaccessible to the public. What lies in store for these objects, and could the bringing together of policy teams for museums and the historic environment in the new Department for Communities represent an opportunity to leverage public benefit from this resource?

Around 200 licensed archaeological excavations are carried out each year in Northern Ireland; the majority conducted as part of the planning process as a result of conditions set by the local planning authority. Some of these will take just a few days to complete, while others, such as the excavation of the early medieval crannóg at Drumclay on the outskirts of Enniskillen, can take many months. Such projects generate an archive of documents, photographs and digital files; artefacts such as pottery, glass and leather; as well as scientific samples. This work is usually carried out by commercial archaeological contractors, licensed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to conduct and record excavations on behalf of the developer.

The developer who owns the land will generally, under Northern Ireland law, also own the archaeological objects (in contrast to Scotland and the Republic of Ireland where such antiquities belong to the state). However, once an excavation has been completed and construction work commences, developers rarely have an interest in taking home their archaeological archive, after all, the vast majority of the objects recovered have no monetary value. But heritage groups and archaeologists assert that such archives contain objects and information which have a value through the stories they can relate to the public about the past. The problem lies in what to do with all these objects and how to get those stories out of the cardboard boxes in which they lie, sometimes for decades.

Finding a place for the past

Northern Ireland is not the only jurisdiction to grapple with the difficulty of finding a location to store archaeological archives in the long-term. The Council of Europe *Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage*, ratified by the UK in 2000, states in Article 4 that ‘each party undertakes to implement measures for the physical protection of the archaeological heritage, making provision... for appropriate storage places for archaeological remains which have been removed from their original location’. Legislation here states that any archaeological finds should be reported to the Ulster

Museum or the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). But these institutions have not been in a position to curate and store the sheer quantity of archaeological objects produced through the planning process for many years.

Solutions to the challenge of finding 'appropriate storage places' for a growing number of objects and records emerging from construction sites have varied, but some stakeholders point to a model followed by the National Museum of Ireland. There, archaeological archives are stored in a centralised 'Collections Resource Facility'. This is more cost effective than a museum but with objects still accessible for study by researchers and, potentially, for loan to other institutions.



A comb made from animal bone, from the Drumclay crannóg excavation

Difficulties in tackling this situation may have been exacerbated by the disconnection between museums policy, previously under DCAL, and regulation of the historic environment by NIEA under DOE. It may be that bringing together these two aspects of heritage policy within one department represents an opportunity for a coherent policy framework.

While the economic downturn has inhibited development in Northern Ireland, the pace of new archaeological objects being recovered from the ground has slowed, for now, but will inevitably increase. The number of planning applications is nowhere at the peak of 36,593 made in 2004/05, but has recently shown some signs of recovery. As the pace of construction work rises, the quantity of archaeological material requiring storage will probably also increase. Visitor numbers to Northern Ireland's museums are currently at around 1.5 million per year and have risen consistently since the mid-1990s, suggesting that the degree of public interest in viewing, and learning from, our growing number of archaeological objects may well be high.

Housing policy

Eleanor Murphy

A snapshot of key housing issues for the new mandate

Housing supply and demand

Good quality, affordable housing plays a significant role in maintaining physical, mental and social wellbeing. Additionally, the housing market is an important driver of economic growth and regeneration. Therefore, it is a concern that housing supply is not keeping up with demand in Northern Ireland. This is primarily attributable to the reduction in the construction of new private sector dwellings. At the height of the market there were around 14,000 new private sector starts (2006/07). In 2013/14 there were 4,415 new starts, although there are slow signs of recovery (5,252 new starts in 2015).

The recent Housing Supply Forum report highlights that housing supply has been affected by many issues such as the restricted release of developable land, a significant reduction in the number of local developers and regulatory/timescale issues in the planning process. Failure to address the issue of housing supply and demand will have repercussions across all housing tenures: social housing, the private rented sector and owner-occupation.

The social housing sector

The future of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; the outworkings of the *Social Housing Reform Programme*; and welfare reform are predominant issues for both the Housing Executive and Housing Associations. There continues to be significant demand for social housing. In March 2015 there were 39,338 applicants on the social housing waiting list, with 22,097 of these in 'housing stress'. The recent tragic deaths of people who were homeless are likely to prompt a much greater focus on this issue. Rent setting is another key concern as this will influence the ability to fund maintenance and repair programmes, service debt, construct new homes and attract private finance.

The *Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Association's 2016-2020 Manifesto* highlights that there are many opportunities for Associations in the new mandate. However, it states the sector requires sustainability in the current level of Housing Association Grant; the release of surplus public land for new homes; a stronger planning policy; an increase in the Supporting People budget; and an independent Regulator.

The private rented sector

Almost one-fifth of households here live in private rented accommodation, making it the second largest housing tenure after owner-occupation. The recent NIHE

publication *Housing Market Review and Perspectives* indicates growth in demand will continue due to the social housing waiting list; housing affordability issues for first time buyers; high unemployment levels; and a rise in the number of people in part-time and temporary employment.

Availability; affordability; changes to Local Housing Allowance; good tenancy management; and housing fitness remain important issues for tenants.

For some landlords, financial issues may predominate, e.g. the availability and affordability of mortgage finance; a higher rate of stamp duty; and limits on mortgage interest relief. The former Department of Social Development's recent review of the Private Rented

Sector highlights that there are many opportunities and challenges ahead e.g. an enhanced regulatory framework; the potential for institutional investment; greater tenant engagement; and improved housing fitness standards.



Owner-occupation

The decline of home ownership; a significant decrease in private sector construction rates; mortgage arrears and repossession; and the financing of repairs and maintenance are just some of the challenges for the owner-occupied sector. But there are positive developments. The University of Ulster's latest *House Price Index Survey* indicates that the local housing market is continuing to recover. A greater number of first time buyers are entering the housing market, and generally speaking, problems associated with housing affordability are not as pronounced as they are in parts of Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland.

However, recent analysis by PwC indicates that by 2025, Northern Ireland will experience one of the lowest levels of home ownership in the UK. This will be due to factors such as property prices outpacing income growth; a lack of confidence in the market by developers; and a growth in private renting which will lead to the emergence of a 'generation rent'. Whilst homeownership is not a panacea, it is an aspiration for many. NI Executive support for social and private sector housing supply and innovative affordable housing initiatives will be critical. The Housing Supply Forum's report and recommendations are an important reference point for the future direction of local supply and demand.

Managing flood risk in Northern Ireland: are we prepared?

Des McKibbin

Prolonged heavy rainfall over the winter of 2015 has shown how devastating flooding can be to homes, businesses and critical infrastructure. With predictions that localised flooding will become an ever more common occurrence, how prepared is Northern Ireland to manage flood risk?

Major localised flooding appears to be increasingly common. In December 2015 'Storm Desmond' led to record levels of rainfall across Northern Ireland with counties Fermanagh and Tyrone the worst affected.

Fermanagh and Tyrone have experienced a number of serious flooding events in the recent past. However, the extent of this event was described by locals as unprecedented, with numerous roads closed and many homes and businesses badly damaged.

While flooding is a natural occurrence, the extent of recent flooding incidences has inevitably led to questions about the Executive's response and its preparedness for the future.

Response to flooding

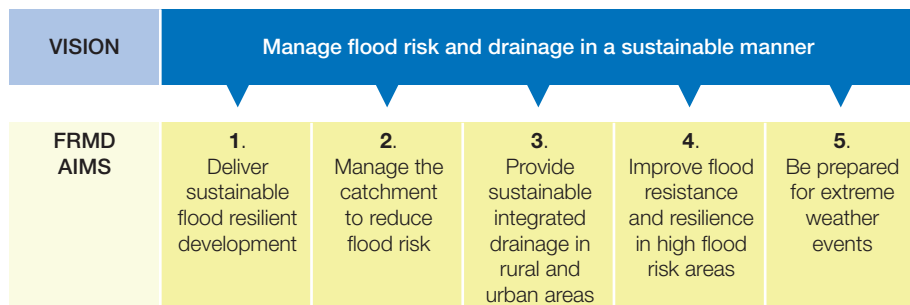
The Department of Finance and Personnel's Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) conducted a review of the Executive's response to an extreme rainfall and flooding event which took place on 27th and 28th June 2012. This report found that while the respective flood response agencies fulfilled their statutory responsibility, *'ambiguity between flood response agencies about their respective roles is unhelpful'*. In this context, PEDU recommended that consideration be given to the *'consolidation of all of the flood response agencies under one departmental ambit – i.e. by the transfer of Rivers Agency from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to the Department of Regional Development (DRD)'*.

While this did not happen directly, the reduction of NI Executive Departments from 12 to nine will see all the flood response agencies reside within the auspices of the newly formed Department for Infrastructure (DfI). In addition to this, DfI will become the Competent Authority for the implementation of the Floods Directive – European legislation aimed at managing the adverse consequences that flooding has on human health, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity.

State of infrastructure

The NI Executive accepts that Northern Ireland's drainage infrastructure is insufficient to meet the future requirements expected of it – to the extent that it is actively stunting economic development – particularly in the greater Belfast area. In Northern Ireland 46,000 of the 830,000 properties (6%) could be at significant risk of flooding due to their location in coastal or river flood plains while a further 20,000 properties are sited in an area at risk of flooding from a significant rainfall event.

The DfI, now tasked with managing flooding risk, must implement DRD's long-term water strategy – developed in partnership with the Department of the Environment and DARD. Improving flood risk management and drainage is a key aim within the strategy; but rather than following the traditional route of building flood walls, extending flood banks and increasing the flow capacity of our rivers, this strategy proposes to '*manage flood risk and drainage in a sustainable manner*'. This five pronged approach is set out in the figure.



Source: *Sustainable Water – A Long Term Water Strategy for Northern Ireland (DRD, 2014)*

Investment required

The PEDU report estimated that some £120m would be required to address flooding problems in high risk areas and in 2012 the Executive identified this as a priority for the next investment period. However, it is now accepted that this level of funding will be inadequate.

In order to deliver long-term, sustainable drainage solutions, which properly address the risk of infraction proceedings and support future economic development, it is estimated that additional funding of at least £750m will be needed for the greater Belfast area alone. Estimates for the rest of NI have not yet been produced.

Where will the money come from?

In the current financial climate, it may be legitimate to ask where this investment will come from. The Executive has indicated that flood mitigation is a priority, however, now within DfI it will have to compete for finite resources against other significant policy areas including public transport, roads and water – all of which require significant investment as the Executive seeks to grow the NI economy.

Climate change: picking up where we left off

Suzie Cave

In the last publication of *Consider This*, climate change was discussed in relation to the possibility of new legislation for Northern Ireland (NI). Five years on, the climate change debate still remains and legislation specific to NI has not yet been introduced. However, discussions around the introduction of legislation have more recently picked up momentum again.

The debate

Since the early 2000s, climate change has gained high priority status on international political agendas. The European Union (EU) is committed to working constructively towards a global agreement to control climate change by adopting an integrated package of legislative measures on energy and climate. These include the targets set for 2020 in the EU's growth strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% (or even 30%, if the conditions are right); this would be lower than 1990 levels.

The issue of climate change has not only raised concern at governmental level; intense media attention has fostered a lively public debate about the potential connection between global climate change and the effects of each extreme weather event at a local level.

Predictions and modelling from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predict increases in extreme weather events over the 21st Century and attribute this to climate change as a result of greenhouse gas emissions causing rising surface temperatures.

Through the production of a *Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Northern Ireland*, the Department of the Environment asserted a link between climate change and recent



episodes of extreme weather in Northern Ireland. Importantly, the latest UK Climate Change Projections (UKCP09) predict that NI will experience warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers by the 2050s, with extreme weather becoming more frequent.

The target race

The latest data shows that emissions for NI in 2013 were 4% of the UK total and that emissions have been reduced by 16% since 1990, compared to 30% across the UK as a whole. According to the Committee for Climate Change, this deficit is due to:

- The comparatively low reductions in emissions from agriculture;
- The land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector being a net emitter rather than a net sink, as it is in the rest of the UK; and
- Increased emissions from transport.

Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales must adhere to a piece of UK-wide legislation called the Climate Change Act 2008. This mandates a reduction of at least 34% in emissions by 2020 (well beyond the EU 2020 target) and 80% by 2050. It also introduced legally binding five year carbon budgets setting a limit on the amount of greenhouse gases the UK can emit. While the Act does not set targets specific to NI, we must contribute to the overall UK reduction.

With the lack of specific targets in the UK Climate Change Act, Scotland produced its own Climate Change (Scotland) Act in 2009 which targets a reduction in emissions of 42% by 2020, preparing for an 80% reduction by 2050. Wales also intends to exceed the UK target for 2020, with a reduction of 40%, and an annual reduction of 3%. The Republic of Ireland aims to reduce emissions from the non-emissions trading sector (agriculture, transport, residential, non-energy intensive industry, commercial services and waste) by 20% of 2005 levels by 2020. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 will provide for targets up to 2050, to be detailed in subsequent plans.

More recent developments

The Climate Change Act 2008 established an independent body called the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) to advise the UK Government on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In December 2015, the Northern Ireland Environment Minister requested that the CCC update its 2011 paper: *The appropriateness of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act*. In doing so the CCC reiterated its support for climate change legislation in NI. The Minister published a consultation on the introduction of a Climate Change Bill in December 2015. Subsequently, the Minister stated to the Assembly's Environment Committee, in March 2016, that bespoke legislation unique to NI is needed.

It will be for the new Minister to decide whether to bring specific climate change legislation for NI forward in the new mandate.

Plant disease and invasive species

Mark Allen

A clear and present danger to our environment

The plant disease and invasive species threat posed to the environment in Northern Ireland is increasing and likely to continue to do so due to factors such as increasing world trade and the potential impacts of climate change. These factors also increase the probability of the threats that we face diversifying and affecting a wider range of plant species.

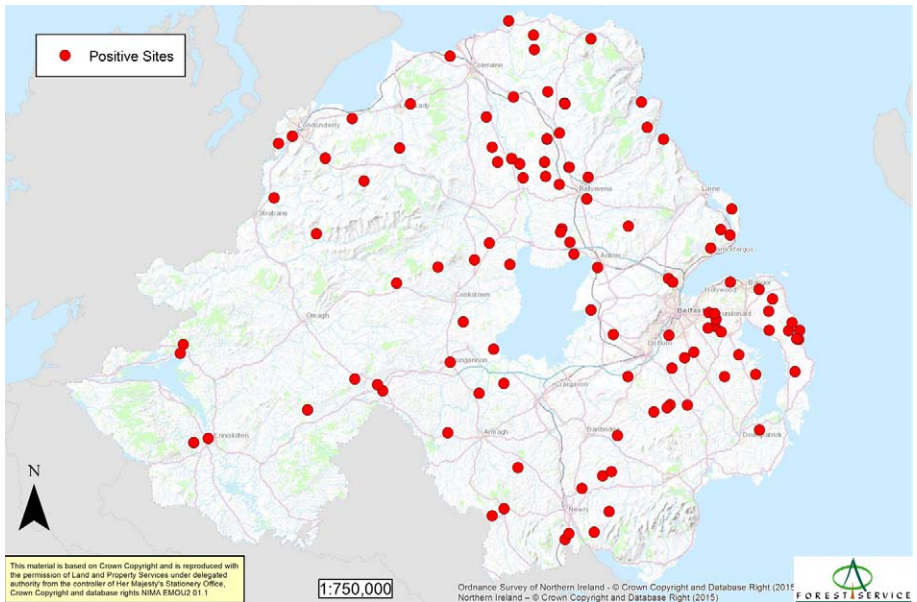
Ash dieback impacts

Historically speaking, the issues of plant disease and invasive species have not been of great prominence for either the general public or policy makers within Northern Ireland. The recent high profile media coverage afforded to the Ash dieback disease (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) in particular has gone some way to changing this situation. Ash dieback disease causes leaf loss and crown dieback in ash trees and can also cause an infected tree to die. The disease was first discovered in Northern Ireland in the autumn of 2012 and was initially linked to trees that had been imported and at that stage was just found within recent plantings and nursery stocks.

As revealed in the figure, by 15th December 2015 ash trees infected with the disease had been identified at a total of 110 premises with recently planted ash and three nursery/trade findings across Northern Ireland. DARD Minister Michelle O'Neill in responding to an Assembly question in October 2015 also confirmed that the disease had been identified in hedgerow ash at three locations in proximity to infected recently planted sites, which does raise the prospect that the disease could potentially be more widely dispersed.

The news of the disease being present within the wider environment is not encouraging given a recent article in the *Journal of Ecology* which suggested that the ash tree could well be eliminated in Europe. This gloomy outlook is based on an assessment of the evidence related to the impact on ash trees of the disease combined with the impact of the emerald ash borer beetle, an invasive species that is native to Asia and North America, the larvae of which kill ash trees through their feeding activity. Whilst the ash borer beetle is yet to be discovered in the UK it is now thought to be present in continental Europe and will in all likelihood make it to the UK and Ireland.

Ash Dieback Positive Sites (November 2012 - December 2015)



Assessing the costs

The impacts of the potential loss of the ash tree to the environment in Northern Ireland are hard to accurately assess but could be significant given that Northern Ireland's current tree coverage level is 8% as compared to the UK figure of 13% and the EU average figure of 37%, plus the fact that the ash tree is the most common deciduous tree found here.

The threat to local ash trees posed by ash dieback disease and the emerald ash borer beetle is still developing, but this is only one example out of many threats that we face. Another topical and more established invasive species here is the Japanese Knotweed plant which presents a threat to buildings, hard surfaces and infrastructure, and which is estimated to cost the GB economy £179m per year.

The way ahead

The growing threat from plant disease and invasive species presents future challenges for policy makers in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, any disease or invasive species which affected grass such as the Argentine stem weevil (*Listronotus bonariensis*) could have a drastic impact on our pasture based agricultural systems. In this context there is a real need to build upon documents such as the *Invasive Alien Species Strategy* and ensure that adequate resources are provided to meet the aims within it, as prevention may well be cheaper than cure.

Addressing gender imbalance in physical activity levels

Dr Dan Hull

Women participate in physical activity much less than men and Northern Ireland is more imbalanced in this regard than the European average. Why is this the case and what could be done to increase female participation in sport?

The *Continuous Household Survey* indicates that 47% of women in Northern Ireland participated in sport in the last 12 months, compared with 63% of men. Men are also more than twice as likely to be a member of a sports club or gym (32%) compared with women (14%). The difference between men and women for each of these measures has remained stubbornly similar from the start of the last Assembly mandate to the end, and we are consistently some way short of the European average.

Contributing factors

Looking at different age categories is interesting in this regard. While women in Northern Ireland exercise less than men in all age bands above 16 years, the gender imbalance is less pronounced at primary school age. Some recent studies have suggested that participation rates among boys and girls begin to diversify during teenage years, and that the kinds of sport offered by post-primary schools (and the ways in which they are taught) may be a deterrent for some. A survey of young people aged 11 to 16 in Northern Ireland found that 60% of boys, but just 38% of girls, participate in sport at least two hours a week. In addition, 63% of girls do school sport for just an hour or less a week.

Recent research conducted by Katie Liston and Marie Murphy of Ulster University concluded that while we do not yet fully understand why women generally exercise less than men, deterrents include factors such as insufficient confidence in undertaking sport; perceptions of not being 'sporty'; fears of a lack of safety in the local environment; insufficient time and money; and insufficient access to the right programmes and classes. Initiatives such as Couch to 5k, Jog Belfast and Parkrun have shown that creating opportunities for physical activity which are safe, low cost, build from low to high intensity and enable a high level of social support can be effective.

Meeting the challenges

Increasing female participation in physical activity is not necessarily a straightforward task. Targeted programmes have been created elsewhere, like Sport England's *#ThisGirlCan* campaign. This initiative uses television adverts and social media to encourage women to take part in a wide range of sports. Building on a programme of research into the barriers experienced by women, the campaign focuses specifically on



‘overcoming fear of judgement’. Additionally, the Irish Sports Council has had a specific *Women in Sport* programme for more than ten years now.

The Northern Ireland *Sport Matters Strategy* includes a target of increasing female participation in sport by at least six percentage points by 2019. However, a report by the Women’s Fitness and Sport Foundation predicts a 5.5% drop in the participation levels of women by 2017. Sport Northern Ireland defines women and girls as a distinct ‘target group’ for funding purposes but does not currently have a bespoke programme aimed at increasing female participation. However, with a budget which declined by 45% between 2010/11 and 2015/16, Sport NI’s resources are inevitably tight.

And there are wider inequalities in the sporting sector which may be impacting on women’s participation rates. For example, the latest figures indicate that 78% of sports coaches are male; most elite athletes are male; and there is a persistent gender imbalance at board level in sports organisations. A study which examined Northern Ireland athletes at the Commonwealth Games concluded that there is a marked and long-term disparity between men and women in terms of medals won.

Sport NI is a signatory to the ten principles of the *Brighton Declaration*, created by the International Working Group on Women and Sport in 1994. The principles include, for example, a commitment to ‘ensure girls receive physical education which provides them with equitable opportunities’. Living up to these principles will go beyond the responsibilities of the new Department for Communities alone. Northern Ireland does not currently have a national physical activity plan, but redressing the current imbalance in physical activity levels is likely to require a sustained, cross-departmental effort.

A single species fishing industry

Mark Allen

Despite not being particularly large in overall UK terms, the sea fishing industry in Northern Ireland makes a significant contribution to the economy of the three County Down ports of Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie where the local fleet is mainly based. However, the local industry could face an uncertain future due to its heavy reliance on prawns.

Looking at the most recent data from 2014, the sea fishing sector here employed a total of 832 fishermen and the total value of the catch landed in Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie equated to £21m. In terms of the actual breakdown of the catch landed by the local fleet in 2014, it is apparent that prawns make up the greatest proportion in terms of both volume and value at 8,700 tonnes (60% of the total catch) and £17.5m (83% of the total value) respectively.

The role of the EU in fisheries management

The apparent reliance on prawns could be viewed as a deliberate and voluntary decision by the Northern Ireland fishing fleet to focus on catching prawns, but such an assessment would not adequately explain what has actually driven this process. A key factor has been the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), and more particularly, the fisheries management approaches that support the policy. In an effort to ensure that there is no overfishing, the CFP operates a mechanism to calculate the maximum amount of fish that can be removed from any fishery called the Total Allowable Catch (TAC). These TACs are agreed by EU Fisheries Ministers in Brussels every December.

The actual decision on national TAC allocations is ultimately the responsibility of EU Fisheries Ministers but the process is based on scientific evidence. In the case of certain regions (e.g. Baltic, North Sea and North East Atlantic), the Commission draws upon advice provided by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

TACs are allocated to actual physical areas of the sea as defined by ICES. Whilst boats from Northern Ireland can, and do fish throughout these areas and further afield, providing they have quota to do so, the greatest concentration of current effort by the local fleet is on fisheries within ICES Area VIIa which covers the Irish Sea.

Key stocks under pressure

The 2015 scientific advice provided by ICES on the state of key commercial fish stocks within Area VIIa, along with the finalised UK TAC for 2016 and how this compares to the 2015 TAC, is highlighted in the table.

The table reveals that in relation to the scientific assessment of stock within the Irish Sea, only one of the species, namely herring, is currently being sustainably exploited in the long term. All of the other species are either being overfished (either inside or outside safe biological limits) or there is not sufficient data to accurately assess their status.

Species	2015 scientific assessment of stock	2016 UK - Irish Sea (Area VIIa) TAC (tonnes)	2016 Irish Sea TAC -% change compared to 2015
Cod		42	-19%
Common Sole		10	-57%
Haddock		792	40%
Herring		3,384	-6%
Prawns (all of ICES Area VII including VIIa)		7,659 (all of VII including VIIa)	8%
Plaice		281	0
Pollack (all of ICES Area VII including VIIa)		2,353 (all of VII including VIIa)	0
Whiting		31	0

Key:

- The stock is exploited at a rate that is consistent with producing the highest catch from the stock in the long term;
- The stock is overfished compared to producing the highest yield in the long term, but is inside safe biological limits or is being managed under a long-term plan which has been approved by scientific advice;
- The stock is outside safe biological limits while not under a long term plan, or is subject to a scientific advice that there should be no fishing;
- The state of the stock is unknown with respect either or both safe biological limits or to producing the highest catch in the long term.

The size of the TACs for the species within the Irish Sea highlights why prawns have become the main species that our local fleet relies on: it would not be possible to support the current industry if it relied on other species. This reliance on prawns does however present dangers for the local fleet, as the current TAC could be drastically affected if there was a more negative scientific assessment of the stock. Within this context it would be better for the local industry if their fishing effort was focused on a wider number of species, but the current TACs greatly restrict the ability for this to happen.

What can be done?

Better scientific data to establish the actual state of stocks (including those for which no data is available) will be crucial to understanding stocks and potentially increasing TACs for certain species and preserving them at current levels for others. The collection and provision of this data should be a priority for local fishermen and government if the industry is to have a long term future. Further, more could potentially be done to support fishermen to use selective fishing gears which would enable them to target specific species without catching other overfished or TAC restricted species.

What does the future hold for cycling policy in Northern Ireland?

Des McKibbin

Cycling is one of our most popular leisure pursuits but can it move from being a hobby to an everyday transport mode and, importantly, replace car journeys?

Large groups of cyclists racing down country roads and family bike rides around local parks and cycle paths are increasingly common sights in Northern Ireland, particularly since the success of the Grande Partenza 'Big Start' of the 97th Giro d'Italia gripped the country in 2014. What is less common, however, is the sight of everyday cyclists using their bike to get to their place of work or education, to visit the shops or go for a coffee with friends.

Increasing the number of people cycling for everyday purposes is seen as the panacea for many of society's challenges, with claims it will improve our health, cure the obesity epidemic, revitalise our town centres and even help to address climate change. However, the fact is that cycling, as a form of everyday transport, is a marginal activity in Northern Ireland.

The cycling debate gathers pace in the NI Assembly

Cycling was a hot topic throughout the 2011-2016 Northern Ireland Assembly mandate. For example:

- There were 348 cycling related questions answered by the Minister for Regional Development;
- An all-party group was established to promote awareness and development of cycling policies and provision in Northern Ireland; and
- The Committee for Regional Development held an inquiry that highlighted the potential benefits of cycling to the local economy.

A bicycle strategy for Northern Ireland

The apparent advocacy of cycling across the Assembly preceded the establishment of a dedicated cycling unit within the DRD *'in order to give increased focus and priority to the needs of cyclists and to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport'*. This unit analysed international best practice in cycling development and held a public seminar in 2014, where a host of renowned international speakers came to Belfast and shared their cycling expertise and experiences.

Ultimately, the role of the cycling unit was to develop a new cycling strategy for Northern Ireland with the aim of making everyday cycling the norm and ensuring it is an attractive, accessible and safe option. Northern Ireland's second cycling strategy, Northern Ireland

Changing Gear – A Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland, was published in 2015; it is based on a three pillar approach:

- Building a comprehensive network for the bicycle;
- Supporting people who chose to travel by bicycle; and
- Promoting the bicycle as a mode for everyday journeys.

Cycling expenditure

While the pro-cycling rhetoric was consistent throughout the previous mandate, the reality is that this was not reflected in terms of departmental expenditure. It is no coincidence that in those nations where the bicycle is an everyday mode of transport, there has been a long-term and consistent financial commitment to promoting a cycling culture. For example, in the city of Copenhagen, Denmark, and a number of city regions across the Netherlands, cycling accounts for up to 40% of all trips. Authorities in these regions consistently spend over £20 per head of population (PHP) on cycling every year. By contrast, in the decade from 2001/02 to 2011/12 the DRD spent just £9m; this is less than £1m per year on average, or around 70 pence PHP. This level of cycling expenditure represents 0.22% of total transport expenditure.



Expenditure on cycling was significantly above average in 2014, with a total spend of some £7.5m or £4.17 per PHP. Through this investment a number of key developments were made:

- The DRD cycling unit was established;
- The draft cycling strategy was published,
- A number of cycling demonstration projects were rolled out; and
- The Belfast bike scheme was launched with an investment of £1.1m from DRD.

Cycling expenditure is set to remain above average in 2015/16. However, at the time of writing, the expectation is that the total spend will drop to £2.4m or £1.30 PHP. The cycling strategy acknowledges the benefits that can be realised from adopting the recommended investment levels for cycling of £10 to £20 PHP. However, it acknowledges that in the current financial climate realising this level of investment may be very ambitious.

Testing times ahead for the Third Sector

Eleanor Murphy

Budget deficits and welfare reform will continue to test the resilience of the sector in the new mandate.

The Third Sector makes a substantial, but at times unrecognised, contribution to society in Northern Ireland. It is a key provider of health/social care; housing/housing support; education and training; environmental protection; childcare; youth services; sport, arts, and culture; and welfare advocacy. It is often a champion of social justice and human rights; plays a key role in tackling poverty and social exclusion; promotes gender equality and community cohesion; and seeks to safeguard the rights of the marginalised. It is dynamic and innovative, increasingly focused on sustainability through the creation of social enterprise and is undoubtedly an integral contributor to our economy. Yet it will continue to face significant internal and external challenges that will test its resilience over the forthcoming mandate and beyond.



What are some of the challenges ahead?

1. Funding – stability and sustainability

The budget deficit and austerity measures are having a significant impact on the sector across the UK. The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) states that uncertainty around NI departmental allocations to the sector (e.g. grant-aid and contracts) is creating a ‘cliff edge’ with some organisations unsure as to whether they will exist beyond their current funding allocation. Junior Ministers have been tasked to work with NICVA to assess the cumulative impact of departmental spending reductions on the sector. An action plan is to be presented to the Executive for agreement and subsequently shared with Departments.

Aside from government funding, there are other financial pressures. In 2011, an estimated 29.7% of funding income was from charitable giving. The new *CO3/Ulster Bank Third Sector Index*, and the imminent NICVA *State of the Sector VII* report, will provide an important insight into the ways in which funding levels in general have changed. ‘Brexit’ could also impact, for example, in terms of access to EU funding and private finance availability/affordability for housing associations. However, there are also funding

opportunities aimed at promoting sustainability through social economy enterprise growth (such as Social Economy Work Programme and Social Enterprise Hubs).

2. Welfare reform

The implementation of welfare reform has led to an increasing reliance on third sector organisations in Great Britain. Funding has not kept pace with demand and resources are often diverted from preventative to crisis-led work. The outworking of the NI Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group report is likely to cushion Northern Ireland from the worst effects of welfare reform. Strand two of the Group's report recognises the importance of providing additional resources to the advice sector to enable it to guide people through the changes ahead.

This pre-emptive approach will alleviate many of the pressures on organisations, but not all. The need to do 'more with less' will remain problematic. The sector has proven itself to be responsive and innovative in addressing economic hardship, as evidenced by the growth in food banks in NI. Given that welfare reform will impact upon the most vulnerable in society (particularly children), meaningful collaboration between statutory bodies and the sector, as well as within the sector itself is crucial.

3. Engagement and accountability

Developing and maintaining effective engagement and accountability are challenges for both the NI Executive and the Third Sector. The framework for the relationship between the community and voluntary sector is set out in the Concordat which emphasises the importance of openness, trust and mutual respect. This may well be tested within the context of the fiscal constraints of the new mandate. Now may be an opportune time, particularly given the restructuring of government departments and the formation of new councils, to revitalise existing, or establish new, mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation between the sector, government and political representatives.

Conclusion

The Third Sector is diverse; each subsector has its own issues that are unique to it, but in general funding, welfare reform and engagement/accountability will affect most organisations. There are other issues that are relevant to the sector that may also be prevalent in the new mandate, for example:

- The roll-out of increased regulation;
- The implementation of departmental strategies and policies;
- Maintaining independence in the face of developments such as the Lobbying Act;
- Leadership and governance;
- Promoting volunteering; and
- Community asset transfer.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Consider this...

Public Finance

A snapshot of the Northern Ireland economy

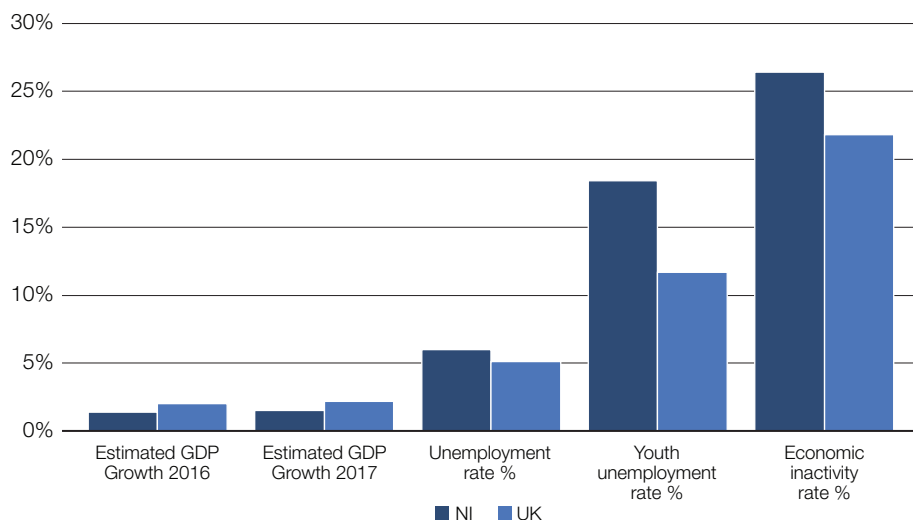
Michael Scholes

The Northern Ireland economy lags behind the UK as a whole in a number of key areas, posing challenges to the Executive.

Northern Ireland's economic position

The Northern Ireland (NI) economy has weathered the recent recession and returned to growth. When compared to the UK as a whole, however, there are a number of weaknesses to be addressed during the next Assembly mandate:

- **Slower growth:** Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the value of all goods and services produced in a country for a specified period. PwC has predicted GDP growth of 1.4% in 2016 and 1.5% in 2017. This is slower than the anticipated rate of growth for the UK as a whole – the Office of Budget Responsibility estimates this will grow by 2% in 2016 and 2.2% the following year.
- **Productivity remains problematic:** Productivity generally refers to how efficiently inputs (labour and capital) are used to produce outputs (goods and services). According to the Office of National Statistics, NI is the least productive region of the UK as measured by Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked. GVA is a measure of productivity that equates to GDP after the effects of taxes and subsidies are factored in. Between 2009 and 2012 the region experienced the weakest GVA growth (3.4%) of all UK regions.
- **Higher unemployment:** Despite a small decrease in unemployment in the latest *Labour Force Survey* data (0.1% during the November 2015 to January 2016 quarter), NI's unemployment rate of 6% remains above the UK average of 5.1%.
- **Higher youth unemployment:** The unemployment rate among 18 to 24 year-olds in the region is 18.4%, according to the latest figures; significantly above the UK-wide rate of 11.7%.
- **Higher rates of economic inactivity:** Economic inactivity refers to people who are not in employment or unemployed, including people who are looking after a home, the long-term sick or those with disabilities, students and retired people. Despite a 1.4% fall during 2015, economic inactivity is at 26.4% in NI, noticeably higher than the UK-wide rate of 21.8%.



Challenges ahead

Some positive signs in NI's labour market include falling unemployment figures and rising weekly earnings. However, economic inactivity seems to remain impervious to the recent economic cycle upswing.

The anticipated commencement of NI's devolved corporation tax power in 2018, is expected to be used as a lever to attract additional foreign direct investment (FDI) to NI. Other factors that will support this objective include the availability of a highly skilled workforce as well as world class infrastructure. However it is anticipated that NI will face future challenges in this regard.

One way of improving NI's economic growth is to target resources and investment in areas that could lead to increased employment opportunities, and in turn increased growth through the multiplier effect of higher wages, subsequently leading to higher disposable income leading to increased consumer confidence. However, the scope for this type of investment is currently limited due to the *Executive Budget 2016-17's* one-year term.

The newly formed NI Executive Departments will each have key roles in addressing the challenges outlined above. NI's economic growth prospects will improve only if future *Programme for Government* policies and Executive Budgets provide a joined up approach that effectively addresses the NI economy's fundamental weaknesses - poor productivity and economic inactivity.

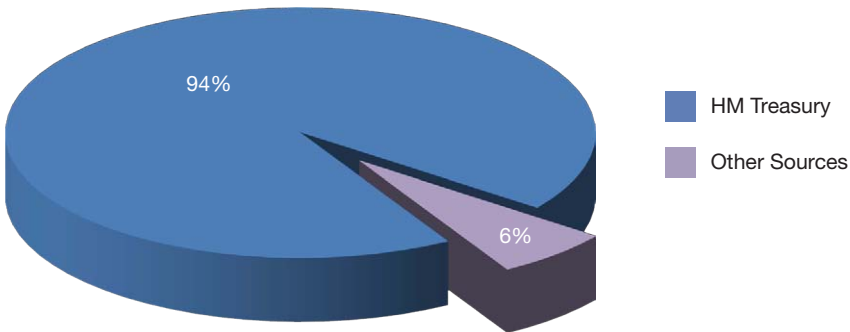
Financing the Executive's budget

Colin Pidgeon, Eileen Regan and Michael Scholes

What money is available to the Executive for its budget?

The majority of public expenditure in Northern Ireland (NI) comes from the United Kingdom (UK) government in the form of a 'block grant' – approximately 94% of the budget. Smaller amounts are raised from other sources, amounting to around 6% of the total. These other sources include: borrowing from the UK government; revenue generated through Regional Rates and consumer charging; European Union (EU) funding for distribution, such as Structural Funds; and selling departmental assets. Collectively, these sources fund the Executive's budget, which is then allocated to ministerial and non-ministerial departments.

Proportion of 2016-17 Budget Allocations from HM Treasury DEL



Funding sources in Northern Ireland

Block grant

The 'block grant' is the funding provided by central government to devolved administrations. The UK government determines the block for multi-year periods, with spending limits fixed for each year within the period, and limits on the level of funding carried forward from year to year. The current block grant covers 2016-17 to 2019-20.

The size of the block grant is determined using the Barnett formula. It is a population-based funding allocation mechanism based on changes in planned spending on 'comparable programmes' in government services in England, England and Wales

or Great Britain, as appropriate. These are then adjusted for relative populations. The changes are called 'Barnett consequentials'; and may be positive or negative, increasing or reducing the block grant.

Borrowing

Further budget finance is available to the Executive through borrowing. The Executive's borrowing powers – general and temporary - are provided in legislation and the *Reinvestment and Reform Initiative (RRI)*. The Executive can borrow up to £200m per year to fund capital projects and infrastructure. A recent example of borrowing was in November 2015, when the *Stormont House Agreement* provided the Executive with the flexibility to use £700m of capital borrowing to fund the *Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES)*.

RRI borrowing is through the Public Works Loans Board at a rate 1% above the rate the UK government pays to borrow on the international money markets. The estimated annual cost of borrowing repayments for NI is projected to peak in 2019-20 at just over £200m.

Regional Rates revenue

Regional Rates are collected from households and businesses. They are '*...determined by the Executive. [It] generates additional resources to support those central public services that are the responsibility of the Executive*'. This revenue is unhypothecated, meaning the Executive can use it to fund any project.

For 2016-17 the Executive increased both domestic and non-domestic rates in line with inflation. It also proposed a continuation of rate reliefs, such as the *Small Business Rates Relief Scheme*.

European funding

EU funding is distributed by the Executive via departments acting as paying agencies. To date such funding has played a significant role; for example, NI received over £1 billion in EU Structural Funds alone between 2002 and 2012 through programmes such as the *NI Rural Development Programme*, the *European Regional Development Fund*, the *European Social Fund* and the *European Fisheries Fund Programme*.

However, under current rules such EU funding must be 'matched' and conditions of expenditure also need to be met.

With specific regard to 'match funding', NI departments acting as paying agencies must meet this requirement by allocating an amount, which will vary depending on the specific EU funding 'match rate' requirement, from their budget (part of the block grant). Departments may also have the opportunity, depending on EU funding requirements, to match some of the EU money from external private sources. So while EU funding increases the Executive's spending power, it has to be matched using DEL. In addition, both receipts and expenditure must be used in accordance with the specified requirements. If this does not occur, EU monies may have to be returned.

Unpicking the Budget 2016-17

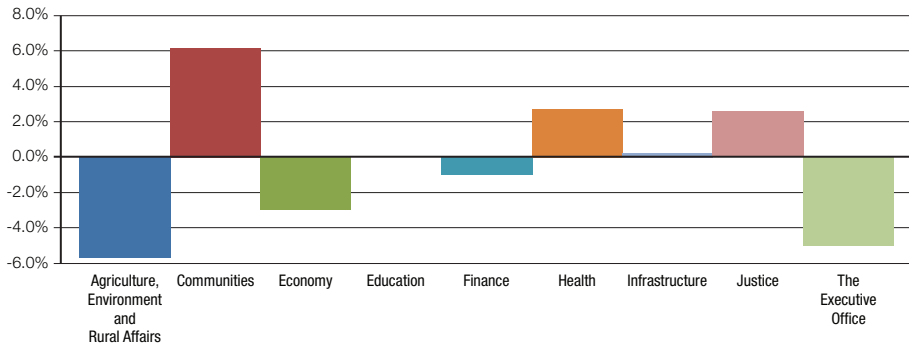
Colin Pidgeon

How were resources allocated to the nine Executive departments?

On 13th January 2016 the Minister of Finance and Personnel published the Executive's single year *Budget 2016-17*, bearing in mind the new nine-department structure which is to become effective following the Assembly's May 2016 elections. The Budget is to provide the incoming Ministers forming the new Executive with a '*...stable, balanced platform to determine priorities and funding allocations post May elections for a multi-year Budget from 2017-18 to 2019-20*'.

Budgets for the new departments were developed by combining the budgets for each function within the old departments. These were then allocated to form a baseline for the new departments. Each baseline was derived from the budget position at the start of 2015-16, with time-bound allocations removed, (e.g. European Union Match Funding and Department of Justice Security Funding).

Figure 1: Percentage changes from baseline to 2016-17 allocation in Resource DEL (Departmental Expenditure Limits)



It is useful to note that some departments have provided indications of how the headline figures may be sub-divided (i.e. distributed within the department). Table 2 shows the five largest budget headings (which departments sometimes call 'budget lines'). In total, these account for nearly £7 billion of *Budget 2016-17*.

Readers should note however, that newly appointed ministers may use the Executive's June 2016 Monitoring Round - to a greater extent than usually permitted - to move

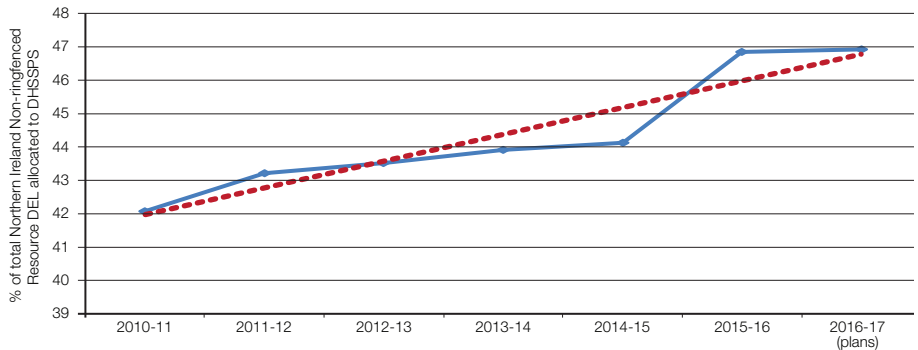
funding between budget lines. For this reason, the allocations to budget lines should not be viewed as final.

Table 1: Largest Resource DEL budget lines 2016-17

Budget line	Department	Budget 2016-17 (£m)
Hospital services	Department of Health	2,734.70
Schools mainstream	Department of Education	1,907.90
Social care	Department of Health	982.6
Safer communities	Department of Justice	746
Employment and social security	Department for Communities	504.7
Total		6,875.90

At lines 1 and 3 of Table 1, it can be seen that Health and Social Care uses a remarkably large proportion of the Executive’s resources, meriting close Assembly scrutiny. As Figure 2 below highlights, over recent years this proportion has increased:

Figure 2: Proportion of Non-ringfenced Resource DEL allocated to Health



Increasing health expenditure is a budgetary feature in all industrialised countries. The reasons for this are complex, but not simply due to population ageing. According to the OECD, more significant factors are new technologies and rising incomes. The OECD argues that health expenditure is the hardest area in which to contain costs. As a result, other competing departmental budgets are put under pressure.

Over the next Assembly mandate, debate is likely to continue about how the Executive will seek to strike appropriate balances when making difficult expenditure allocation decisions given tighter budgets. Contributions from the Assembly will help to inform that decision-making process. One of the Assembly’s challenges in doing this will arise from departmental reorganisation, which will necessitate the tracking of movements in budgets from the old structure to the new.

Rating in Northern Ireland

Michael Scholes

What are rates and why do we pay them?

Rates are a property tax, paid by households and businesses. There are two different types of rates in Northern Ireland (NI), i.e. domestic rates for residential properties and non-domestic rates for businesses and other non-residential properties, such as hospitals and schools.

The total revenue raised through domestic and non-domestic rates in NI is approximately £1 billion a year. This money supplements the Executive's budget and thus supports public service provision in NI, such as hospitals, schools and roads, as well as directly funding work carried out by district councils, e.g. refuse collection and street cleaning.

Domestic and non-domestic rates consist of two elements:

- the Regional Rate
- the District Rate.

Regional Rate

The Regional Rate is ... *'determined by the Executive. [It] generates additional resources to support those central public services that are the responsibility of the Executive.'*

The Executive annually sets a rate for the domestic and the non-domestic Regional Rates. For 2016-17, the domestic Regional Rate is 0.4111 pence in the pound; and the non-domestic Regional Rate is set at 32.40 pence in the pound. Regional Rate revenue is unhypothecated, which means the Executive can use it to fund any project.

District Rate

The District Rate is similar to the Regional Rate. However, the revenue raised goes directly to the ratepayers' district council to fund local services in the council area, not to the Executive to fund NI-wide services. It is set annually by individual district councils.

For 2016-17, the domestic District Rate ranges from the lowest at 0.28 pence in the pound in Lisburn and Castlereagh, to the highest at 0.44 pence in the pound in Derry



and Strabane. The non-domestic District Rate for 2016-17 ranges from the lowest at 20.12 pence in the pound in Fermanagh and Omagh, to the highest at 28.38 pence in the pound in Derry and Strabane.

Calculating Rates Bills

Rates bills are calculated in the following way:

Domestic rates bills

Domestic property is assessed by the Land and Property Services (LPS) on the basis of its capital value, i.e. the amount a domestic property reasonably could have been sold on the open market using 1st January 2005 market prices. Valuations then are put on a list as specified under The Rates (Capital Values, etc.) (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

The calculation is made as follows:

Capital value of property x (*domestic regional rate* + *domestic district rate*).

E.g. a domestic property in Mid Ulster District Council with a capital value of £100,000 -
 $£100,000 \times (0.004111 + 0.003081) = £719.20$

Non-domestic rates bills

Non-domestic property in NI is assessed on the basis of its Net Annual Value (NAV). The NAV is based upon an assessment of the annual rental value that the property reasonably could have been expected to let for on the open market on 1st April 2013, as specified under the *NAV List (Time of Valuation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013*.

The calculation is made as follows:

NAV of property x (*non-domestic regional rate* + *non-domestic district rate*)

E.g. a non-domestic (business property) in Mid Ulster District Council, with a NAV of £100,000 -
 $£100,000 \times (0.324000 + 0.231969) = £55,596.90$.

Following the above calculation, relevant deductions are made to the final bill for applicable allowances, such as Freight and Transport Relief, Small Business Rate Relief and Industrial De-rating.

Regional Rate revenue funding the Executive budget

Regional Rates revenue is one of the funding sources available to the Executive, beyond block grant allocations from Westminster. Since 2011 the Executive has annually increased the rate for Regional Rates in line with inflation. The Executive argues that this contributes to a lower tax burden on households and businesses, thus leading to increased consumer confidence. Increasingly questions have been asked about the prudence of this approach, given the financial arrangements under devolution, including the Executive's restricted fiscal powers.

Preventative expenditure

Pamela Dugdale

Key obstacles to introducing a preventative approach in Northern Ireland.

Recently, 'Preventative Expenditure' (PE) has gained a high level of political consensus. There are many definitions, and this imprecision has resulted in departments claiming that all their expenditure is preventative. Generally speaking, PE seeks to reduce public spending by investing early, before problems become too severe and expensive to address. Those on the left view it as a way to reduce poverty, while those on the right consider it as a way to reduce economic inactivity and ultimately service provision costs. While the idea that '*prevention is better than cure*' is generally accepted, government's funding of public services has rarely followed the maxim.

Recent reports in the United Kingdom have identified a number of barriers when governments introduce a preventative approach; some of which are explained below.

Negative expenditure

A 2011 Scottish Executive report classified 40% of public spending as 'negative', i.e. used to deal with the consequences of social problems, rather than prevent them. Although the figure was widely accepted, research identified there was no evidential base for the calculation. Further research tried to identify the amount spent on PE by the public sector, but data limitations restricted such attempts, making them largely unsuccessful.

Lack of robust evidence base

Commentators agree that a lack of robust evidence is one of the main barriers to introducing PE, and this is a particular problem within Northern Ireland. This is an issue since it is only through evidence that funding can be prioritised for the most effective initiatives.

Funding

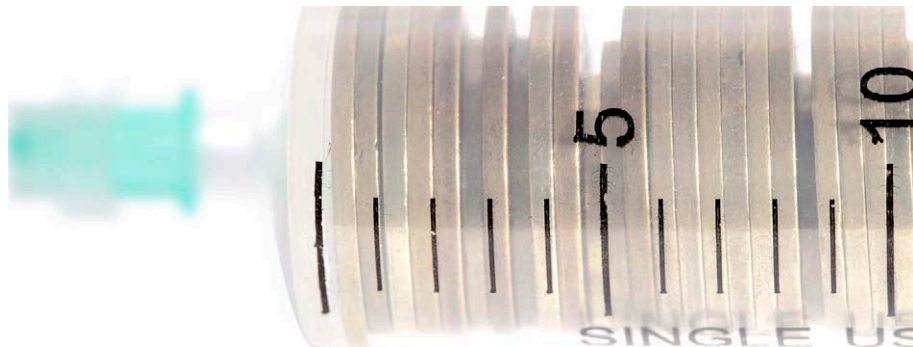
Since public funding is a limited resource, its allocation to preventative strategies may necessitate redirection of funding, from acute, to preventative services. Such a shift is contrary to the view of the state as a 'safety net'. For this reason, governments are likely to face opposition if they divert money into services with a less visible profile and measureable outcomes, e.g. health promotion, at the expense of initiatives to reduce hospital waiting lists. Practitioners suggest the following approach to address the issue:

- **Front-loading funding** to finance acute and preventative services to run in parallel for a short time; and
- **Greater clarity** around the impact of preventative services to prove they lessen the need for acute services over time.

Both of these actions, however, may require additional expenditure.

Short political timescales

Political cycles normally operate over five years, which provides an incentive for governments to invest in initiatives that show short-term results. PE has a long-term focus, with any savings accruing outside the political cycle. There is little incentive, therefore, for governments to develop strategies that may benefit their successors.



Misalignment between costs and benefits

The public sector splits people into component parts: while one department deals with health, another deals with education, etc. However, people by nature are more complex than this, and the issues that affect them are often interrelated.

Currently public bodies have little incentive to work together to implement preventative approaches that yield cost savings to another department's budget. But the cross-cutting nature of most preventative activity may be achievable only if there is real budget integration.

Additionally, budget holders do not necessarily benefit from cashable savings related to one less hospital patient. Hospital overheads remain, and the place freed up by the intervention is likely to be filled by the next person on the list. While this is a positive outcome for the individual concerned, there is no money released from the hospital's perspective, which could be used to help fund the initiative.

Leadership and vision

It can be easier to identify and deal with a problem's results, rather than isolate its cause. One academic identified some problems as 'wicked' in that they seem intractable or too big and interconnected, challenging the development of simple straightforward solutions. However, literature suggests, strong leadership and vision are needed to redefine, introduce and implement a more proactive culture in government planning, both in terms of policy and expenditure, especially in the context of tighter budgets. Moving away from the reactive culture is critical to extending PE strategies and better equipping government to address societal needs.

Financial Transactions Capital

Pamela Dugdale

What is it, and how can it be used?

Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) is funding allocated to the Executive by the United Kingdom (UK) government. The Executive has discretion over FTC allocation to projects. However, FTC can be deployed only as a loan to or equity investment in a capital project delivered by a private sector entity. ('Private sector' is defined using the Office of National Statistics classification and includes charities and universities).

The private sector must use FTC to invest in related infrastructure. FTC schemes are required to comply with the following conditions:

- The capital project must deliver policy objectives and be suitable for delivery by the private sector.
- There is a private sector entity for the department to invest in.
- The sponsor body must have the legislative authority to enter into this type of transaction.

FTC differs from the normal Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) funding received by departments through the budget. Capital DEL is used directly by departments and related public bodies to purchase capital assets and deliver public infrastructure, which are then wholly public sector owned. FTC is seen as an additional type of capital funding, to help boost investment. It also aims to stimulate private sector investment in infrastructure projects that benefit the region, over and above the level of investment made by the Executive from its conventional Capital DEL budget.

Incentives for using FTC

Only a percentage of FTC has to be repaid to Her Majesty's Treasury. However, the percentage differs depending on the tranche, with the 2012-13 tranche repayable at 60% and the 2013-14 tranche repayable at 76%.

Additionally, the department deploying the investment may keep half the net benefit. For example, where the department recoups 100% of the loan or equity investment and Treasury's repayment rate is 60%, then the department repays 80% of the FTC to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). The department retains 20%, and the remaining 20% is retained by the 'centre', to manage the overall position. For example:

- Department loans £1,000 to a project.

- Project repays £1,000 to the department.
- Department repays DFP £800 and retains £200.
- DFP repays HM Treasury £600 and retains £200.

Additionally, any loan interest may be retained by the department deploying the investment.

Compliance with EU rules

Projects in receipt of FTC must comply with European Union (EU) rules on State Aid. In general, State Aid rules require public authorities not to provide state resources on a selective basis to organisations if it could distort EU competition and trade. Therefore, where a private sector entity is involved in a market activity, the return to the department must be on a commercial basis. This means that a loan to any company operating in a competitive market must usually involve the charging of a commercial market interest rate.

There are, however, some exemptions to this rule. For example, the *de-minimis* rule states that trade between Member States is not deemed to be affected where the investment is small – below €200,000 to a single undertaking in any three-year period.

FTC spent/allocated

£'000	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
FTC Spent	11,839	40,900	68,235						
FTC Allocated	11,839	46,755	68,625	129,298	113,600	100,700	76,400	66,100	54,000

Northern Ireland (NI) Investment Fund

The 2015-16 Executive Budget announced the creation of a NI Investment Fund primed with FTC. It was hoped that the Fund would be operational during 2015-16. This proved optimistic; recent estimates suggest it will not be operational until autumn 2016.

The Fund will provide loan, equity or ‘mezzanine’ finance to viable local private sector projects that are not in a position or cannot obtain commercial funding. It will concentrate on the following sectors:

- Urban regeneration.
- Energy and energy efficiency.
- Telecoms.
- Social housing.

Appointed as a technical adviser, the European Investment Bank’s role is to enable implementation of European best practice into the Fund’s design.

Unused FTC must be surrendered to Treasury under its Budget Exchange System, which requires surrender of Capital DEL underspends over 1.5%. Tighter budgets therefore should focus minds on working to ensure effective FTC use; if not, this funding will be lost to NI.

Outcomes-based budgeting

Pamela Dugdale

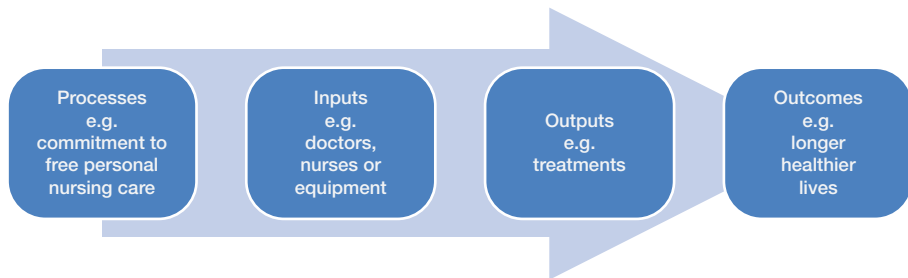
What is 'outcomes-based budgeting', and what are its key benefits and limitations?

Outcomes-based budgeting may be defined as:

The practice of developing budgets based on the relationship between funding and expected results. It increases visibility into how government policies translate into spending and focuses on the outcomes of a funded activity; i.e. the quality or effectiveness of services provided.

Fundamental to understanding this type of budgeting is the difference between outputs and outcomes:

- Outputs: the goods and service that governments produce or provide.
- Outcomes: the impact or consequences of the outputs for the community.



The aim of outcomes-based budgeting is to align programmes and services with prioritised government outcomes.

The NI Assembly's Committee for Finance and Personnel stated that there should be '*...clear, visible linkages between Budget allocations and the Programme for Government*'. In response, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) indicated that past attempts to link funding with targets had limited success.

Key benefits

Accountability

Clear linkages between funding and outcomes help measure the effectiveness of intervention programmes, providing improved accountability to the Assembly and the

public. The approach also helps clarify the roles and responsibilities of both politicians and civil servants in achieving identified priorities.

Outcomes-based budgets are collaborative in nature, helping to promote coordination and cooperation between departments and agencies, making inefficiencies easier to identify.

Transparency and participation

Outcomes-based budgets provide increased transparency and participation in the budget process, enabling stakeholders to identify linkages between funds allocated and proposed outcomes. Stakeholders can identify whether the stated outcomes have been achieved. This is a key component, with one academic commenting that an absence of transparency between funding and targets has a detrimental effect on participation.

Value for money and efficiency

The transparency afforded by outcomes-based budgeting enables stakeholders to assess for themselves whether funds expended on achieving a particular outcome provided value for money. Some academics believe that greater transparency of costs, resources and performance has led to government restructuring budgets to reduce spending and better align budgets with performance.

Evaluation and better services

Outcomes-based budgeting can be used as a management tool, to evaluate programmes and services, facilitating cost-effective use of public money. Policymakers can use it to articulate government's goals and objectives and monitor progress. It integrates funding and objectives – budget and performance - enabling them to focus on economy, efficiency and effectiveness, making performance measurement an integral part of budgeting.

Key limitations: additional costs

In 2012 DFP stated that mapping targets to funding '*...would not be a practical or even efficient use of resources*'. The additional analysis to assign funding to outcomes may result in additional costs and add confusion to the budgeting process.

Key limitations: identifying outcomes

The number of government-identified outcomes may be problematic. Evidence suggests large numbers of outcomes can dilute the usefulness of the available data, discouraging stakeholders from using them.

Annual Reports and Accounts in the Public Sector

Pamela Dugdale

What Information is contained within an Annual Report and Accounts, and how can I access it?

The purpose of an Annual Report and Accounts is to provide information about an entity's financial position, changes in financial position, financial performance and cash flows. It is useful to a wide range of users, enabling them to assess the stewardship and accountability of management for the resources entrusted to them.

The majority of public sector bodies in Northern Ireland operate a financial year which runs from 1st April to 31st March. By summer recess most public sector accounts are audited and laid in the Assembly. From July the public therefore can access a large number of audited public sector accounts on the organisation's website.

There are three parts to an Annual Report and Accounts: a Performance Report; an Accountability Report; and the Financial Statements.

Performance Report

The Performance Report provides organisational information, its main objectives, strategies and the principal risks it faces. It must provide fair, balanced and understandable analysis of the entity's performance. It is not audited but the external auditor ensures it is consistent with other information in the financial statements. It is signed and dated by the organisation's Accounting Officer or the Chief Executive. It contains two sections – an Overview and a Performance Analysis.

The Overview enables readers to understand the organisation, its purpose, key risks to achieving its objectives and its annual performance.

The Performance Analysis reports on the organisation's most important performance measures and where appropriate, its longer-term trend analysis.

Accountability Report

The Accountability Report explains how the organisation meets its Assembly key accountability requirements. It has three sections: a Corporate Governance Report; a Remuneration and Staff Report; and a Parliamentary Accountability and Audit Report.

The Corporate Governance Report should explain the organisation's configuration and governance structures and how they support its objectives.

The Remuneration and Staff Report sets out the remuneration policy for directors. More specifically, it details remuneration (including pension and benefits in kind) of staff key to

its operation and where relevant, the link between performance and remuneration. There is a presumption that information on named individuals will be given in all circumstances.

The Staff Report element provides additional information including: the number of senior civil service staff by band; the staff numbers and costs; staff composition by sex; sickness absence data; consultancy expenditure; and exit packages.

The Parliamentary Accountability and Audit Report brings together the key Assembly accountability documents. It includes:

- The Statement of Assembly Supply and supporting notes for departments financed through the Estimates process;
- Fees and charges;
- Long term expenditure trends; and
- The Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General to the Assembly.

Financial Statements

All public sector entities produce individual or group accounts in accordance with International Accounting Standards (adapted for the public sector). The financial statements include:

- Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure;
- Statement of Financial Position (new name for the Balance Sheet);
- Statement of Cash Flows;
- Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity; and
- Notes to the Accounts.

The headings of the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure follow the organisation's material sources of income and expenditure.

The Statement of Financial Position provides details of the entity's assets and liabilities at the end of the financial year. It is signed by the Accounting Officer, or where applicable, the Chief Executive.

The Statement of Cash Flows and Changes in Taxpayers' Equity where appropriate, takes account of the fact that the entity is financed by Supply (Department of Finance and Personnel).

The Notes to the Accounts provide additional detail, on both the accounting policies adopted by the organisation and the figures contained within the core financial statements detailed above. The individual notes provide supporting detail for the core financial statements.

The Annual Report and Accounts contain a huge amount of information that can be easily accessed and understood, and can be used by others to hold the organisation to account.

Devolution of corporation tax powers to Northern Ireland: key considerations

Michael Scholes

Expanding fiscal power for the Executive, but will it deliver expected investment or simply reduce the block grant?

The Corporation Tax (Northern Ireland) Act 2015 (the 2015 Act) empowers the Assembly to set its own corporation tax rate. The Executive is committed to a commencement date of April 2018, at a 12.5% rate. This change is expected to affect approximately 34,000 companies of all sizes, including 26,500 small and medium size enterprises (SMEs).

Attracting foreign investment

The setting of a Northern Ireland (NI) corporation tax rate in itself does not guarantee future investment and employment. Companies are under no obligation to reinvest profits, create additional new employment opportunities or purchase additional plant or machinery that may benefit NI supply-chain companies. Nonetheless, it is expected that some companies will re-invest profits into their NI-based businesses. Hailed as a major instrument to rebalance the economy by attracting increased foreign direct investment (FDI) and employment opportunities, it is expected to promote genuine economic activity and expand the private sector.

However, evidence suggests that a lower NI corporation tax is only one of many factors influencing firms' investment location decisions. For FDI to have a maximum positive impact on the NI economy, its job creation must be in high-value sectors such as pharmaceuticals, telecoms and information technology services. Employment in these sectors tends to be high skill/high wage, and therefore delivers higher levels of disposable income and greater economic stimulus.

The UK government's austerity measures have constrained NI public expenditure. Consequently, budget cuts to NI departmental spending may adversely impact on, for example, public spending on higher/further education, apprenticeships, investment promotion and infrastructure investment. This may be particularly important for the local labour market and its ability to fill future high-value employment vacancies. It also may affect Invest NI's performance in promoting NI to investors, and impact on the ability to develop 'fit for purpose' infrastructure.

Block grant adjustments

The revenue foregone as a result of a lower NI corporation tax rate necessitates a reduction to NI's block grant. This is due to prevailing European Union State Aid rules

and current devolved financial arrangements. The adjustment must reflect direct and behavioural effects of a reduced NI corporation tax rate.

Behavioural effects include tax avoidance measures, such as profit-shifting and tax-motivated incorporation. Estimating the cost of these behavioural effects is challenging. In 2015, the First Minister suggested that an incremental approach would be used, phased in over three years, with a likely reduction of between £100m and £150m in year one. However, adjustment calculation negotiations are ongoing between the Department of Finance and Her Majesty's Treasury.

In November 2015, the *Fresh Start Agreement* stated that block grant adjustment calculations will not include increases in income tax and VAT receipts from 'second-round' effects of increased economic activity as a result of a lower NI corporation tax rate. This raises questions as to whether NI will receive its fair share of future resource allocations.



Future potential impact on the Barnett formula

A lower corporation tax rate could present problems in relation to the Barnett formula's future use. An academic's evidence to the Assembly's Committee for Finance and Personnel (CFP) in January 2015 noted this when stating:

...given the potential devolution of corporation tax in Northern Ireland, longevity of the Barnett formula as a structure for allocating resources is a problem for the rest of the United Kingdom.

In 2014, other evidence to CFP raised the issue of the Barnett formula as a protective mechanism in this context, stating the formula:

...insulates [NI] from the risks of volatility of tax flows and the need to work out how you are going to finance public spending given the uncertainty of those tax flows.

Devolution of corporation tax powers to NI may increase tax flow volatility risks, necessitating greater Assembly scrutiny of future Barnett allocations. This remains to be seen, leaving the future for the Barnett formula uncertain.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Consider this...

Business and Employment

Overview of the Northern Ireland labour market

Eóin Murphy

Recent changes in the Northern Ireland labour market

Northern Ireland (NI) was impacted heavily by the global recession that began in 2008. The recovery since has been slow in the UK and even slower in NI. With heavy job losses in industries such as construction, the shape of NI's labour market has changed, with the services sector now of increased importance. In addition, the balance between the private and public sectors is beginning to shift due to the ongoing Voluntary Exit Schemes (VES) operating across the public sector.

Background to the current situation

Following the 2007 financial crisis, and the subsequent 2008 global recession, NI's economy contracted, with companies closing across the region.

This resulted in a number of large scale job losses, with the construction and manufacturing sectors particularly affected.

NI has subsequently had a slow recovery. Employment has gradually improved in a number of industrial sectors. In broad terms, the private sector has had a large increase in jobs, with 12,090 new employee jobs added between September 2014 and September 2015.

However, the number of jobs in the public sector has fallen due to the ongoing VES. This is largely a result of the Executive receiving a reduced block grant from the UK government.

Characteristics of the NI labour market

The total population aged 16+ has increased from 2012 to 2016, whilst the number of people who are economically active (i.e. employed or unemployed) reached a high in 2016 of 887,000, up by 20,000 on the previous year.

The table below shows a year on year comparison for November to January of the NI labour market since 2012:

Nov to Jan	Total Aged 16+	In Employment (16+)	Unemployed (16+)	Unemployment (16+ rate)	Economically Inactive (16+)
2012	1,418,000	809,000	55,000	6.4%	553,000
2013	1,425,000	792,000	72,000	8.3%	561,000
2014	1,434,000	807,000	65,000	7.5%	562,000
2015	1,442,000	815,000	52,000	6.0%	575,000
2016	1,450,000	834,000	53,000	6.0%	563,000

The number of employed people has increased since 2012, with 834,000 people employed from November - January 2015/16. This is a year-on-year growth of 19,000 posts.

This growth in employment is reflected in the falling figures for those in unemployment. Whilst the general trend since 2013 has been downwards, unemployment has increased between 2015 and 2016.

This can be partly explained by the number of people who are economically inactive in NI. As the data highlights, it reached a peak of 575,000 people from November to January 2015.

Consequently, NI has a high proportion of its population which is economically inactive (26.4% of the working age population in comparison to the UK average of 21.8%).

Some of this inactivity is a result of people becoming students or retiring. However, a large proportion relates to people without access to the labour market due to being long-term sick, having a disability (31%) or due to family commitments (25%).

The Department for Employment and Learning has developed a ten-year strategy to tackle economic inactivity, but has been unsuccessful in securing funding from the Executive to deliver its targets, such as those relating to skills development.

Key potential issues

Skills development

The *NI Skills Barometer*, compiled by Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre, found that the largest net requirement for skills in NI comes from the graduate level, with 25,394 job vacancies from 2015-2025. Of these, the *Barometer* forecasts that NI's existing and projected graduate levels will fill 13,979 posts and the remaining 11,415 posts will be in need of appropriately qualified graduates.

The *Barometer* also identified an existing and future undersupply of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) graduates and an oversupply of more traditional subject graduates, such as Law, Education and Architecture.

Tackling this skills gap would promote NI's economic growth and overall productivity.

Competitiveness and productivity

NI's high level of economic inactivity has been an issue for a number of years. In particular, it affects women who make up the majority of lone parents and carers. Arguably, reducing the number of economically inactive people would increase NI's competitiveness and productivity.

What are the trade implications for Northern Ireland of the UK leaving the EU?

Aidan Stennett

A referendum on the UK's membership of the EU is to take place on 23 June 2016. Voters will be asked '*Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?*' This article examines the possible trade implications for Northern Ireland of a UK exit from the EU.

The EU referendum debate

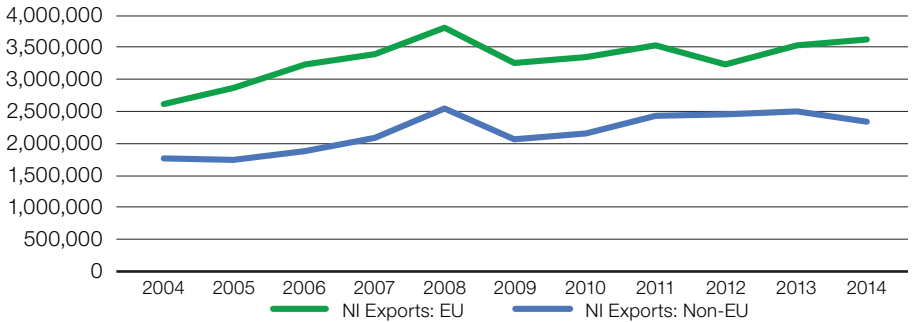
Those who advocate leaving the EU argue that the institution has become economically weak and that it is too bureaucratic to respond to global challenges. On this side of the debate, a UK outside of the EU will have greater global influence by virtue of World Trade Organisation membership and the capacity to negotiate bilateral agreements with trade partners.

Those in favour of remaining part of the EU emphasise the uncertainty of what will replace the UK's current trading relationship should the electorate vote to leave and emphasise the shortcomings of these alternative arrangements. Trade with other countries would also be affected, they argue, as the UK is forced to renegotiate trade deals with countries currently secured through its EU membership.

Northern Ireland trade with the EU

The UK's EU membership provides Northern Ireland with access to a single market of 500 million people. HMRC trade data shows the EU to be Northern Ireland's largest export market. This has been the case over the last ten years for which data is available (2004 to 2014, see Figure). In percentage terms, overall exports have been consistently split 60:40 in favour of the EU over the last ten years. In 2014, Northern Ireland exports to the EU were valued at £3.63bn. Exports to non-EU countries were valued at £2.35bn in the same year.

Figure: NI Exports to EU and Non-EU countries 2004 to 2014 (£000s)



Northern Ireland's trade balance with the EU is significant. With the exception of 2012, the region has consistently exported more to the EU over the past ten years than it has imported from it. This contrasts with the UK as a whole, which has consistently imported more from the EU than it has exported to it.

Quantifying the impact of the UK leaving the EU on Northern Ireland trade is problematic. In an exit scenario, trade between the UK and the EU will continue in some form. However terms of trade and the UK's access to the single market could be fundamentally altered, depending upon what replaces the current arrangement.

A number of possibilities have been put forward. The UK could seek single market access without EU membership. There is precedent for this. Norway has full-access to the single market, but must contribute to the EU budget and implement EU directives. Switzerland has partial access to the single market, secured through bilateral agreements. This too is predicated on EU budgetary contributions and the implementation of EU law.

Alternatively, the UK could leave without a free trade agreement and choose to trade with the EU on World Trade Organisation terms, although this would carry with it the possibility of Most Favoured Nation tariffs being placed on UK exports entering the EU.

A third option is a bespoke UK/EU deal. This is perhaps the most uncertain option, as the terms of such an arrangement will depend upon negotiations between a post-exit UK and the remaining EU.

Ultimately, the impact on Northern Ireland trade of a UK exit is at present ambiguous. Not only will it depend upon the nature of post-exit UK/EU relations, it will also depend upon the region's ability to absorb any increase in tariffs or reduction in exports in a post-EU environment. In turn, this will be affected by the region's capacity to grow non-EU exports as a counter-balance to any reduction in EU exports resulting from changes to single market access.

The national living wage and Northern Ireland

Eóin Murphy

The introduction of the national living wage (NLW) could have a number of impacts in Northern Ireland (NI), raising the earnings of those aged over 25, but potentially creating issues for small to medium enterprises (SMEs).

The NLW

In April 2016 the United Kingdom (UK) government introduced the NLW for workers aged 25 and over. The NLW is £7.20 per hour, acting as a premium to the National Minimum Wage (NMW) (which is £6.70 for those over the age of 21).

The Low Pay Commission (which sets the NMW) will make recommendations to the UK government as to how the NLW will change on a year to year basis. The UK government intends for the NLW to reach 60% of median earnings by 2020 (the £7.20 rate is 55% of median earnings), with the overall objective of the NLW reaching over £9 per hour by 2020.

Potential impact of the NLW

The introduction of the NLW has raised questions regarding its potential positive and negative impacts across the UK.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts that there will be marginally higher whole economy earnings growth as a result of the NLW's introduction. Hourly productivity could also increase by 0.3%.

Alongside this, the Resolution Foundation estimates an income rise for 1.9 million people. In addition, by 2020, 29% of female employees could also benefit from the NLW.

The Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) anticipates that the NLW's introduction will result in a wage increase for 13% of workers and 'knock-on' salary increases for other workers in NI.

However, some downsides also have been identified. The OBR states that by 2020, the NLW's introduction could lead to between 60,000 to 120,000 job losses across the UK, with lower average hours and reduced Gross Domestic Product by 0.1%. In addition, there could be lower overall profits for companies, which may lead to an increased borrowing. For NI, it finds that there could be a corresponding reduction of between 1,500 and 3,000 jobs.

The Resolution Foundation carried out an analysis on the 'bite' each UK region would feel as a result of the NLW's introduction. It found that NI:

...has the highest bite of any part of the UK, at 63 per cent. This suggests that it is likely to face the most pressures in implementing the NLW.

Indeed, the NI Independent Retail Trade Association stated that the potential wage increase could be a significant challenge to NI SMEs, especially as a result of the high proportion of microbusinesses (i.e. those that employ between one and nine workers).

Concerns also have arisen within the social care sector. A report by the NI Commissioner for Older People explains that the average hourly tariff paid for home care in NI costs £11.35. The tariff reflects both workers' wages and all other costs, and is the lowest in the UK. However, an increase in workers' wages, without a corresponding increase in the tariff, could adversely impact on the sector's ability to deliver care.



Way forward?

The introduction of the NLW will have a number of impacts in NI and raises questions as to how businesses will react to the changes it inevitably brings.

The NERI states that:

How businesses will react to this increase in the wage bill is unclear at this stage. Recent history suggests that business will either reduce costs elsewhere or take a dip in profits.

Whilst it can be expected that the anticipated additional employer costs, due to the NLW, will be offset in some way by the potential positive impact of increased spend due to higher wages on the economy, time will tell what the extent and degree of this impact will be.

Economic impact of cuts to the Higher Education sector

Eóin Murphy

Education and training are key factors in economic progress, acting as a means of raising productivity. Whilst other factors can result in short-run economic improvements, education and training are critical to embedding long-term growth. As such, the current reductions in funding for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) could have a negative impact on future economic development in Northern Ireland (NI).

Higher Education budget cuts

Higher Education public funding fell from £230m in 2010/11 to £174.3m in 2014/15. This is a reduction of £55.7m (or 24%).

The effect of inflation has further reduced the value of the funding. As such, public expenditure to HEIs has fallen over the last number of years, with inflationary increases further impacting on the universities. However, HEI incomes have, in the most part, continued to increase since 2008/09.

It appears this is a result of HEIs relying more on alternative income sources including:

- Tuition fees
- Research grants and contracts
- Other operating income.

For example, the income derived from tuition fees has steadily increased since 2008. Queens University Belfast's tuition fee income has grown from £53.6m in 2008, to £86.5m in 2015 (a 61% increase). Ulster University has had similar growth with tuition fee income rising from £36.6m in 2008, to £73.9m (a 102% increase).

Both universities have relatively stable levels of surplus over the last number of years, despite the reductions in public sector financing. This is in part due to savings made via expenditure reductions, including staff costs. For example, Ulster University decreased staff costs between 2009-10 and 2014-15 by approximately £9m.

As such, it appears that the additional income derived from tuition fees, research grants and other income as well as expenditure reductions, have offset the losses created as a result of the decreasing public sector finance. However, the sustainability of this approach remains to be seen.

Impact of the budget reductions

HEI public expenditure reductions can have a number of impacts, including on those entering university and on their future prospects.

Demand for places can be considered through the number of full-time, first-degree students. Enrolments by this group fell in 2009/10 and by 2013/14 had yet to recover. This suggests there will be fewer graduates entering the Northern Ireland (NI) labour market. When students do graduate, the majority enter employment. For example, in 2013/14, 70% entered work only, and a further 7% began work and further study.

It is important, however, to consider whether these graduates are meeting the skills needs of the economy. The *NI Skills Barometer*, compiled by Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre, found that there will be 25,394 estimated jobs vacancies from 2015-2025.

Of these, the *Barometer* expects that at existing and projected graduate levels, NI will have 13,979 posts filled and a further 11,415 in need of appropriately qualified graduates. The majority of these (8,379) are at Degree level.

The *Barometer* also identified an oversupply and undersupply of skilled graduates. The under-supply in graduates was found mainly in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) subjects, such as Maths, Computer Science and Creative Arts and Design. The over-supply lies in more traditional topics, such as Law, Medicine and Education.

An over-supply of graduates can force wages down, whilst an under-supply can have a major, adverse impact on an economy. As stated by the *Skills Barometer*:

The most significant implication would be that economic growth would be constrained, the skills mismatch would result in a continued loss of talent to employment opportunities overseas and higher levels of unemployment.

Way forward?

The Department for Employment and Learning has taken steps to tackle the underfunding of HEIs with the *Big Conversation* options paper published on the 9th March 2016. It included suggestions such as increasing tuition fees for students or increasing the level of public investment. It remains to be seen as to how the successor Department of the Economy will address this issue.



Does Northern Ireland need a tourism strategy?

Aidan Stennett

Despite the absence of a centralised tourism strategy, the sector makes a significant contribution to the Northern Ireland economy and has exceeded targets set out in the previous *Programme for Government*.

Tourism performance

According to Deloitte, in 2014 Northern Ireland's tourism industry contributed 5.2% to the region's GDP and supported 43,300 jobs (equivalent to one in every 18 jobs).

The Northern Ireland Executive's long-term vision for tourism is to develop an industry valued at £20 billion by 2020. Both the *Programme for Government 2011-2015* (PFG) and the *Northern Ireland Economic Strategy* contain the interim target of increasing visitor numbers to 4.2m and revenue to £676m by December 2014.

At the end of 2014, the latest full-year for which data is available, visitors to Northern Ireland numbered 4.5m and had a combined spend of £751m – exceeding the interim target.

Examining visitor numbers more closely shows Northern Ireland's largest tourism market to be domestic tourism, representing 52% of total visitors in 2014. In the same year, visitors from the Republic of Ireland represented 9% of total visitors, GB visitors represented 26% and visitors from outside the UK and the Republic of Ireland represented 14%.

Tourism expenditure presents a different picture. In 2014, visitors from GB spent £257m or 34% of total tourism expenditure. Domestic visitors spent £238m, approximately 32% of total tourism expenditure. Tourists from outside the UK and the Republic of Ireland spent £189m, or 25% of total expenditure, whilst tourists from the Republic of Ireland spent £68m, or 9% of total expenditure.

Interestingly, when these expenditure figures are examined on a per-visitor basis, tourists from outside the UK and the Republic of Ireland are the highest spenders – spending £307 per visitor, compared to £219 per GB visitor, £174 per Republic of Ireland visitor and £102 per domestic visitor.

The Hunter Review

2014's independent *Review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Wider Structures* (the *Hunter Review*) sought to ensure

...current [tourism] organisational structures are the optimum necessary to deliver the targets set out in the Economic Strategy and the Programme for Government and are effectively aligned with the work of Invest NI.

The report made 33 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), including: the rebranding of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) to Tourism Northern Ireland; closer working between Tourism Northern Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland; a review of the skills needs of the tourism industry; and a deepening of collaboration with Tourism Ireland and the new local councils.



The Hunter Review's key recommendation was that the Northern Ireland Executive develop an overarching tourism strategy. Over the last Assembly mandate tourism developed without a central strategy. A draft strategy was published and consulted on during 2010, but it did not receive Executive approval. *The Hunter Review* notes that the absence of a strategic plan did not prevent progress and development in tourism infrastructure, including five Signature Projects. Visitor numbers also increased over this period, prompting the question: does Northern Ireland need an Executive-wide tourism strategy?

Conversely, the review also states that the absence of a strategy has inhibited: '*...the development of those collaborative partnerships across the industry, in government and beyond, which are the building blocks for future progress*'. It notes too, that having no over-arching plan has '*caused a degree of confusion within the industry over the respective roles of the Department and the NITB*'.

Strategy development

DETI has embarked on the development of a new tourism strategy. During February 2016, regional stakeholder consultation events took place throughout Northern Ireland. These events will be used to inform the draft strategy due for publication and consultation in summer 2016.

Development of this strategy will be taken forward by the new Department for the Economy and is likely to be an important topic from the outset of the next Assembly mandate. The overarching theme of this strategy will be 'internationalising' the Northern Ireland tourism product. Key policy areas to be addressed by the strategy include:

- Growing the events and business tourism marketing;
- Creating visitor experiences;
- Developing Northern Ireland's tourism skills;
- Defining and developing the role of government and industry; and
- Developing Northern Ireland's digital tourism experience.

Is the sun setting on Northern Ireland renewable electricity?

Aidan Stennett

There has been considerable growth in the development of renewable electricity over the previous Northern Ireland Assembly mandate. Changes to renewable electricity support may impact the ability to achieve similar levels of growth in the future.

How much of our electricity comes from renewable sources?

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's (DETI) *Strategic Energy Framework* (SEF), published in September 2010, introduced a target of securing 40% of Northern Ireland electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020.

At the time of the SEF's publication, renewable electricity accounted for 10% of Northern Ireland consumption. According to the latest figures from DETI, 25.4% of total electricity consumed in the 12 month period from January 2015 to December 2015 was generated by renewable sources, predominately wind generation. Renewable electricity generation has exceeded the interim target set in the Northern Ireland *Programme for Government*: to secure 20% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2015.

The Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation

The Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation (NIRO) has underpinned Northern Ireland's success in developing renewable electricity. First introduced in 2005, the NIRO has allowed Northern Ireland renewable generators to participate in a UK-wide market for Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs). This has provided generators with two sources of income: the first from selling their electricity to the grid and the second from selling ROCs on the UK-wide market.

Two aspects of the NIRO have been particularly favourable to Northern Ireland generators. Northern Ireland consumers pay less for subsidising renewable development than their GB counterparts due to lower obligation levels. Furthermore, as a non-competitive scheme, the NIRO has supported all eligible renewable projects.



What will the future look like?

The NIRO is in the process of being phased out, along with equivalent schemes in GB. Support for new large-scale onshore wind ended in April 2016. The NIRO will remain open to small-scale onshore wind pending further consultation. The overall scheme is due to end in 2017, to be replaced by scheme known as contracts for difference (CfD).

CfDs will replace current support arrangements with direct private contracts between low carbon generators and the Low Carbon Contracts Company (LCCC), a Government-owned company. CfDs are based on the following principles:

- A generator is offered a 15 year contract with a known strike price for the renewable electricity sold.
- If the market price for electricity is below the strike price, the generator gets paid the difference between the two (funded through a levy on consumers bills).
- If the market price for electricity is above the strike price, the generator pays back the difference.

Higher electricity bills?

Importantly, CfDs will remove elements of the NIRO favourable to Northern Ireland. The costs of the scheme will be socialised across the UK evenly. DETI has estimated this could see the direct cost of renewable support (£17.25 on the annual domestic electricity bill) triple, with industrial bills increasing by 7-9%. Unlike the NIRO, CfDs are based on competitive auctions. This means renewable development taking place where it is most economic, potentially resulting in reduced levels of development in Northern Ireland.

In May 2015, consultancy firm RICARDO-AEA carried out a *Review of the Costs and Benefits of the Northern Ireland Executive's 40% Renewable Electricity Target* on behalf of DETI. This report concluded that 'increasing the levels of renewable electricity consumed has a positive net benefit for the NI economy', but noted:

Whilst our economic analysis indicates that increasing the level of renewable electricity to 40% is the best option, the lack of guaranteed support for NI based projects means that it is difficult to justify the investment in further network reinforcement projects that may not be needed before 2020, if NI developers' bids for support via CfDs are not successful.

DETI has embarked upon a 'Review and Refresh' of the SEF. A survey of stakeholder opinion designed to inform this review concluded in September 2015, the results of which are yet to be published. Given the changes planned to renewable electricity support, as well as the ongoing review of Northern Ireland's central energy policy, the future of renewable energy development in the region is likely to be an important topic during the next Assembly mandate.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

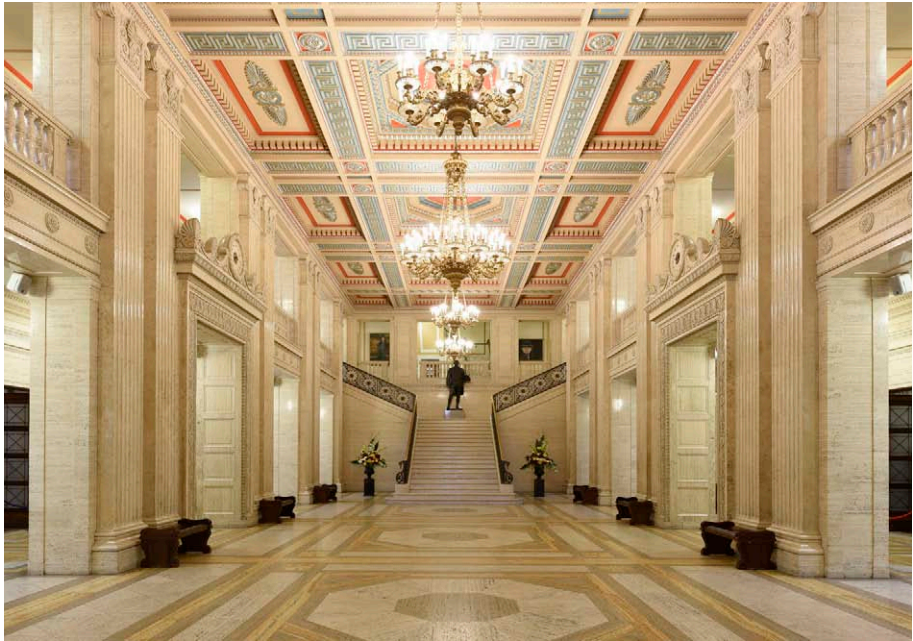
Consider this...

A brief history of Parliament Buildings

A brief history of Parliament Buildings

George Woodman and Marina McConville

From family estate to seat of government



The Great Hall

The Stormont Estate was created in the early nineteenth century by the Cleland family, who were the major landowners in the Dundonald area. Their house, built around 1830, was remodelled in the late 1850s in the Scottish baronial style and given the name 'Stormont Castle'. In 1893 the Clelands went to live abroad, letting out Stormont Castle.

In 1921, after the death of the last tenant, it was placed on the market at the time when the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland was looking for a permanent site. The Parliament voted its approval of the Stormont Castle Demesne as *'the place where the new Parliament Houses and Ministerial Buildings shall be erected and as the place to be determined as the seat of the Government of Northern Ireland ...'* The UK government purchased the Stormont Estate in December 1921 for £20,334.

The inauguration of the Parliament of Northern Ireland on 22nd June 1921 and its initial sitting the following day took place in Belfast City Hall. For most of the time after this until Parliament Buildings was ready for occupation, the Parliament met in Assembly's College (now Union Theological College) in Botanic Avenue, the main centre of training for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

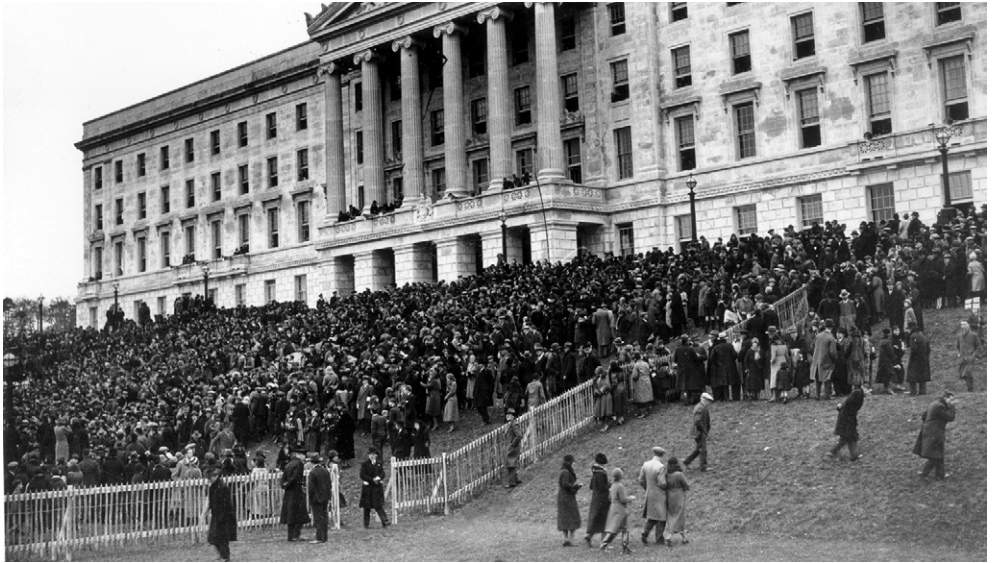
On the Stormont Estate itself the original intention was to demolish Stormont Castle. A successful local campaign prevented this and it went on to become the official residence of the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, later functioning mainly as government offices. Today it is the headquarters of the Executive Office, formerly the Office of the First and deputy First Minister.

Design and construction

The first commissioned architect was Ralph Knott, the architect of County Hall in London. He designed Stormont House, the official residence of the Speaker of the Northern Ireland House of Commons. This later also housed government offices and is now the headquarters of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Mr Knott was replaced as the principal architect from 1922 by Sir Arnold Thornely of Liverpool.

Work started on the preparation of the site for Parliament Buildings in 1923. After economic considerations led to the scaling down of his original scheme for a parliament building with adjoining office blocks, Mr Thornely designed the building to accommodate both the Parliament and the administrative headquarters of the Government of Northern Ireland. The foundation stone was laid by the Duke of Abercorn, Governor of Northern Ireland, on 19th May 1928. The building rests on a plinth of unpolished Mourne granite. It is 365 feet long, 164 feet deep and 70 feet high, rising to 92 feet at the centre of the main façade.

Northern Ireland government departments moved into the completed building in 1931. The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) performed the opening ceremony on 16th November 1932 and the Parliament met there for the first time on 22nd November. It had 78 Members in two houses, 52 in the House of Commons and 26 in the Senate, with a government elected from the majority party. Until 1969, Queen's University had four representatives in the Commons. Twenty-four Senate Members were elected through proportional representation by the Commons and the Lord Mayors of Belfast and Londonderry were Members ex officio.



The opening of Parliament Buildings

World War Two

During the Second World War on 29th July 1941 the Senate agreed in secret session to hand over the Senate Chamber to the Royal Air Force (RAF) to use as an operations room and, from 25th September 1941, No. 82 Group Fighter Command was based there. In October 1942, the RAF moved its Northern Ireland headquarters into Parliament Buildings. In February 1945 as the war in Europe drew to a close, they returned the Senate Chamber to the Parliament. During the war, Parliament Buildings was covered in dark camouflage paint.

Sunningdale and Direct Rule

The Parliament was prorogued on 29th March 1972 before its final abolition on 18 July 1973. It was replaced by the Northern Ireland Assembly, elected on 28th June 1973. It also had 78 members, in one chamber, and sat for the first time on 31st July 1973. Following the *Sunningdale Agreement* in December 1973, a power-sharing executive made up of Assembly members from the Ulster Unionist, Social Democratic and Labour and Alliance parties took office on 1st January 1974.

The Assembly was prorogued on 29th May 1974 and dissolved on 28th March 1975. The Northern Ireland Convention which followed, also had 78 Members. It considered what provision for government of Northern Ireland was needed. The Westminster Government judged its report to have insufficient support for implementation and the Convention was dissolved on 6th March 1976.

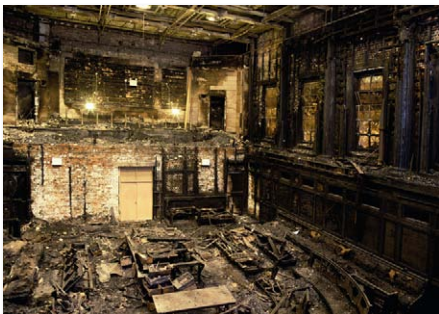
The next Northern Ireland Assembly was elected on 20th October 1982. Also consisting of 78 Members in one chamber, its two main functions were to produce a scheme of devolution which could demonstrate cross-community support and to scrutinise the work of government departments through a series of committees. It met for the first time on 11th November 1982. It did not fulfil the first aim but carried out the second for over three years. It was dissolved on 23rd June 1986.

The Civil Service soon grew beyond the capacity of Parliament Buildings, a tendency accentuated by the growth of the welfare state from the 1940s onwards. One or two departments, notably the Ministry of Finance (later the Department of Finance and Personnel and now the Department of Finance) maintained headquarters in Parliament Buildings until the autumn of 1998, when the entire building was required for the new Northern Ireland Assembly, elected under the terms of the April 1998 *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement*.

Renovation, fire and restoration

By the late 1980s it had become obvious that a major programme of restoration was needed on the fabric of Parliament Buildings. Renovations had started in the mid-1990s when a major fire on 2nd January 1995 caused the destruction of the Assembly Chamber. As a result, a far more extensive programme of renovation was undertaken, with the building evacuated from 1995 to 1997.


From July 1998, it became home to the new Northern Ireland Assembly. The Assembly met there initially in 'shadow' format before powers were devolved from Westminster in December 1999. During suspensions of the Assembly between the periods of 11th February and 30th May 2000, and 14th October 2002 and 8th May 2007, Northern Ireland was returned to Direct Rule from Westminster. The building was maintained for the Assembly pending restoration of powers. Parliament Buildings celebrated its 80th Birthday on 17 November 2012 with a special open day for the public and an exhibition on the construction of the building.



Fire in January 1995



Restored chamber



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This volume is designed to provide information on the range of services we offer, and includes a selection of articles from our subject specialists on a variety of current issues. Many of these articles derive from our work over the previous Assembly mandate and are intended to inform and stimulate debate.