



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

European Union Programmes: Special EU
Programmes Body

26 May 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Colin McGrath (Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr George Robinson
Mr Pat Sheehan
Ms Emma Sheerin
Mr Christopher Stalford

Witnesses:

Mr Declan McGarrigle	Special EU Programmes Body
Ms Gina McIntyre	Special EU Programmes Body

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): I invite into the Spotlight Gina McIntyre, chief executive of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), and Declan McGarrigle, the programme manager, to give us a quick briefing. Thank you very much indeed for joining us. We will follow the usual format of passing over to you to give us a quick update. We can then move into some questions and answers. If you are happy enough, Gina and Declan, we will pass over to you.

Ms Gina McIntyre (Special EU Programmes Body): Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you, Chair. I will give you a quick update on the results of the consultation, which ended on 12 May, for the PEACE PLUS programme. You were provided with a briefing, but that was before the consultation ended, so we will give you an update. We were absolutely delighted with the response that we received to the consultation. We had 415 respondents who filled in the survey, which was a fantastic response. Three quarters of those responses were from organisations, and a quarter were from individuals. The most important thing to note is the overwhelming support for the programme as it was drafted. As you may recall from last November, there were six themes outlining the content of the programme, with 21 investment areas throughout those six themes.

There was significant support for the programme. We marked it in categories of "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Don't Know" and "Don't Agree", and the highest scores that we received in "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" were 92%, with the lowest being 69%. For the budget allocations, the highest scores were in the region of 76%, with the lowest at 63%. That shows you the overwhelming support for the content as it was presented. The equality screening was also presented as part of that consultation, and there was strong support for that. There was strong support for the administrative proposals that we have put forward on helping projects, training and that type of thing. We are continuing with the qualitative analysis of the report. As you can imagine, a lot of it is very positive. We are particularly

focused on any issues coming forward that we can constructively bring in to the programme, but, as you can tell, there is very little.

Forty per cent of the respondents came from community and voluntary organisations, and we had a wide range of respondents from other agencies such as business organisations, social enterprises, education agencies, environmental agencies, government agencies, research organisations, youth organisations and 13% that were described generally as "Other", which included arts and cultural organisations, sporting organisations, human rights organisations and accredited bodies. You can see that there was a wide range of support. The most interesting and most exciting part for us is that 49% of respondents wanted to get involved in the programme. Those are people who had not been involved in the programme before but who really wish to get involved going forward. That is really good for us. I suppose people expect, "Oh, it's everybody who knows the programmes who will respond", but that was not the case. Almost 50% were from new people, 40% of respondents have been or are currently involved in the PEACE PLUS and INTERREG programme, and another 13% have an interest through stakeholder groups.

Sixty-two per cent of respondents were based in Northern Ireland, 18% in the border counties, 18% in the rest of Ireland, and 2% elsewhere, including Scotland, England and, indeed, America. That speaks to the new aspect of the programme of functional areas where we can do a lot more, North/South and east-west.

Obviously, we could not go out and do the normal physical events that we would have done, such as roadshows, and meet people. We had to do it all through social media. We used a wide range of social media: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, all those that you would expect. We did some print and advertising campaigns. We directly emailed 2,300 recipients with mailshots. We did partnering work with relevant interest groups such as the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA); the Wheel, in Ireland; the Community Relations Council; Pobal; Northern Ireland Environment Link; and Social Enterprise NI. We also held specific events for young people.

We had a dedicated consultation page. We had a useful video that outlined the programme in more general terms. We used social media channels and YouTube channels. We had an infographic and an Easyread format. We also went through and prepared what we called navigation papers. Because of the size of the programme and range of things that can be supported, we wanted to ensure that all those sectors understood that there were a lot of investment areas out of the 21 that they could get involved with, and not just the ones that had their title as such; for instance, health, environment or community. We understand from feedback that those online navigation papers were a great success. We had ones on business, community and voluntary, environment, the youth sector, SMEs, rural community and health. We did video messaging targeted at children and young people. We got a great response to that. I will not bore you with all the figures on the social media impressions, engagements and clicks, but they were extensive. We were very pleased with the outcome of that.

The next step for us is the finalisation of the programme. We have prepared high-level indicators that go into the programme in relation to investment areas. We will finalise the budget. The really exciting news since we last met is that the budget for the programme was increased to €1 billion, with an announcement from the UK Government before Christmas that they would add money. The exact amount has not been finalised. It is €1 billion, and maybe a little bit more due to the finalisation of exchange rates and that type of thing. We will finalise the budget once the EU and the UK and Irish Governments finalise and give us the exact figure.

The equality screening findings in the consultation found that 66% agreed with the equality screening. We were informed about a couple of reports that we were able to add as an addendum to that equality screening. We have had our expert look at that. We are very happy with that. Over half of respondents agreed that the strategic environmental assessment's findings for the PEACE PLUS programme covered all the relevant information.

That is probably all that I want to say about the consultation. We are, as I said, in the process of finalising the programme with the indicators and outputs. We have had a lot of input from Departments to help in relation to the targets. Now, we just have to get the indicators and the finalised budget approved. We need the process of approval, which goes through the Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government and the North/South Ministerial Council, before we can submit to the EU Commission. We cannot submit to the EU Commission until its regulations are finalised, which, with a fair wind, will happen at the end of June. Therefore, we are working to be ready to submit the programme at the start of July. We have regular contact with the Commission, and we know that we will be one of the first programmes that is ready to submit.

In response to some of the queries from Mr Lunn and Mr Stalford on gaps emerging between programmes, the programme is completely new and will be completely competitive and open for everyone. It is not a continuation of the current programme. Certainly, some themes will continue, particularly in the children and youth sector as those have been so successful. However, when the programme opens, it will be completely open and competitive. We will ask for different results and outputs from what we ask for in the current programme.

There has always been a gap — if you want to call it a gap — between a project ending and applications to a new one. That has always happened, except 20 years ago between PEACE I and PEACE II, when the Northern Ireland Executive put in additional money to make sure that there would not be an extensive gap between funding rounds. The projects funded in the current PEACE and INTERREG suite of programmes were funded for a specific reason: to deliver on outputs. The projects have done a fabulous job, particularly over the past year. We have been very flexible and worked with every single project on a case-by-case basis. We have extended projects' letters of offer and worked with them on the outputs that can be achieved. We have allowed projects to re-profile budgets to give them extra time. For example, the majority of children and young people projects have re-profiled and will work until June 2022. Only one finishes in March 2022; all the rest have re-profiled their budgets to finish in June. With that, they will complete all the outputs that the programme set out to achieve.

The nature of the programmes is that we are not providing core funding. It is not a government intervention as such. We fund projects to do a specific job and deliver outputs for a specified period. It is always the hope that the projects will either be picked up mainstream or become commercially viable. We do not core fund as such; we fund for a purpose. As I have said, the projects have done an amazing job given what they have faced in the past year. Most of our projects are extending into 2022. We should have had quite a lot of projects completing this year, but because we have re-profiled them, they are completing in 2022 and, indeed, some will complete well into 2023. That is a little bit of a concern for us, as we have to manage the projects until the end and the programme closes at the end of 2023. Mr Stalford was not quite right. Our current programmes close at the end of 2023.

The PEACE PLUS programme will be submitted to the Commission in July. It can take four to five months for approval, but we hope that it will not take that long as we have stayed very close and have had a very constructive, iterative process with the Commission. We will try to start opening aspects of the programme as soon as possible with pre-development support and opening calls. We have already given support and funding to all the local councils to start their community-developed action plans, with the hope that they will be ready to submit those to us early next year. Councils are not in a competitive process; they are given an allocation specified for their area. We are very hopeful that those will be able to get under way early next year.

As I said, other areas will be opening. One of the areas that we are trying to open first is the children and young people projects, as it is most similar to current programme work. Of course, we will be very keen to ensure that we retain the youth officers, who are doing a fabulous job. However, there is no guarantee, because it is a new programme and there will be competition for each investment area. I will stop there.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): Thank you very much, Gina. I appreciate your input. Thank you for the update on your consultation. It is not the easiest time to undertake a consultation. To have done that and got the information that you have is an achievement.

Moving on to the subject that you mentioned at the end, I fear that other Committee members and I will have a problem because we are being briefed with something very different from your briefing. That will cause a difference in information, and we will have to work through that. According to briefing papers that I have received, in some sectors, the posts of up to 200 youth workers are likely to have to be terminated at the end of December, and it could take the new funding stream well into 2022 and even into 2023 to get through the process of getting the funding whereby it is given to you, you develop the programmes, you get them approved, you open for calls, the applications are made and grants are given out.

Often, when you get to the very bottom level, the youth worker level for example, they may be focusing on something that delivers an outcome. If there is a seamless transition to the next programme, they could divert and move in and deliver a different type of work or deliver to different groups. That would be a seamless transition for the members of staff on the ground. However, if there is a period of three, five or six months between one programme and the next, the organisation inevitably has to let those people go. Once you let them go, you have to start recruiting again. After a

number of months, the people who were working for you will be working somewhere else and you have to go right back to the beginning.

There is a real benefit to keeping the two programmes back-to-back and allowing, hopefully, the outcomes to change but the personnel and structures to remain the same. How realistic is that type of scenario? You cannot tell me, "That group will get that funding", but, hypothetically, if a group applied to the new fund and was successful, what are the chances that things will be seamless, without a gap?

Ms McIntyre: I am not sure where you are getting your information from, Chair, because we are certainly not aware of youth workers who are closing projects at the end of December. As I said, we have been working very hard to facilitate extensions; we have granted over 60 extensions, and we only have 90 projects in the PEACE programme. There have been numerous extensions into next year and into 2023. The young people projects are all extended to June 2022, so I am not sure where those youth people whom you are talking about in relation to the end of the December are from. We have no knowledge of them.

We are trying to move as fast as we can on pre-development support. We are looking at how best to do that measure with children and young people. We are considering that with the Departments that are involved. With regard to June, there definitely could be a gap of a couple of months from when the call is opened to it being processed through. However, we are trying to prioritise that because it should be seamless in that area. We understand that those youth workers have done such a good job; nobody wants to lose them, least of all us, if they can be supported into the next programme. However, there are no guarantees.

There could be a couple of months' gap. We are looking at all that and, indeed, over the next couple of days, we will look at timetabling to see how we could open certain aspects. We will talk to the Departments about, potentially, starting to do that work ahead of the programme being approved. For them, that is moving ahead at a risk, but we will do all that. We are aware of the issue of ensuring that the funding gets out on the ground as soon as possible, especially when we see the support for the programme and people's desire to apply. We want to get people thinking about projects right now.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): I want to ask about the technicality of the gap, if there is a gap. Who, in essence, creates that gap? Is that you telling us that you cannot go any quicker because you are waiting on somebody else to give you something, or is it a case of saying, "If we give a month for this and two months for that", or is it that you are not allowed to spend money until a particular time? If there is a gap, what actually causes that gap?

Ms McIntyre: As I said, we will submit the programme in July, but we will have to wait for approval. That is based on our having a programme approved in Northern Ireland and Ireland through the North/South Ministerial Council to submit in July. Once it is submitted to the Commission, we will have to wait for it to approve the programme as well. There is a bit of time, but we are looking at how we can potentially move ahead of the Department. We are starting to get the paperwork, call material and targets ready to see whether we can get ahead of it and avoid a gap, particularly in that area. There are no guarantees. We need to move as fast as we can, but there is no guarantee that there will not be a gap of a couple of months.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): I will wait until the end and share this with the Committee, but I may ask that we get our Committee Clerk to have a longer conversation with you offline about those processes and about who you are waiting on. The Committee could then write to the Executive Office, the Commission and the Irish Government to say that it is absolutely imperative that this does not sit in the corner of somebody's desk for three weeks before they look at it, but that it really needs to be looked at on day one, otherwise we will be looking at potential gaps.

In the previous conversation with the junior Ministers, there was a suggestion that, if there are significant disruptions in the summer, we can look back at the disruptions that took place at Easter and see that it was youth workers who got on the ground and resolved those problems. Once the Executive Office changed COVID restrictions in legislation and youth workers were allowed to get out on the ground, they solved those problems. Going forward, we do not want to end up losing the expertise of any individual youth workers due to there being a two- or three-month gap. If you are a young youth worker, living at home with a child and mortgage payments, you cannot take the hit of a gap of two or three months. You will move on to another post somewhere, and that expertise could be lost. We will get the Committee staff to talk with you offline about the detail of that.

Mr Sheehan: Thank you for what you have given us so far, Gina and Declan. Gina, are all the extensions that you talked about extensions to programmes that are funded through Peace IV?

Ms McIntyre: Yes, the ones that we deal with are funded through Peace IV and INTERREG.

Mr Sheehan: Did you say that most of those will run until June 2022?

Ms McIntyre: That is the earliest that they will finish. A lot of them will run into the middle of September. The latest is September 2023. A lot of projects have to run over the next two years.

Mr Sheehan: What are the criteria for a group to get an extension?

Ms McIntyre: If they have budget left and have not completed all their outputs, they are re-profiled to move their budget to allow them to deliver on their outputs. We have been working with them, so all the projects that needed extensions have got them.

Mr Sheehan: Most members of the Committee have a similar issue in that they have been given a particular picture of how things are, which is that there seems to be a degree of panic out there, particularly among some of the groups that provide services for young people.

Colin talked about the issue of a seamless transition from Peace IV to PEACE PLUS. You now say that that commitment was never given and that they are completely different programmes.

Ms McIntyre: That was never given, Mr Sheehan. They are completely different programmes. The PEACE PLUS programme is a hybrid of INTERREG and Peace, so it is completely different from the current Peace programme.

When we started the consultation, over two years ago, we always hoped that we would have the programme open and up and running by later this year, or even by this time this year. As it turned out, we did not have the budget until Christmas. We have done everything that we possibly can, and all the Departments and everybody have worked with us to get the programme and the content into the shape that they are in. We did not know the budget until Christmas and, in fact, still do not have the final figure for the budget. That has to be agreed among the UK, the EU and the Irish Government. I know that they are working hard on it, so it is not that anybody is dragging their heels. EU regulations were due to be finalised by December 2020, and they were not; they will now not be finalised until June 2021. We cannot submit the programme until the regulations are finalised.

There have been other factors. We always hoped that the programmes would have dovetailed, if you like, but there was never any guarantee, and we cannot guarantee any organisation any role in the PEACE PLUS programme at this stage, because it will be entirely competitive. That is especially so, since you see that 50% of the respondents are people who want to get involved in the programme and have never been involved before. It is an open and competitive programme.

Mr Sheehan: Do you accept that there may be organisations that have to make workers redundant, as a result of the gap between the ending of this programme and the funding for the new one?

Ms McIntyre: I would hate to see anybody made redundant, especially people who have the skills and, in particular, the youth workers. However, if there are redundancies to be made at times, it is not just as a result of the gap between the programmes. It may be that the organisations apply to the PEACE PLUS programme and do not get funded. That is nothing to do with the gap. They are completely different programmes.

Please do not think that we take lightly the fact that anybody would be made redundant, because we do not. We want to retain, from the current programme into the new one, as many people as possible who have been involved and have built up the skills. However, there are bigger factors outside our control, as we heard in the previous conversation. Other parties are involved. We had to wait for the budget to be confirmed at Christmas, and we still do not have the final figure. As soon as we have the necessary approvals to submit to the Commission, we will do that.

Mr Sheehan: I have just one final question, because I am sure that some of the other Committee members will pick up on it. Has there been an underspend in the current funding?

Ms McIntyre: No. We are 103% committed in the Peace programme. As a management technique, we will always consider that there may be some underspends emerging in different projects that may not have been able to do certain activities that they had planned, but most of the underspend that we would have anticipated happening is being used to extend out projects. Therefore, it would appear that a lot of them are going to spend in full.

However, we will monitor very closely to see whether there is any underspend emerging from projects. Then we will have to look, first, to the projects within that are currently funded. Can they deliver the outputs that they are required by their contract to deliver? Do they need additional costs to do that or in order to deliver an extension? That is our first port of call, before we look for any particular new projects or add new targets to the programme.

Mr Sheehan: Is there any suggestion that an underspend in the funding may be used to plug an overspend in the capital side of things?

Ms McIntyre: There is a possibility that, if an underspend emerges anywhere in the programme, it may be used on some of the capital projects that might have increased costs due to COVID and have to deliver their output. They could be partly built, and they have to deliver. That would be the first place that we would look in order to make sure that the outputs that are agreed in the programme are delivered. If they are not delivered, that puts those projects in jeopardy.

Mr Sheehan: OK. Thanks for that.

Ms McIntyre: I think that the Chair's connection is frozen.

Mr Lunn: I am still here.

The Committee Clerk: Trevor, will you chair and ask your question, until Colin gets back. Is that OK?

(The Acting Chairperson [Mr Lunn] in the Chair)

The Acting Chairperson (Mr Lunn): Certainly. Gina and Declan, thanks again for your report. I go on record again saying what I said the last time that you were before us: I think that the work that you do is fantastic, and I hope that it can continue. However, I am a wee bit confused about the extensions. In simple terms, does the granting of an extension to an existing programme depend on there being an underspend in this year's budget?

Ms McIntyre: Let us say, for example, that a project's output is to deliver 200 children through a programme. It might say to us, "Well, because of COVID, we've only been able to deliver 100, so we have this money saved in our budget. Can we use this money now and extend out for another six months so that we will deliver the entire output of 200?". That is what has been happening with all the extension projects. They have used their underspends that they were not able to use in their activity to extend the lifetime of their project to deliver their outputs.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr Lunn): One organisation in particular, which has been in touch with us, reckons that it will have a 1% underspend at the end of this year. It seems unlikely that it could be extended for six months and that the organisation could be kept going until June 2022. I do not know how many are like that. You probably know better than me. I am sorry to go on about the gap, but that is June 2022. The information that seems to be around those organisations at the moment is that even January 2023 may not be feasible. It is a chasm; it is not just a gap. Some of them may not survive. They may lose all their key people. The good work that they are doing might have to come to an end. They could possibly be reconstituted at some future date, but it is a very serious situation. There is a lot of apprehension out there.

Ms McIntyre: There are clearly a lot of rumours as well. It is certainly not our intention that we will not start funding projects until January 2023. That would not bode well for the programme. There is still a little bit of a misunderstanding. If a project has delivered its outputs, we cannot pay it any further money to just exist. That is core funding. If the project that you refer to has 1% underspend at the end of December and it has delivered its outputs, that is a fantastic achievement for that project. I understand the concerns and uncertainty about the programme not yet being open to take applications, but that project has been delivered and completed. That is the difference. This is not core funding. It is to deliver results and outputs. Once you have done that, that is the project over. The ones

that have been extended had perhaps 10% or 15% underspend and were able to say, "We need to deliver this. We need another three or six months. We have the money in our budget to do it. We can do that", and were able to do that.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr Lunn): I am getting a better understanding of how the system works. Thank you for that.

You talked about the €1 billion, give or take some currency fluctuations, which is going to be the budget for this again. To what extent is that dependent on a contribution from the UK Treasury or the Northern Ireland Office?

Ms McIntyre: It is very dependent. It is the same split as the current programmes are. The UK has put in its contribution to the €1 billion programme along with the EU and the Irish Government. Obviously, there will also be match funding that comes from the Northern Ireland Departments and the Irish Departments.

(The Chairperson [Mr McGrath] in the Chair)

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): Thank you to whomever got Trevor up in to that part of the meeting as I dropped off.

Ms Anderson: Thank you, Declan and Gina. It is always good to hear from you. Gina, it is one of those sayings: sometimes, you do not know what you have until it has gone. In the middle of all the Brexit madness and discussions, and the protocol and its impact, not enough people took account of the fact that it is an amalgamation of two stand-alone, distinct programmes: Peace and INTERREG. Those two are now merging into PEACE PLUS. You know that I am a fan, Gina. The EU has had a significant impact on the North and the border regions of Ireland. It is important that the potential benefits for communities of Peace funding — PEACE PLUS, now — are realised.

You talked about local action plans. Do they contain a broad base of perspectives for the community? All of us know the importance of youth services and youth officers to children and young people and of those who work with young people who are struggling with mental health issues. How broad-based are the local action plans? Are they scoping up and capturing as widely as they can for the people who are working in the communities?

Ms McIntyre: Thanks, Martina. You are right. Part of the issue is the fact that PEACE PLUS will be the only programme. We have not heard people complaining about gaps. There are always people who worry about it. Maybe the youth sector's European social fund (ESF) projects are concerned, but I am not aware of any of our youth projects having any problems, given that they are funded to June 2022.

We have done a couple of things regarding the local action plans. Each of the councils has an allocation of resource that comes out of its own action plan. We are giving the council that to use in advance so that it will have staff to develop the plans. We have also provided consultancy help from outside. We have hired a group of consultants who will work with the councils to help and advise them in the development of the plan. The focus will be on the community developing the plan. It is about the community needs. We have given some ideas, but we are not being prescriptive. The plan has to show how they have gone to every ward in the council and that the areas that they are working in are cross-community.

We have kept it flexible in that we have said that it has to focus on three areas. First, it must focus on the regeneration of the community. That can involve anything from small capital projects to training projects, social economy projects or women's projects. It can be anything that will regenerate the area. Secondly, it must focus on building positive relationships, and, thirdly, it must celebrate culture, identity and diversity. It is flexible, but it has to be done on a cross-community basis and/or a cross-border basis in certain areas and councils.

Declan, do you want to add anything about how we developed the plans with communities?

Mr Declan McGarrigle (Special EU Programmes Body): We are very much trying to go down a co-design route and community plan model that a lot of local authorities are already using and are required to use. The same applies in the border counties. We are very much trying to drive it down to

the district electoral area (DEA) level, or LEA level, or, potentially, to have clusters of DEAs working together in partnership to develop the plans and to have governance at that level.

As Gina said, it is very much around those three core themes, but it is broad. We are working with a consortium of consultants who will work across all 17 local authorities to help with that co-design process and to look at best practice and models that exist. They are conducting mapping and feasibility exercises, currently, and will start to engage directly with local authorities in the next number of weeks to start the process. That programme of support will continue over the next six months as we work to get the programme approved. We are trying, as far as possible, to offer support now and to assist local authorities in advance of the programme being approved, because we know that this is a core area — investment area 1.1 — for which there is ring-fenced money for local authorities.

Ms McIntyre: Obviously, it will take some time to go out and engage with the community. As Declan said, we are very much driving a co-design approach with the community. It has to address local needs. We are not being prescriptive. It could be clusters of local areas to make sure that they can facilitate the cross-community and peace-building aspects of the programme.

Ms Anderson: The PEACE PLUS co-design process can, without doubt, make an even greater impact by ensuring that funding reaches those organisations that continue to build and develop the peace and political process. You talked about building positive relationships not just in their communities but across communities. I am fully and absolutely supportive of the need for those to be cross-community and cross-border, which is important for INTERREG as well. One thing that I have been concerned about, however, which I have raised with you, is where it is cross-community to tick a box. We do not want that situation. For instance, I come from a city where 80% of them are from one particular tradition, and some projects have not been funded, because, to draw down funding, they have to be cross-community, so it then becomes a tick-box exercise. Some of the past lessons around that have, however, been learnt.

You talked about the positive implications of the co-design work in building positive community relations. We know that there are people who have been on the street in times of need and tension to address a situation. For example, in my constituency, ex-prisoners and ex-combatants have worked together to ease tensions and have contributed to society in that way. Is work being done to engage with those organisations to ensure that we do not lose that capacity and influence in our society? You also talked about all the other positive streams, but we know that we still have a journey to travel.

Ms McIntyre: You are absolutely right, Martina. We picked that up through the consultation and through discussions with people like you. In theme 1, you will see that we have an investment area at 1.2 called "empowering communities", and that is about looking at those issues. There will be a small projects fund for projects up to £100,000 to do peace-building work. That is to address those things that you talked about, such as the local people on the ground who need some support to make what they are doing even better than what they are already doing voluntarily.

There are areas that look at building institutional capacity and what we can do there. Then, of course, there is the regional work on building positive relations. Certainly, from the discussions we had and what we heard during the consultation, I think that there is enough in there. There are groups who want to do things outside the council plans. They have their own project ideas, but they need something on a smaller basis. That is all built in, particularly for the groups that you mentioned.

Ms Anderson: Given the gap in funding, which you talked about — I know that Pat, Trevor, I think, and Christopher raised this during the last engagement that we had — there is a responsibility on us to make sure that organisations are aware that, given the way things are with Brexit at the moment, this is not a rollover or a continuum but a new project. I hazard a guess that you are probably right, in that, for some of those organisations, it is about the ESF. They will need training, because it is more salary-based, so it is about what they need to do to get that training. Maybe we need to differentiate between those who are coming to us for such funding to ensure that it is Peace funding, as opposed to European social fund funding, that they require and that that is what their concerns are about. It does not surprise me at all that 50% of the responses that you got were from people who had not participated before. I have always said that, given that this is the only pot of funding that we will receive from the EU, there will be a bit of a scramble because people will not be getting funding elsewhere. It is part of, as we said earlier, the unmitigated disaster that is Brexit, but I know that you will not want to comment on that. Thank you very much. I appreciate everything that you have done in the past and continue to do.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): George, is there anything that you would like to ask or check?

Mr Robinson: Chair, first and foremost, my apologies. The Standards and Privileges Committee meeting went on until about 3.30 pm, so I have only joined you in the last half hour or so. I have no questions at the moment. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): OK, that is grand. Thank you.

Gina and Declan, before we leave it, we have been given the information that we have been given, and there is maybe a suggestion that it is not right or that it might be different funds. The Peace IV youth project strikes me as being funded by Peace IV rather than by the ESF. Is the Peace IV youth project funded by Peace IV?

Ms McIntyre: It is, and those are the ones that are extended until June 2022.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): OK. It is a case of maybe putting it a different way. If the new programme rolls out, there are appropriate opportunities for them to apply and they are successful, there should be a fair chance that they will be close enough to being back to back to ensure a seamless approach. *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality]* and I understand that, but we are sort of throwing a dart at a wall and saying, "Is it close to it, or are we on the wrong wall?".

Ms McIntyre: We would like to think that we could be close to it. We will certainly do everything that we can. There are factors outside our control, but there are factors inside our control as well. We can timetable, start to develop some work and put resources into that. There are things that we can do, and, all along, we have almost ignored the factors outside our control and have done what we can do. We will continue to do that, and, come June to September next year, we might be able to make decisions. I know that that is still worrying for people, but that is the best that we can do.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): I will speak to the Committee, as we normally do after a presentation, to see if there are any future actions, but we could see if there ways to help with anything that is outside your control but may be closer to being in our control.

Everybody who wanted to ask a question has done so. Thank you very much indeed for your attendance today. It is always appreciated. We look forward to interacting with you again in the future.

Ms McIntyre: Thank you, Chair. If anybody wants to talk to us about anything, please feel free. You know where we are. Bye.

The Chairperson (Mr McGrath): OK. Bye-bye.