Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

Peace IV Funding:
Community Relations Council Briefing

21 November 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Peace IV Funding: Community Relations Council Briefing

21 November 2012

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:
Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Megan Fearon
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr John McCallister
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr George Robinson

Witnesses:
Ms Jacqueline Irwin   Community Relations Council
Mr Tony McCusker   Community Relations Council

The Chairperson: I invite Tony McCusker and Jacqueline Irwin to join us. They are the chair and chief executive, respectively, of the Community Relations Council (CRC). You are very welcome. Tony, do you want to kick us off?

Mr Tony McCusker (Community Relations Council): At this stage, all that I will do is introduce Jacqueline, the chief executive, who will make an opening statement that is more or less based on the document that we have already given you. After that, we will be open to questions.

Ms Jacqueline Irwin (Community Relations Council): Thank you, Committee, for the invitation to speak to you. As many members will know, CRC has delivered European Peace programmes for many years, going back to Peace I, Peace II, the Peace II extension and now Peace III. The latter was delivered in collaboration with Pobal at the request of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). Under Peace III, we are contracted to support the Special EU Programmes Body in the delivery of measure 1.1, which concerns building positive relationships at the local level. We are also directly responsible for the implementation of measure 1.2, which concerns acknowledging and dealing with the past.

Although it was unexpected, CRC welcomes the development of the Peace IV programme, particularly at a time of recession and austerity. That is because we will need all the help that we can get at the financial end of things and because the strategic context within which the Peace III programme was to be placed did not materialise in the timescale that was originally envisaged. I am referring to such things as the review of public administration, which we are still working on.

A shared future was also placed as a strategic policy framework, and we are working on its replacement, the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy (CSI), as well as the victims' strategy and the new victims' service, which, as members know, was recently established.

Our paper to you for this meeting followed the format that the formal consultation documents suggested, and we are happy to discuss that in detail. For the purposes of these introductory remarks, however, I will focus on four issues, if that is agreeable: bureaucracy; the capturing of learning; partnership working; and the links between the Peace programme and our wider regional plans and structures.

Dealing first with bureaucracy, the period during Peace II and Peace III resulted in the Peace programme moving incrementally into the mainstream of European funding procedures. As a result, the programme has had to adopt more regulation, including a greater auditing requirement, to align itself better with wider European requirements. I think that it is fair to say that, during that time, the EU has become more concerned generally with ensuring financial accountability in all member states.

The arrangements to get the funding in place for Peace III, certainly in the early phases, had all the usual difficulties. I think that it is generally recognised that given the size of the grants that are involved, projects probably need to accept a higher level of regulation if they want to participate in the programme, which, as members will recall, was designed to be a strategic intervention.

However, the level of resources going out required, in some cases, three different levels of clearance: two from Europe and one from the Department of Finance and Personnel. That produced an understandable level of frustration for groups on the ground. Therefore, it is important to ensure that, for any future programme, the competing requirements of demonstrating project impact and financial accountability are balanced. In our view, that requires a speedier and more aligned process. Peace IV should attempt to simplify that while ensuring accountability for expenditure. There remains a wide variance in projects' ability to cope with the administrative burden of the programme. You have probably heard that from others who have spoken to you.

Having said that, it is worth noting that although partnerships continue to struggle with the bureaucratic nature of the programme, that is now less of an issue than it was at the outset of Peace III. For that reason, we recommend that Peace IV explore different models of development to ensure that the essential work is allowed to take place.

Where programme structures are concerned, CRC is aware that many funded groups expressed the view that they just want to get on with the work. CRC believes that it may be worth further exploring whether hubs of assistance could be developed to deal with some of the aspects of project delivery that are generally described as back room, such as procurement, administration and audit, to allow projects to focus on the practical aspects of service delivery with end users.

I will turn now to the issue of learning from the Peace programme. The Peace III programme undertook its evaluation work mainly at the higher programme level, which was a deliberate choice, rather than at project level. SEUPB has structures to measure progress through the Aid for Peace process, as it describes it. In our view, however, the lack of external review at all levels of programme implementation disadvantages the learning for future programmes and, in this case, the planning for Peace IV.

In our view, any new round of funding should include the scope to undertake research and to commission external evaluation of the projects, provided that they feed into a wider review of impact. The challenge is that they are too disparate and that too many end up not being taken on board. We fully accept that, but we think that you need a process that allows you to look at all strands of implementation. So, much of it is iterative, and there is rich learning to be had at all levels.

The third issue that we wish to highlight is partnership working. Operationally, local partnerships continue to implement their peace and reconciliation plans for their areas. A great deal of progress has been made on linking and sharing best practice in peace and reconciliation work. The opportunities to network across partnerships have been valued. They have played an important part in building the capacity of partnership members and partnership committees because their capacities have varied across the region during the period of Peace III. Progress has been made, and CRC, on behalf of SEUPB, continues to implement support mechanisms that aim to develop partnership capacity. Support remains necessary to place the strategic nature of the peace and reconciliation programme higher on the agenda and to ensure that it is embedded and mainstreamed within our structures after the lifetimes of Peace III or, indeed, Peace IV.

Work also needs to continue to address areas of low uptake and newly emerging marginalised groups. It is critical that Peace IV does not preach only to the converted. We think that there is an important role for agencies such as CRC and others to work to build capacity at all levels and to address imbalances in uptake.

Our last point relates to the link between the Peace programme and our regional plans and structures. We believe that it is vital that we embed that work and that the themes of the programme and the delivery mechanisms work in tandem with our wider regional plans and structures. Therefore, it is important to us that the Executive and Assembly are very actively involved in agreeing the mechanisms that should support local authorities and regional roles. They should also keep a role for, and focus on, core peace-building expertise. CRC recommends alignment and integration with the wider economic strategy and the overall approach of the region.

I will leave it there to allow time for questions.

The Chairperson: OK, Jacqueline; thank you very much. As regards whether we should have Peace IV, Europe and the Republic both seem to say yes but that the funding should be additional. The UK disagrees. Do you take a view?

Mr McCusker: That has almost been a cyclical argument during my career as a civil servant. The reality is that when you introduce a European programme with non-additionality, nothing of any great substance gets done. I suspect that that would be the case if there were non-additionality on this. Essentially, all that you would be doing is setting aside what you currently do. In many senses, that would be a tall ask, given the amount of money that you would have to try to set aside for a programme such as this. It is a political call, but my experience is that you do not really get much traction with non-additionality.

The Chairperson: Tony, can you take a view on the relative benefit of Peace money compared to INTERREG and all the other European programmes? Is that too broad?

Mr McCusker: I think that it is too broad a comparison, and I also think that it would underestimate the impact that some of those programmes have on peace. Infrastructure programmes actually do have an impact on peace, but that has never really been adequately assessed. So, it would not be wise to compare them. Equally, I think that most commentators would argue that a substantial amount of the reconciliation work that has been done and the progress that has been made, over the past 10 years must be down to the significant investment that Europe has made.

The Chairperson: OK. I could very easily, readily and happily support Peace IV. If we were to go for that, would you agree with me that, right at the top of that document, it should state that it contains the exit strategy that says that there will not be a Peace V by 2017, 2020 or whatever date we choose?

Mr McCusker: Jacqueline might have a view on that. My view is that we are probably long since past the date when we need to plan an exit strategy. A significant block of infrastructure depends on a number of these blocks of funds that simply will not be there in the future. We need to plan that at some point, and we have not really adequately tackled it yet. Jacqueline will have a better idea about how it works through the programmes.

Ms J Irwin: Even the process that is being used for this consultation in aligning the Peace programme consultation with the INTERREG consultation points in the direction of saying that we will move closer to aligning these projects and programmes. From our point of view, it is probably just as well that it will happen after Peace IV, as opposed to after Peace III, because we are not quite yet ready for that yet.

To respond to your earlier point, I think that that speaks to the alignment of the resources that are coming in from the regional exchequer and to what is required there. It is also connected to the alignment of the policy programmes with what is coming in from independent or offshore funders, if you like. We have not got that completely in place yet. So, another opportunity is very welcome, and we should take it.

Mrs Hale: Thank you, Jacqueline and Tony. I may be asking you this question because I am a new member of the Committee. I read the piece on research and evaluation. You said that lack of

sufficient external evaluation has hampered any chance of Peace IV. Should any new round of funding include a scope to evaluate and monitor? Who would do the outside monitoring for that?

Mr McCusker: In one sense, you can understand why the decision was taken. Part of the problem was that there was no provision in the funding for project evaluation.

Mrs Hale: I find that very strange.

Mr McCusker: Most of us do, but a valid reason was put forward that said that the quality of previous project evaluations was particularly low. There was not sufficient challenge in those through the outcomes and success of the projects. So, there was an element of feeling that there is no great value for money in doing a lot of individual project evaluations. On the other hand, not having the external challenge — there are many ways that you can do that, such as traditional consultancy or, more likely, academic study — you do not have the benefit of that clear, objective, rational analysis of what you have actually done over the past number of years to feed into the next programme. What you have is quite a significant and highly sophisticated database, but none of the sort of subjective analysis of the programmes' impact. I think that that comes at a loss to shaping where you are going in the future.

Mrs Hale: It seems as though an opportunity was missed. We need to look back —

Ms J Irwin: I think that what happened was that, certainly, under Peace I, as well as Peace II and the extension, a great deal of evaluation work was carried out. The challenge was that it was not being brought to one central point and looked at in the round. I think that that was a fair challenge. Aid for Peace under Peace III was an attempt to say that we will do the work at overall programme level, which is where we need to see the impact. It remains to be seen whether Peace III will be able to come to any clear and robust conclusions on that. However, that was the plan. I think that we now need something that actually brings both those elements into play, because we have lost some of the underpinning richness. We need to bring that back into the frame again, but we need to do it in a way that means that we actually draw the learning through in a very structured way. That is what has been missing. If we are moving to an exit strategy, we will also need that so that we can inform the domestic programmes, if you like. So, that is another very good reason to do it.

Mr McCusker: I think that a major strategic issue is involved in this, which is that Northern Ireland is used internationally as a model for conflict resolution and peace building. If, on the other hand, you are trying to do that, it is unfortunate if you do not have a sound analytical base to make the case, because peace building is one area where significant investments have been made internationally. The vast majority of the money that goes into peace building is international money; it is not local money.

Mr Lyttle: I would like to ask a brief supplementary question, if that is OK. Whose responsibility was it to conduct that kind of evaluation or holistic oversight of the project?

Ms J Irwin: Under the old programmes or under Peace III?

Mr Lyttle: Under Peace III, I presume. I am talking about the programme where concern was raised that an opportunity was missed.

Ms J Irwin: Peace III Aid for Peace is organised by the Special EU Programmes Body at programme level. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency also helps with that, by the way.

The Chairperson: SEUPB —

Ms J Irwin: It has overall responsibility for it.

Mr McCusker: Where the delivery mechanism is concerned, because there is no provision for evaluation, you are really, in a sense, out of that sort of area.

Mrs Hale: Looking forward, your submission talks about how new groups access funds. You are looking for them to come through, and you are looking to where opportunities were missed and then

4

feeding that information back. Will new groups that access the fund be given tools with which they can give feedback and evaluation? Will that information then be collated somewhere?

Ms J Irwin: That is a very important component. It has been one of the difficulties with the Aid for Peace programme. Although a lot of the groups that feed data into the process have some understanding, it remains to be seen whether there is sufficient understanding of what is being compiled to ensure that we get something very robust at the other end. That point speaks to a range of wider support issues — back office issues, if you like — that lots of groups need help with. We have a choice to make in a time of limited resources about whether we try to create that capacity in every single group or whether we look to build some sort of support structures around a number of groups. That choice has to be made so that they can get on with what they went into the work for, if you like, at the front end, and so that those other issues, such as evaluation, measurement, learning, audit, procurement, and so on, are handled so that they do not fall foul of regulations but are also not so caught up in learning those skills that they do not have the time to do what they really wanted to do in the first place.

Mrs Hale: OK. Thank you. That has been very informative.

The Chairperson: Do you mind if I ask a question, Chris? If we are going to have Peace IV, we have to look at the balance between evaluation, which seems to be thin on the ground in Peace III, and audit, which was a sledgehammer. We have probably all heard what, to me, were the apocryphal stories about how many sandwiches people had at their meetings. A women's group, which I will not name because I do not have its permission, claimed that it organised a meeting and that SEUPB pulled it up to ask why it paid for 10 lunches when only eight people attended. The group said that that was because the other two people were involved in a traffic collision on their way to the meeting and were in A&E during lunch. Apparently, the response to that was, "Well, when they are better, could you get them to go to their GPs and get a note for our files?"

Mr McCusker: I have not heard that one.

The Chairperson: It is hopefully apocryphal, but it illustrates the point that audit versus evaluation is well out of kilter in this matter.

Mr McCusker: There is an oddity in this, which is that if you talk to the Audit Office about its expectation of the audit meeting, you would find that it would actually argue a very proportionate approach. However, that does not seem to emerge anywhere. The disproportionate approach is accepted as reasonable. So, you end up investing in a lot of organisations, and they spend a lot of their time on fairly basic administration rather than actually putting the resources to the front line. That is unfortunate.

The Chairperson: Take a victim support group, for example. The people who join those groups do not join because they are accountants or human resource managers; they join because they care about the individuals that the group serves.

Mr Lyttle: That is a useful analogy that draws out what I was thinking. I was thinking more about whether a joined-up approach has been adopted, as opposed to people splitting hairs about audit and evaluation. Has there been a joined-up approach to the implementation of peace and reconciliation? Do you think that OFMDFM is prepared to lead the implementation of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland in the absence of a European Peace programme?

Mr McCusker: That is an interesting set of questions. The jury is still out on the focus of the last part of your question; that will have to be judged through what emerges from CSI. The time that it has taken for it to emerge does not fill you with an awful lot of confidence that it will, but we go in hope.

To go back to your earlier point, the context for Peace III was that that policy would be in place. The expectation was that things such as the Programme for Government would be shaped around where Peace III would be going and, to some extent, where CSI would be going. However, none of that is contextualised. We still do not have a framework around which to plan Peace III. So, you do not have a definitive reconciliation policy that should shape the Executive's take on or input into that.

Mr Lyttle: Does that mean that it is not particularly joined up?

Mr McCusker: That part of it is not joined up, but you would hope that before you get to a definitive position on Peace IV, there would be a policy decision or policy agreement on CSI. If you do not, you would end up with a major investment programme that would be flying blind through your regional strategy. That would be an extraordinarily bad way to do it.

Mr Lyttle: Where CSI is concerned, there is debate about the need for a regional delivery body. Is that tied up in some of what we are debating today, such as oversight and bringing things together? What is your view on that?

Mr McCusker: Do you declare a conflict of interest in this or not? It would be odd to think that you could move through Peace III and, presumably, consideration of Peace IV without there being some sort of regional infrastructure to work on delivery. To me, that seems like a given, and that is what we, as a body, would argue on the basis that that is what we have done and that is the way that you would have to do it in the future. I think that an argument would probably emerge elsewhere that SEUPB could do it in-house as a regional organisation. That would be a matter of judgement on capacity and past performance that you would have to look at separately. I am resisting responding to your smile. You would have to look at that very critically. If you are going to have such a major programme, I cannot see how you could do it without having a regional body to work on its delivery.

Mr Lyttle: Can I ask —

The Chairperson: I think that Jackie wants to come in.

Ms J Irwin: I have to declare an interest as well. Having done that, the answer for me is either yes or that there should at least be a regional focus, however you end up defining that. Otherwise, once a programme is up and running, there is a pressure to make sure that you meet the expenditure targets in Europe. You are then part of a much wider process, and it takes on a life of its own. You have to find a way to be able to keep the lens on what you wanted the money for in the first place. So, my simple answer to your point is yes.

In answer to your earlier question about how joined up it is, if I thought that it were a straightforward matter of joining everything up, I would wonder why we ever got to where we are now. This is difficult for all sorts of historical reasons, and I think that we have to acknowledge that. Having said that, if it is not possible right now to put all that joining up together, I think that, in policy terms, the emphasis is immediately put on iterative development. Capturing the learning and moving forward step by step then becomes the focus.

That is what we have to decide on now. We either say, "We have all the headings, and it is simply a matter of implementing them", or we say, "We cannot get them yet, it is a struggle, and we are still working on these issues.". If we go with the second option, we have to put the emphasis on the bodies that will deliver, ask them to come back and report to you regularly. You will gather the data and use them to decide what you do next in an iterative way. That applies to the domestic policy and probably to the European context. In some ways, Europe recognises that better than we do at the local level. Even in bringing forward Peace IV, Europe sees that these issues take a long time to process and that it is important to continue to support the groups and to gather the information from them. That seems to be the approach that Europe takes, and maybe we could learn from that.

Mr Lyttle: I commend the organisation's work, as well as that of anybody who is working in peace and reconciliation. The lack of agreement in the Assembly on what peace and reconciliation looks like must make it incredibly challenging at times to deliver this work on the ground. The decade of centenaries work has been excellent, so I commend you for that.

Ms McGahan: I attended a meeting last year in Cookstown about EU funding at which all the councils in the North were represented. I do not know whether you were at it, but the key frustration that was flagged up was about how the two clearing houses — the EU and the various Departments — are involved in what leads to a botched process just so that the money is spent and where there is an outcome that is not necessarily purposeful or meaningful. The same project in another EU country will be up and running an awful lot sooner. One of the things that came out of that meeting was that people need to just keep lobbying. That is vital. I am not sure whether that is still going on, but at a council and an Assembly level, you need to keep lobbying on the issue.

Mr McCusker: That is happening. Going back to the previous point, at one level, you could look at it as a purely administrative task, whereby people get the applications in, they are assessed against strict criteria and the money is got out the door. However, for a variety of reasons, it is quite often much more complicated than that. One reason is that there are a lot of players in the market doing various things to provide support, including the Executive. For example, on the issue of interfaces, quite a lot of players are inputting resources and time and energy, and sometimes the elements pass each other and you do not get the sort of synergy that you need.

On the regionality point, it is not simply about the administration of a budget; it is about the knowledge of and professionalism in this sort of work and knowing what is good, bad and indifferent.

The other matter that has to be guarded against, which is a big function for a regional body, is that it is very easy for some of the larger organisations that have been at this table many times to command most of the resources. However, that can happen at the expense of the smaller and maybe more deserving organisations that do not have the same ability to express their needs. I think that the existence of an organisation that is both administrative and developmental is critical, and we should not lose sight of the importance of that. On the council one, Jacqueline referred to the need for networking, and particularly if we move to a new form of local government, we need to get right what is being done at a regional level and at a local level and the relationship between the two programmes. You will have an opportunity to talk to Belfast City Council about that, as it is one of the areas that we need to get right in Peace IV.

Ms McGahan: Have you done any engagement with NILGA on that?

Mr McCusker: We have not done an engagement with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association yet. At this time, we are not sure that we are delivering on Peace IV, at a corporate decision level and whether that is anticipated by the Special European Union Programmes Body or the Executive. We need to be careful that we do not presume that we are doing something in the next round.

The Chairperson: Or that you will accept an offer.

Mr McCusker: That is an issue that has to be thought about. As you know, I chair two organisations, both of which have, to some extent, been burned by their experiences on these programmes, not only from the sheer demands that they make on the organisation and staff but on reputation. To some extent, we carry the reputation that is associated with the programmes and the programmes that are supported, so we will have to think long and hard in both those organisations about what role we will want to play in Peace IV.

Mr McCallister: I have a couple of points, Tony and Jacqueline. Tony, I am interested in your comments that it was originally envisaged that Peace III would link in. Whoever presented the evidence did not make it entirely clear, and the Chair summed up the view that we should have been linking it then and that we definitely should be linking it if Peace IV is coming along. In what order will these come, or how late can we leave the cohesion, sharing and integration issues? On various occasions throughout the year, perhaps as far back as March, we have been promised that it was definitely coming in September. It is now late November, and it is still not here. Realistically, we are probably unlikely to see anything. As we have often said, that might just be the strategy that comes out. We need to start seeing action plans on what people will do. I am interested in your thoughts on that. Which do we work on first? Do we keep pushing for Peace IV funding without CSI in the hope that it comes along, or should it not be very closely linked to it?

The Rural Community Network gave evidence to the Committee that Peace IV needed to move well beyond the single-identity work. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr McCusker: Let me kick off on the context. It would be extraordinary if we were to begin Peace IV without a definitive regional policy. Peace III was in 2006, and the Executive came into being in 2007. It would mean going into a period without a framework around which you would set it. The other thing to remember is that the Peace programmes are a percentage; there is a percentage add-on from the Executive on this. To add a percentage without the benefit of knowing what your strategic objectives are would look odd as well. In those circumstances, unless we have a strategic context, Peace IV would tend to be almost a re-run of Peace III without any serious strategic change because you would not have a document to tell you otherwise.

The other thing that might come out of this is the question of what Europe would think of delivering another large tranche of money without there being a regional strategic framework to do it in. That would be a pretty odd position to present to Brussels. There must be a case for enormous pressure on the Executive to deliver their policy framework so that people can do the planning for Peace IV within that planning outline.

Single-identity work is always a difficult one. Jacqueline will know more about this than me, but there are two arguments. One is that many groups present themselves, and we absolutely must do several years of single-identity work before we can move to the other bit. However, another line says that we have had enough of that; people should be well beyond that by now. We have been talking about that since the early 70s when the Community Relations Commission was in existence, and the approach was community development. You built up a community infrastructure and then people could reach across and do the divide stuff. That was 40 years ago. We have been having that debate for 40 years, and there is a point at which you have to move on and say that there are some criteria, this is about reconciliation, and you need to give a heavy emphasis on the reconciliation part of it.

Mr McCallister: That point has been made to the Committee. Peace funding started in 1996; it is 16 years on. You used the word "extraordinary" that we would be into the fourth programme without a regional strategy to link it with.

Mr McCusker: In 2006, there was a regional strategy, A Shared Future. If you take that literally, A Shared Future remains the regional strategy until it is replaced. I think that the First Minister is on record as saying that, at one stage, there is a policy and it has not actually been changed yet. Given the debate that you have had for the past number of years, it is a bit disingenuous to say that A Shared Future is the current policy when there are clearly two parties at the table who are not convinced of that.

Mr McCallister: Some would say that it is a better draft than anything that has made its way out since then.

Mr McCusker: Not many will disagree with that, having seen only one iteration of a paper so far. It was probably the most roundly condemned and criticised consultation that there has been for some time.

The Chairperson: It did enjoy that status.

Mr McCusker: I do not recall any others. However, not many commentators — and I speak wearing a political hat as a board member rather than serving as an executive member — would have found much fault in A Shared Future, other than that people said that it was a policy devised by a direct rule administration. If that was its only fault, it was a minor one.

The Chairperson: To be fair to the Rural Community Network, its briefing paper said that it was against Peace IV funding for single-identity work, but it talked about an application for a community festival, for example. If you were talking about a single-identity group of RUC widows, it had no difficulty in saying that there was a continuing need to fund and support and permit the existence of —

Mr McCusker: Victims are probably one of the areas —

The Chairperson: — the 10-year victim strategy that we are not long into.

Ms J Irwin: You have made my point. Most funding from Europe takes a forward-facing perspective and an acknowledging and dealing with the past perspective. In relation to acknowledging and dealing with the past, your point is true and will continue to be true, and we want to make that argument.

In relation to single-identity work, it is clear that we have to be careful not to view peace building as an event. There is a continuous element to it as well as a care and maintenance element that shares some of the characteristics of youth work. We always hear the argument that we have funded that, so why is it not all sorted now? The answer is that a new batch of young people is coming through, so you are talking about public policy being applied against different end users each time.

We are already seeing some of that. You will know that we have new and emerging political viewpoints, some of which are linked to violence, and we have ongoing work to do. Although the peace accord can be an event, we should recognise that peace building and sustaining is a process, as are all relationships. A mature democracy makes provision for that and takes care of its ongoing future issues, as well as what has brought it to where it is today.

The Chairperson: I could not agree more. That is why Peace IV should tackle intergenerational issues that we know about, such as educational underachievement. Are we all content?

I have a final thought to take us back to where we began. The €333 million from Peace III was provided, basically, as the resource to make happen the review of public administration, the shared future, and the victims' strategy, which were not actually there, to be implemented. I fear that historians will say that it was a wasted opportunity.

Mr McCusker: I am not so sure. In many ways, it has worked in spite of the absence of a strategic framework, and people have taken it upon themselves to do the work that the Executive should have been setting a strategic framework for. Looking at what was happening with this work 10 or 15 years ago, you could argue that we have moved an awful long way. Many things are happening now that would not have been contemplated five, 10 or 15 years ago. Is that a direct result? I am not sure, but I think that the resources invested went a long way in encouraging us to move on.

The Chairperson: Jacqueline and Tony, thank you very much.