



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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**COMMITTEE  
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE  
FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY  
FIRST MINISTER**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(Hansard)**

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**British Council**

15 December 2010

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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FOR THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND  
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Tom Elliott (Chairperson)  
Dr Stephen Farry (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Martina Anderson  
Mr Allan Bresland  
Mr William Humphrey  
Mrs Dolores Kelly  
Mr Danny Kinahan  
Mr Barry McElduff  
Mr George Robinson  
Mr Jimmy Spratt

**Witnesses:**

Mrs Shona McCarthy ) British Council  
Mr Colm McGivern )

**The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr Elliot):**

Shona and Colm, you are very welcome. Would you like to give us a short presentation of about 10 minutes and then leave yourselves available for questions?

**Mr Colm McGivern (British Council):**

Thank you, Chairperson. I am the regional director of the British Council in the UK. I propose to

speak for a couple of minutes about the organisation globally and then hand over to Shona, who will give some more information about the work that we do in Northern Ireland. That will take about 10 minutes, and then we will be open for questions. Thank you again for giving us some time today to say our piece.

The British Council is a major asset for the UK, making a powerful contribution to our international standing as an open, internationally engaged and influential country. Our purpose, as stated in the strategy document, is to create international opportunities for and trust between the people of the UK and other countries worldwide. We do that by making good use of our great cultural exports: the English language; the UK's cultural diversity; our education system; the arts; and scientific achievements. By being generous with those cultural assets, we make the UK more attractive to other countries, and our work with those cultural assets here also helps to make Northern Ireland more attractive to other countries. That is our business: international cultural relations. We bring people together to learn, create and work together for the long-term relationships of trust in the UK and Northern Ireland.

The organisation is a regulated charity. In fact, it is the second largest charity in the United Kingdom and was incorporated in 1940. The British Council is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) and has about 7,000 staff working for it worldwide. The vast majority of those staff are what we call locally engaged or appointed in the countries where we work, and we have a network of over 100 offices across the world.

As regards scale, the organisation has a turnover of about £700 million, 33% of which comes from a grant from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 33% of which we earn from our income, and another 33% of which we win in partnership or contract funding. That £700 million is roughly equivalent to the cost of a medium-sized university. For every £1 of grant that we receive from the Government, we multiply it by £2.50. Last year, we began the largest staff restructuring programme in our history to save more than £12 million recurrently through a programme of voluntary early retirement. I make that point to try to prove that we are a lean and efficient organisation.

Our work connects people around the world with the UK, delivering a solid economic impact for today, while attracting talent, linking institutions and developing partnerships for the UK for the future, and we draw on those relationships all the time. How can we do that? We can do it,

because we are on the ground in the places that matter for the UK, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. We are also prominent in the big, new markets that are important for the UK, such as India and China, while retaining strong friendships across Europe and the US. Last year, we worked with over 18 million people, connecting the UK's educationalists, English language teachers, artists and cultural entrepreneurs with their peers internationally. We work with about 1.5 million people in the UK, and those people are directly involved in the programmes that we run.

I will give a few quick examples of our impact just to give the Committee a sense of the work that we do globally. Last year, we taught English to 300,000 people face to face in 48 countries, and several million more accessed our resources online. In higher education, we attracted over 400,000 international students to the UK, contributing £8 billion to the UK economy.

In Afghanistan, we are teaching 10,000 English teachers to develop their classroom skills. We teach more people by radio. In Iraq, we have a Government-sponsored university linking programme worth £3 million, which links more than 30 universities with universities in Baghdad and Basra. In Burma, the British Council is one of the few organisations that offer unfettered access to the Internet. We have a partnership with the Open University that sees us train social organisations in Burma on issues of social change. You can imagine how difficult and challenging that can be.

We have built strong school links between the UK and Pakistan. We are big in the big new markets such as China and India. More than seven million people visited the British Council-designed pavilion at Expo 2010 in Shanghai. In India, we trained 175,000 teachers of English last year. Both universities in Northern Ireland are involved in the UK-India education and research initiative, which builds partnerships between Northern Ireland and Indian higher education institutions, and Shona will say more about that in a moment.

Like the Northern Ireland Executive, we have had to work hard to live within our means. We are in the second year of a pay freeze for our staff across the organisation. We have cut 500 jobs in the past year, including making more than 330 people redundant. No one takes pleasure in making those kinds of changes in any kind of organisation, as you well know. However, we think those cuts have enabled us to cope with the sharp decline in the value of sterling over the past number of years, to live within our means and to allow us keep investing in our strongest assets: English, our cultural diversity and our educational institutions.

The British Council is a big organisation, as I have described to you. Northern Ireland has a strong voice in the organisation. Our Northern Ireland chairman is Brian Hanna, whom some of you will know as the former chief executive of Belfast City Council. He is a member of our board of trustees in London. I am the UK regional director. The UK headquarters is in Fountain Street in Belfast, where I am located. Shona and her colleagues comprise a top team in Northern Ireland, and they give Northern Ireland a very strong voice inside a large organisation.

I will let Shona talk some more about the work that we do in Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Shona McCarthy (British Council):**

I am going to bring it all back home to the millions with whom we engage here. We have an office, as Colm said, in Fountain Street in Belfast. We have a team of 35, at any given time, working there to make sure that Northern Ireland engages with and avails itself of the huge opportunity that 100 offices around the world offers. My sole purpose and the premise of my job is to maximise the opportunity of the British Council to make sure that Northern Ireland is internationally engaged.

Already, our estimates tell us that we contribute around £4.6 million worth of cultural relations activity in Northern Ireland. We are a significant body that delivers significant impact, both socially and economically, here. The more money that we leverage locally — and we work in partnership with local Departments, and I will tell you more about that — the more we can draw down within the organisation for Northern Ireland. At the minute we multiply every £1 of grant to £3, which is above the UK average. I am delighted about and proud of that achievement.

Increasingly, we act as a convenor and facilitator. If we are going to ask anything of the Committee today, it is that we should be more co-ordinated in our approach to international engagement and working. More and more, we work with partners, such as Invest Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, to make sure that we do not go out individually but have bigger impact by acting collectively and in a more co-ordinated way. Increasingly, the British Council's Northern Ireland office is acting as a convenor and co-ordinator of that collective effort.

We have three core business areas, as Colm said. In Northern Ireland, we have huge

programmes in education, the arts and society. Our education work is now reaching, without any exaggeration, 25% of the schools in Northern Ireland. Over 52,000 young people internationally are linked through British Council programmes. That is one in six of the school-going population in Northern Ireland. The team and I, in the Northern Ireland office, have big ambitions to increase that. We see it as future-proofing — as an opportunity to ensure that young people here grow up knowing about the rest of the world in our increasingly globalised society.

Our programmes range from ones with which you may be familiar, such as Comenius and eTwinning, which are major European programmes, to those driven by the British Council, such as Connecting Classrooms, which connects clusters of schools from here with clusters of schools in other parts of the world. One tangible example is that Cross and Passion College in Ballycastle is connected with Coleraine High School and their two feeder primary schools to link with nine schools in Sri Lanka. That is a three-year programme, where pupils meet not only virtually over the Internet but have face-to-face engagement to enrich the curriculums in both countries and to learn from and share with each other.

In higher education, we work in partnership with the Department for Employment and Learning, and we are the convenor of what is possibly the first coming together of the two universities and the further education sector to ensure that, internationally, we promote the entire offering of further and higher education in Northern Ireland. We convene a grouping that represents both universities and the six further education colleges. The programme is called Choose Northern Ireland, and it has been piloted over the past two years. It has had a serious impact on student mobility and, in a very large world, it promotes the collective offering of what Northern Ireland can bring to globalised higher education.

We also deliver specific student mobility programmes such as the business education initiative, which is now known as Study USA. Under that initiative, we place more than 100 students from Northern Ireland to study for a year in the US. We do that in partnership with the Department for Employment and Learning. Other student mobility programmes include the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE) and the programme of language assistants, through which we bring in 130 language assistants every year to support the teaching of foreign languages in schools. Likewise, we send out 130 of our students reciprocally to give them an international opportunity to support the teaching of English across the world.

In the arts, we work quite often with the Arts Council and, increasingly, directly with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. We do that to try to avail ourselves of the major global opportunities to ensure that Northern Ireland has a stake in those and to ensure that some of our best cultural assets are showcased around the world. For example, without the British Council's co-ordinating role this year, we would not have been present at the Shanghai world expo. China presents a major growth link opportunity for Northern Ireland. Our two universities and many of our businesses want to work there, and the British Council office really had to drive that to ensure that there was a Northern Ireland presence at that major global showcase. I am delighted to say that Duke Special blew the Shanghai world expo away, and, including the televised coverage, his concert reached audiences of over 41 million people, who now know of some of our cultural offering. Duke Special has his own story about his time in Shanghai. He made all kinds of links and used the opportunity to work in schools and some of the higher education colleges there.

We have a strong North/South strategy. We have a smaller office in Dublin, but we make sure that working in a North/South capacity is at the heart of our programmes that are driven from the Northern Ireland Office. A tangible example of that is the fantastic production of 'Black Watch', which any or all of you may have seen while it was on at the Belfast Festival at Queen's. The performance ran in Dublin and in Belfast and attracted thousands of people, and we did wrap-around educational and panel activities with it.

We are very active in supporting Derry/Londonderry's city of culture ambitions for 2013. We are the lead partner in supporting the international aspirations for that year. We have started that process already by giving a kind of deliberate discrimination towards the city by hosting events there such as our annual lecture series, at which Shami Chakrabarti, the director of Liberty and human rights expert, delivered a lecture last year. This year, Ben Hammersley, who is the editor of 'Wired' magazine, will lead a lecture on the digital world and new media and the opportunities that that offers for working in the city.

We also do significant work at a society and community level through large-scale global programmes called Active Citizens and Global Xchange. Those link directly community leaders and youth leaders from Northern Ireland with their counterparts in different parts of the world, including South Africa, Sierra Leone, Syria and Algeria. Last year, we ran a big programme in the north-west and, this year, one in west Belfast. I could go on all day on all of the detail of our

programmes, but I will not do that to you.

In conclusion, we have set serious geographic priorities for Northern Ireland to focus our work. We have ambitious goals for growing our numbers through increasing our audience, engagement and cultural relationships impact. We want to build our work in India and Sri Lanka and are already well positioned to do that. I have just returned from a trip there, which has opened all kinds of possibilities and relationship-building opportunities for here. We are also increasing our work in China. We are doing a lot of work in countries that are either in or emerging from conflict, including a major new human rights education curriculum project that we are piloting this year with Sri Lanka, Iraq, Albania, Israel and South Africa.

We pool our efforts across all our work to ensure that we maximise our impact. We want to work in partnerships, and, to some extent, we are already doing that in Northern Ireland. We are a value-for-money organisation that has an economic and social impact on Northern Ireland.

I wish to point out to the Committee that, in these constrained times, international work is not a luxury or an extra; rather, it is something that we must engage with more and ensure that our young people are engaged with, so that they can operate fully as active citizens in contemporary twenty-first century society. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you very much, Colm and Shona. First, what are the practical outworkings of participation for a school in Northern Ireland and one in Sri Lanka or wherever? How does that work? What type of cultural activities do they share or exchange?

**Mr McGivern:**

It depends on the nature of the programme. Some programmes facilitate the movement of people. They will, for example, assist a teacher and one or two youngsters to move from Northern Ireland to Sri Lanka and vice versa. Other programmes are based on the Internet and the exchange of ideas across the Internet through e-twinning and school-twinning. As you can imagine, one is more expensive than the other. We can do more of the latter than the former. We have found that face-to-face connections between young people are absolutely astonishing in assisting with their cultural development. The learning that it gives to them about their own locality as well as the other culture that they are experiencing is astonishing. Typically, a fairly tightly facilitated

programme is provided for youngsters who come to Northern Ireland: the school hosts them, and they often live with the families of the young people whom they meet in Northern Ireland. It is, therefore, an immersion experience for them. Schools also usually run some activities in the local community for them.

**The Chairperson:**

Are those activities purely driven by the school or the British Council?

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

The schools generally set the agenda and decide on the actual content and focus for most of the programmes.

**The Chairperson:**

Does that need to be approved by the British Council?

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

It is usually done in discussion with us. We run contact seminars where we bring together the teachers from one school with the teachers of another school and often representatives from the education ministries in the different countries as well. Through a negotiated discussion, the schools then come up with the core areas on which they want to work. The schools in Ballycastle and Sri Lanka, which I gave as an example, wanted to work on curriculum development issues, so they set the agenda themselves. We are the facilitating body that brings schools together and gives them the means and resources.

**The Chairperson:**

Is it mainly curriculum issues that are worked on by the schools?

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

As Colm said, it depends on the programme. Another big programme we run is called International Inspiration, the sole focus of which is sport and development through sport.

**Mr McGivern:**

International Inspiration is about promoting aspects of young leadership for people through sport, which is a common denominator across cultures. The global schools partnerships programme

tends to focus on development issues, connecting schools in the northern hemisphere with ones in the southern hemisphere and looking at issues related to sustainability and sustainable living. There are, therefore, a number of different themed programmes, all of which are agreed through mutual negotiation.

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

The human rights programme speaks for itself. It focuses on human rights-based approaches.

**The Chairperson:**

How many people are on the board?

**Mr McGivern:**

In London or Northern Ireland?

**The Chairperson:**

Northern Ireland.

**Mr McGivern:**

About 10 people.

**The Chairperson:**

It might be useful if we could find out who is on the board.

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

Three permanent secretaries are on our Northern Ireland advisory council. They are from the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure —

**The Chairperson:**

Are you suggesting that that is positive or negative?

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

I am suggesting that that is a positive thing. The other one is from the Department of Education.

**Mr Humphrey:**

Thank you both very much for your presentation. You mentioned the play 'Black Watch', which I had the opportunity of going along to see. I understand that the Belfast Model School for Girls in north Belfast was the only venue in Northern Ireland that could house that play.

I will cobble together a number of questions, if that is OK. You said that 33% of your funding comes from your own income. What type of work do you do to generate that income? Will you expand on your work with community and youth leaders? I would like more information on that. Will you also expand on your partnerships with the likes of the Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland? You also mentioned the work that you do with Departments here. Will you expand on your work with the Executive and whether you do any collaborative work with councils across Northern Ireland?

**Mr McGivern:**

We generate income primarily through teaching English face to face and the provision of accreditation services for UK examinations bodies. Every year, we teach 300,000 people face to face in our teaching centres and in certain markets across the world. There is a fee for that teaching. The provision of examination services, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Cambridge exams, is very much in demand from people worldwide who aspire to study in, or come to, the UK to have a higher standard of English. English is the global language, and those are the sources that drive our income. We have ambitious plans to grow business in that area, because the demand for English is increasing across the world. Our figures tell us that about 1 billion people are learning English today. Our face-to-face teaching numbers are relatively quite small, so there is a possibility for expansion.

One programme that we facilitate for community and youth organisations in Northern Ireland is the Active Citizens programme, which works with community activists across Northern Ireland and brings them together with international counterparts on programmes of mutual support to stimulate community-based activity. We can provide you with more information on that.

**Mr Humphrey:**

What is your definition of a community activist?

**Mr McGivern:**

They are people who are engaged in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector and work at community level across Northern Ireland. An organisation that we worked with in the pilot initiative is Seeds in Derry, which Martina Anderson will know. That organisation organises a community café and drop-in centre for young people in Derry city centre. We work with NGOs that are involved in civil society.

**Mr Humphrey:**

You also mentioned youth leaders. Do you work with particular youth organisations?

**Mr McGivern:**

We fund the Youth Council for Northern Ireland's Causeway programme, which is operated North/South on the island of Ireland and east-west in the UK. It is a programme of mutual understanding, which, over the course of many years, has assisted the movement of a lot of young people between the islands. That is one Northern Ireland-specific programme, but there are several others. We have a large-scale global partnership with an organisation called Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), through which we operate a programme called Global Xchange. That programme provides young people from across the world with an immersion opportunity in Northern Ireland and a southern hemisphere country. At the moment, we have Global Xchange partnerships with —

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

There was an exchange between Newry and the Philippines last year. There is another one coming up this year involving Armagh, Dungannon and a host country that I cannot remember. We have hundreds of programmes, so I am sorry that I cannot remember. You asked for more detail on those, William, and, by all means, we can come back to you with a breakdown of each.

**Mr McGivern:**

I will hand back over to Shona to talk about the partnerships between the Northern Ireland institutions and Departments.

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

There are various examples. For example, as I mentioned, we are working with the Department for Employment and Learning to convene meetings between all who are involved in the further

and higher education sector. That comes under the banner of Choose Northern Ireland.

We are also a key partner at the moment in the Northern Ireland Connections project, which is designed to try to achieve a more co-ordinated approach to connecting with the Northern Irish diaspora. We are doing that with the Tourist Board, Invest Northern Ireland, the universities and all of the partners that have an externally facing remit in their brief. Those are a couple of examples. I am also at the table of the working group for the international development strategy, and we will have a meeting here next week. There are a number of examples in which we are key partners in a more collective and collaborative approach to international engagement.

The last thing that you asked about was departmental partnerships. We have two active ones with the Department for Employment and Learning. We work with that Department to deliver the Study USA programme and Choose Northern Ireland. We work with the Department of Education on a wide range of our schools-linking initiatives, including the language assistance programme and those European partnership programmes like eTwinning, which is part of Comenius.

**Mr Humphrey:**

Do you work with local councils?

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

There are examples of that. We have worked with Belfast City Council on programmes such as OPENCities and Creative Cities. We collaborated with Derry City Council on the annual lectures series. Derry City Council is part of the grouping that supported the Derry City of Culture 2013 bid.

**Mr McGivern:**

The larger councils are the ones that tend to have international ambition. There is quite a lot happening in international activity across government and other institutions in Northern Ireland. If there was something that we could do even better, it would be to co-ordinate that a little bit better and to make sure that we were marshalling our resources in the places in which we wanted to have the greatest impact. There is learning for all of us in that.

If we want to make an impact in big markets, such as India and China, and Invest is focussing

on those areas, several other institutions, including ours, have to focus their efforts there as well. If there is one thing that we should do together, it would be, as I said, to marshal resources and encourage co-operation in specific instances and opportunities that arise.

**Mr Spratt:**

Thank you for the presentation. You said that you are focussing on the big markets, particularly China and India. In India, you are supporting research and innovation collaborations between institutions there and the two universities here. Will you explain that to me in more detail and tell me exactly what you have delivered along with the two universities.

**Mr McGivern:**

Both universities have significant international ambitions, as you will know, and India is a key market for both of them. Our programme, the UK-India education and research initiative, supported both institutions in developing institution-to-institution partnerships with the organisations that they were targeting in India.

We also funded specific programmes of connection between the two regions. For instance, the University of Ulster is involved with an Indian institution on a particular technical collaboration in its computer science division, which is based in Derry. So, there have been some deeply important collaborative opportunities between the two, and I can supply you with more information on the exact nature of the collaborations.

**Mr Spratt:**

As a representative for south Belfast, I would like to know what you have done for Queen's University in particular, given that there is quite a bit of work ongoing. Research and innovation are high on the agenda of universities, particularly when it comes to collaborating with different regions and in the search for funding.

With regard to the arts and the creative economy, you said that you want to increase the potential for investment and tourism in the region. We know about the benefits of the creative arts, and we heard in the Budget debate today about Northern Ireland Screen and the benefits that it brings to the local economy. You mentioned Duke Special at Expo 2010 in Shanghai. What other areas are you involved in to encourage the arts and the creative economy to further expand in Northern Ireland? What benefits do you think you can bring to that in the future? Is it an area

of potential expansion?

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

I can address both points: Queen's University and the creative economy. I have just come back from 10 days in India and five in Sri Lanka. Even in that one visit, from networking in the brilliant offices that we have in both Delhi and Calcutta, 12 top museum curators from those cities will come to Northern Ireland in January 2011. They will come to see our award-winning Ulster Museum. Had I not made that intervention, that trip would have gone to the UK, but it would not have included Belfast. Now, they will come to Belfast for three days, and they will be met by Trevor Newsom and the team at Queen's University as well as the Ulster Museum team. Also, during that trip, I managed to find space for three Northern Ireland writers on a major collaborative programme for UK writers in India. We have also three forum-theatre practitioners now participating in a three-year-long gathering of experts in forum theatre in both Sri Lanka and India.

My job is to exploit the potential of the brilliant people we have in those other offices to make sure that Northern Ireland is written into every single opportunity that arises and that we are tying in, as Colm says, with those market places with which business and universities here want to connect. We are also collaborating with Queen's University — the arts departments, the gallery, the festival curator and the international unit — to use a big programme that we have, called UK-India Connections through Culture, to offer resources and support for Queen's to build its relationships in the cultural sector in India.

**Dr Farry:**

I apologise for missing a part of the presentation. You have chosen a busy day, but I welcome you both.

I apologise if this question has been asked already, in which case say so, and we will skip on. Can you reflect on the way in which the various Northern Ireland Departments engage internationally? Do you find it to be piecemeal? Is there scope for doing things more collaboratively between the Departments to ensure that we get the maximum benefit? We have a lot to offer the rest of the world, and, equally, we have a lot to learn from it.

**Mrs S McCarthy:**

We have a huge opportunity. As Colm said, great things are being done individually in different Departments. The missing link at the moment is co-ordination. I see it when I go out to other countries, and I will give a tangible example. When I went into the British Council's Calcutta office, there was someone there from Queen's University for a meeting. I did not know that he was there, and he did not know that I was there. That is just one example. That is why I came back and we made this particular effort. That is just a localised example. It happens right across the board. We could look a bit more closely at our colleagues in Scotland and Wales, because they seem to carry out their overseas missions in a very co-ordinated way across the sectors. We miss a trick. If we were to ask anything of this Committee, it would be: is there some way that we can address that level of organisation?

**The Chairperson:**

Have you any suggestions about how to improve it? Governments have been looking at this for years, and they have not come up with any easy answer to it. No matter what side of government you look at, there is always a level of dysfunction as regards co-operation. People blame one Department or another, but it is just a lack of simple discussion or co-ordination. So if you have any suggestions about how to resolve it, we will be pleased to hear them. I am not putting you on the spot now.

**Mr McGivern:**

Oftentimes, we find co-operation easier if everyone focuses on a common purpose. A number of large-scale opportunities are coming up worldwide in which Northern Ireland can play a role. One is a big showcasing festival in China in 2012. We are putting resources into that, as is HSBC. There is scope for us to have significant impact for Northern Ireland with relatively little resource, because all those other organisations are in play. I would encourage us to convene something to look at that initiative as a starting point.

We have asked the Committee for something, but we also make an offer of support. If there is a way in which our organisation can facilitate some greater co-operation between the various instruments and actors on the world stage for Northern Ireland, we would be happy to do that, or, at least, to start that discussion and conversation. That is vital for this place.

The economies that pop out of the global recession in the best position will be those that are

open and internationally engaged, are smart and have invested in their young people and their educational qualifications, and have a sustainable aspect. By keeping open our international links, and investing in international aspects of education, we can strengthen Northern Ireland on the world stage. Our organisation is committed to doing that.

**Mr Humphrey:**

The difficulty with international co-ordination for the devolved Administrations across the United Kingdom is that foreign and international affairs are the domain of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We in Northern Ireland have a special relationship with the United States and links through the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels. There is a need, though, for the devolved Administrations and the national Government to have a co-ordinated approach to those matters, especially in a time of economic difficulty. Given the report that we had back from the British-Irish Council (BIC) meeting this morning, surely those issues could be discussed at that forum.

**The Chairperson:**

That is true, William, although I suppose that will not resolve the issues here from the Northern Ireland Executive and Departments. Shona and Colm are talking more about simply co-ordinating Northern Ireland issues.

**Mr Humphrey:**

I appreciate that, but instead of UK delegations going out and people going in disparate ways, if that could be co-ordinated, it could tangibly be an outflowing and outworking of the discussions that they have at BIC. However, I take the point about our own Administration.

**Dr Farry:**

William's suggestion of exploring through BIC whether all the devolved regions could do something in conjunction with the UK Government would be useful. Perhaps we could also write to OFMDFM about whether someone in Government could simply be assigned to act as a co-ordinator to receive communications from Departments. If the Education Department or the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure were doing something, they would notify an individual in OFMDFM. One person would know and could pass the information to other Departments so that they could all learn from each other.

**The Chairperson:**

That may be useful as a starting point. Are members happy to write to OFMDFM about that and to the BIC?

*Members indicated assent.*

**Mr McGivern:**

If there is any way in which we could assist with the BIC and bring our experience to the table there, we would be happy to do so.

**Ms M Anderson:**

You have three permanent secretaries on your board. Do you not find at least some degree of collaboration between those three Departments, given that the three permanent secretaries are firmly located? In any other board that I know of that has people working in silos but who relate to one another, they bring a contribution to the table. Do you not find that happening for even three Departments? Do those three permanent secretaries not work in a collaborative way?

**Mr McGivern:**

It is immensely beneficial to have them there, because they bring collaboration to the table. You are exactly right. However, there is so much happening that it is often impossible to corral it all. The challenge for us is to find ways and processes to ensure that everybody is pointing in the same direction and that individual organisations are not necessarily developing their own strategies and going off in different directions.

**The Chairperson:**

Will you remember to send us details of who is on the board?

**Mr McGivern:**

Absolutely.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you very much.