Northern Ireland Assembly

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

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report: Community Relations Council Briefing

6 June 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:
Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Alex Maskey
Mr Francie Molloy
Mr George Robinson
Ms Caitríona Ruane

Witnesses:
Dr Paul Nolan Community Relations Council

The Chairperson: I welcome Dr Paul Nolan.

Dr Paul Nolan (Community Relations Council): Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chairperson: Dr Nolan, you are very welcome. Will you kindly make some opening remarks and then stay for questions?

Dr Nolan: Yes, I am very happy to do that. I take it that members have received a copy of the report. You may not have had much chance to read it, but at least you will have got a sense of what kind of report it is.

I will first say something about the origin of the project. It came about as an initiative from three organisations; the Community Relations Council in Northern Ireland, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. Those last two are separate organisations, incidentally. The charitable trust funds voluntary activity and has invested a lot in Northern Ireland over the years. The foundation is a social research body that, again, has invested a lot in Northern Ireland. What puzzled them was whether the Northern Ireland peace process was moving forward or moving backward. There seemed to be conflicting messages coming out of Northern Ireland. So, the project was created in order to monitor that year on year. The report that you have here is the first of what is intended to be an annual series of reports.

The idea is to create an indicator framework that would let us see, by looking at the situation from a number of different perspectives, whether we were actually achieving some form of normality or peace, and to test some critical questions; principally, whether or not the peace is durable. In other words, is it a permanent peace or is it possibly just a generational truce? There is also a question about the quality of the peace, because it is sometimes said that we have got peace that is based on a sort of benign apartheid model of being shared out rather than sharing. How true is that? What is the evidence for that? Finally, if, at some point in the future, violence were to break out again — and the cycle of Irish history suggests that that is not impossible — what, looking back from five or 10 years from now, might we have been able to spot? What were the hairline cracks?

Those were the kinds of questions that we were asked to investigate. I came in to take on the project in 2010. I had previously worked at Queen's University, Belfast and had retired. Then, because I had previous involvement with Rowntree and have a lot of respect for its work, I was intrigued by the project, so I took it on, and this is the first report. That is the background to it.

The Chairperson: You have 10 key points at the top of the document.

Dr Nolan: I have, Chair, yes. I can go through them, but it is always a bit tricky. There is an old story about Moses coming down from the mountain with the 10 commandments and getting doorstepped by a journalist from 'The Sun', who said that he was going to report the story and asked Moses to tell him what it was. Moses said, "Well, I have these instructions from God: the Ten Commandments." The journalist said, "Well, look, Moses, you don't understand the way the news cycle works, just give me the top three." It is a bit like that. I will try to summarise them. I will not go through them all one by one; I will bunch them into positive developments and things that might give us concern.

The Chairperson: I think that it is important that we reference all 10, whatever way you want to group them.

Dr Nolan: OK. How much time do we have?

The Chairperson: We are quite relaxed. It is a very important issue that you are bringing to us.

Dr Nolan: All right. The 10 points are set out at the front of the document. I will try to speak to them. If you feel that I should speed it up, please signal that, and I will try to oblige.

The first one is an obvious point. Sometimes, the very obvious does not get said, but it is the obvious that is important. In this case, the first thing to be said about the situation in Northern Ireland at present is that the political institutions are secure. Although we often have worries and concerns about what is happening with the peace process in Northern Ireland, it is worth remembering that, judged against other peace processes, this is the signal successful peace process in the world today. It is a bit like the thing that Churchill said about parliamentary democracy being the worst possible form of government apart from all the others. Our peace process may be deeply flawed, but in the sorts of observatories and peace institutes, of which there are several, around the world that look at this, if Northern Ireland gets mentioned at all now, it is to say that Northern Ireland is the example of what had been seen to be an intractable conflict that has moved to a point at which it can be deemed successful.

It is worth observing that, when people look back, they very often reference the 1998 referendum as the high point of the peace process here. At that time, however, 29% of the electorate voted against the accord. We are now in a situation in which all five political parties operate within the same consensus. In the previous Assembly, 108 of the Members were in support of that. In this Assembly, it is 107. That is still a pretty rock-solid consensus for the political arrangements.

The second point relates to the first and is this: the level of violence is down. I document that in a number of ways, and you will see the various figures that are given. Take the year 2011, which I try to keep to throughout the report. I have provided Members with sheets, which are supplementary to the report; I have worked on them since. They give a fairly simple graphic representation of what has happened with violence in Northern Ireland from the time of the first ceasefires in 1994 up to the end of 2011. You will see on the top line the number of deaths, and that is down to just one last year, which was the tragic killing of Ronan Kerr. It is not to downplay the tragedy of that to note that it was the only death last year, which, in statistical terms, takes us back to the period before the records began in 1969. If you look at bombings and shootings in that same period, you will see that our peak periods are in the past. That is not to say that they will not recur; it is just to put it in some scale. In

2010, comments were made to the effect that the dissident campaign was coming up towards a level of the previous campaign by the Provisional IRA. I do not see any evidence of that in the statistics. It is worth emphasising that that is not to say anything about the latent possibility of violence returning to that scale.

I have broken the statistics into three periods: from the ceasefire to the Good Friday Agreement; the decommissioning wrangles and the guns-versus-government period; and the restoration of devolution. If we were to make any kind of generalisation, it would be that, in periods of stable government, we tend to see violence diminish.

The level of violence is down. Something that is generally not understood, certainly not outside Northern Ireland and possibly not inside Northern Ireland, is that there is less violence here than in England, Wales, the Republic of Ireland and most western European countries. If you look at the statistics for general crime levels in charts 30a and 30b, you will see that crime levels here are significantly lower than those in England and Wales, by a ratio of 2:3.

It is also worth noting that in conflict societies elsewhere that have experienced ethnic violence, it is very common that ethnic violence is accompanied by very high rates of sexual violence. That has not been the case in Northern Ireland. The figures for domestic violence and sexual violence here tend to trail behind those for other parts of the UK.

If you look at the figures for race hate, again, you will see that the levels have dropped. You will see those figures and chart 37 on page 51. Incidentally, since I published this report at the end of February, the PSNI has produced new statistics that show the same trend, with the level of violence here continuing to drop below the levels elsewhere. That is also true of race crime.

Sometimes, the statistics provide salutary caution against the more hysterical statements that characterise Northern Ireland as the race hate capital of the world. When I looked at the figures, I found that for hate crimes, compared to other police districts in the UK, we are pretty much within the pack; we are not good, but we are not the worst. We are not at the extreme end. That tends to be the case with a lot of the data that I examined. There is a tendency in Northern Ireland to want us to be the most extreme, the biggest, the best, the greatest and, usually, the worst, but most often we are not, and our rates are similar to those in the north east of England or Scotland. We are never as bad as Wales in any area. We have a problem with race hate, but it was less pronounced in 2011 than in previous years, as was sectarian crime. So, overall, there is a fairly positive picture because the level of violence is down.

My third point is an obvious one. I was trying to measure the extent of the paramilitary threat. Again, the figures show that the number of assaults carried out by dissidents or loyalist paramilitaries was down in 2011 on what it had been the previous year. Statistics do not tell the whole story. There were fewer shootings by dissident republicans, but some of the shootings were much more damaging to the victims because Óglaigh na hÉireann uses shotguns, which shatter the limbs. There are some dreadful stories that you will be familiar with. So, although the number of shootings is down, the severity of the shootings has not diminished. The number of loyalist beatings is down. So, paramilitarism remains a threat, but it is not as extreme as it was the previous year.

My fourth point is that the policing deal is not secure. If we look at what has been happening with policing and responses to policing, what we see is a graph with a steady upwards gradient when it comes to support for the police. That continued even after I published the report. Support for the police is at about 84%. In other European countries it may be assumed that everyone supports the police, but, for a society emerging from conflict, 84% is pretty hopeful compared to where we were at the time of the Patten report. However, there are some problems that we need to look at, and I will try to summarise them. One is that the target set by Patten for the proportion of Catholics in the police force was 30%. In March 2011, the PSNI achieved 30·3%. Again, the gradient for that was a very steady; there was a year-on-year increase of one percentage point. It was 30·3% if you were counting police officers, but if you were counting the PSNI as a whole — by that I mean taking into account other staff — it was less than that. Overall, it came out at around 27% or 28%, which is somewhat lower than the 30% target. We only just made the target.

The other reasons for concern are to do with the higher numbers of people leaving. The number of Catholics leaving the police force early is significantly higher than the number of Protestants. I felt that it was important to look not just at those coming in through the front door, as it were, but those who were exiting through the back or side doors. I produced the figures on this, and, having spoken to PSNI subsequently, I think that it is worth noting its view, which is that this is just churn; it just happens

in any one year. The figures for people leaving Marks and Spencer, for example, might show a differential as well. These things happen. That might be right; I am not going to argue that the figures I have got here are definite proof of anything, but I think they are indicators that we would want to keep an eye on. If we see these indicators as being like dials on your dashboard, I think this is one that you would want to return to next year just to see whether it is a deepening trend.

The other issues that I drew attention to included the reintroduction of former RUC members. Matt Baggott has already spoken on that. This is to be regretted, but it has not helped in establishing the PSNI as being a distinctly different force from the RUC. I put two things together. One was to do with characteristics of the Catholic intake. For that, I drew on a study that was published last year, which is the first full-length study of Catholics in the PSNI. It was written by a woman called Mary Gethins, who interviewed a lot of Catholic PSNI officers, and tends to characterise them as being not wholly typical of the Catholic population in that they were more centrist in their politics, more accommodationist, more likely to send their kids to integrated schools and so on. In interviews with her, those officers spoke about what they called the "canteen culture" as being the old RUC culture. That surfaces in public view from time to time, as in the case of the sports club at Newforge, which calls itself the RUC Athletic Association as opposed to PSNI. There was an attempt to change that, but members resisted. That sends out a message.

Members will be familiar with coverage of the role of MI5 and covert policing. That tends to be covered by the nationalist press; 'The Irish News', the 'Andersonstown News' and so on. That is creating problems within nationalist areas for Sinn Féin, it would seem. There has been a problem, and, again, I do not need to tell you about it because the Police Ombudsman's office has been the subject of some controversy. In the past year, there have been three separate reports, but Catholic confidence in policing seemed to be attached to confidence in the criminal justice system overall, and part of that was to do with the ombudsman's office. There has been a decline; the first decline in support for the ombudsman's office came, not unexpectedly, in the most recent opinion polls. Again that puts a dint in the 84% figure.

Finally, there is the fact that we have had dissident attacks on Catholic police. We do not know the figures, I certainly do not know the figures for the number of PSNI officers who have moved out of Catholic areas because of that. I think it is reasonable to assume that there will have been some movement, and that goes against the whole spirit of the police force being resident in both communities. Putting all of that together does not form a crisis, but the heading I would give it is that the policing deal is not secure. It is something that we monitor from year to year.

The fifth point is to do with the equality agenda and the fact that what we were experiencing up to 2007, and it is very clear when you look at the data and the tables, was the equalisation of the two communities on the labour market. When we hit 2008, it was as if someone hit the stop button on the escalator and on that upwards movement that had been Catholics coming into the workforce — not only into the workforce, but moving up the ranks in the Civil Service and equally in the private sector. That equalisation stopped. Those differentials seem to have been frozen at the point that we reached in 2008, and it is unlikely that that will change. We do not quite know what the effects of the recession will be in other ways. Currently, the typical victim of the recession is a male construction worker. Those are the people who have been hardest hit to date, but we are talking about blind forces over which we have no control, so we do not know quite how the recession will play out in the future. We do know that it has had an impact on the equality agenda.

Point 6 is on youth unemployment. In the headline, I make a qualification by saying that it is "potentially destabilising". A number of the reports that have been produced over the years are consistent in their message that, wherever you have conflict or violence, you will find youth unemployment. The opposite is not necessarily the case; youth unemployment does not necessarily result in violence or conflict. However, there was a bit of a warning last August from the riots in London and other English cities. At that point, the youth unemployment rate in England had reached 20%. If you take that to be the point where the dial enters the red, you want to be a bit careful to see where we are going. I do not want to overdramatise this. In fact, the most recent figures show that youth unemployment in Northern Ireland has dropped to 17%. We cannot be complacent, but we should not be alarmist either. Youth unemployment is lower than youth unemployment in England, Scotland or Wales. It is not a crisis, but, again, it is something that we want to watch.

It is reassuring, perhaps, that there is no differential on the Protestant/Catholic fault line. It is exactly the same for young Protestants and young Catholics, so a gap is not opening up. Again, it is something that we need to be mindful of.

Point 7 is that a new, confident, and neutral urban culture has emerged. That is the finding for which I have least evidence, because it is quite hard to get data to support it. Most people in this room lived through the Troubles, and we all know that, if you walk through Belfast — or any of Northern Ireland's other cities or towns — it is not how it was in 1977 or 1984. I am describing something that gets remarked upon by journalists who come to visit. They often come over for a special event or extravaganza, such as the MTV Awards or the Titanic centre opening, but they end up writing about the buzz around the city. I do not know quite how we capture that. I tried to look at in a number of ways. You can look at the number of restaurants or bars that have opened, but that could still be the case in a divided society. One measure that I took was to look at the number of festivals each year in Belfast. There are 53 each year, which is one for every week in the year. I looked at them under a typology to see whether they were single-identity festivals, for particular niche groups or for the city as a whole. Most of them were for the city as a whole, and I took that to be a sign of us moving towards a more shared culture.

Point 8 is that Northern Ireland remains a very divided society. There is plenty of evidence for that in the report. In areas such as education and housing, we know that there are divisions. We are more certain about the statistics on education; 6·5% of pupils attend integrated schools while the other 93·5% attend schools that are either Protestant or Catholic.

Housing is more difficult to assess. I could not get hard data on that, and it will not be available until the census is unpacked. The modules on housing do not get unpacked until 2013, so I cannot say anything definitive about it. We know that 90% of social housing is segregated, and that is the term used by the Housing Executive. That accounts for only 16% of the housing in Northern Ireland overall, and we do not really know about the other bits. People talk about Protestant areas and Catholic areas, so we can assume from that and from previous census reports that it is still very divided. However, I am afraid that I cannot give you anything more definitive on that until we get the census results.

The final two points are linked. One is — this was written in 2011 — that there is no strategy for reconciliation. I do some work in the report on how all of this has been funded. Most of the funding for reconciliation activity has come from external sources, so it is necessarily driven by external agendas. I am not saying that those agendas are right or wrong; we probably find it easy to accept most of them, but it is still a significant point that we have not taken ownership of that in Northern Ireland. The final point does not really need to be expanded on. It is well understood that the big problem for Northern Ireland is still that of dealing with the past. Our headlines are still full of shootings, bombings and atrocities — not ones that happened yesterday, this week or this year, but ones that happened in the past. We are still dealing with the legacy of that.

Those are the 10 key points. Thank you for your patience as I went through them.

The Chairperson: It was most interesting. Thank you very much.

Ms Ruane: Thank you, Paul. Go raibh maith agat. Welcome to our Committee. I have a couple of comments, and I would welcome a response if you feel that there needs to be one. I sit on the Policing Board, and we see the statistics every week. I think that the PSNI would agree that sexual violence is on the increase and that there is under-reporting of it. I would argue that it is the same with race crime and sectarian crime. I worked with a person who was going through the courts with a very serious case of sectarian harassment. Only for the fact that we were there every step of the way and pushed for aggravated assault, which is how it gets defined as a sectarian crime, that would not have happened.

I absolutely agree with you on retiring and re-hiring. If you are doing a future report, it might be worth looking at how the PSNI circumvents some of the monitoring of the Catholic/Protestant ratio by using outside agencies to employ staff. When we ask for a breakdown of Catholic/Protestant numbers, we are told that the PSNI is using an agency and it is up to the agency to do that. There are issues in that regard, and we are raising them.

Is having a neutral urban culture good? I am sure that other people around the table have views on that as well. I am not sure that I agree with your finding. I would like to see celebration of diversity. We do have more of a celebration of diversity. I see young people who would not have worn certain tops into the town now wearing them. That is a sign of confidence rather than stepping back. I do not know whether we are reaching a shared culture, but we are moving towards — "respect" is probably too strong a word — an acceptance that other people have a different culture and that they are entitled to it. Equally, others are entitled to theirs. We could have that debate.

I welcome the fact that you are looking at England, Scotland and Wales. You made reference in your report to the South of Ireland and how it is part of the Good Friday Agreement. We should also look at some North/South comparisons. That would have been useful.

You will know that I have a big interest in education. You talk about how this society remains very divided in education. There is division in respect of religion, but I would argue that the biggest divisions are social, economic and class. That determines outcome more than anything else. That then links into youth. Youth unemployment, which, funnily enough, the Chair and I were talking about earlier, is about NEETs, meaning those people who are not in employment, education or training. That is a very serious issue for our society.

Those were just some of the comments that I wanted to make. Thank you for your presentation, and I look forward to your responses.

Dr Nolan: There is quite a lot there, Caitríona, and I will try to run through it quickly. I will take your last point about social class first. I agree with you: that is a factor everywhere in the sociology of education. There is usually a pretty straightforward read-off between educational attainment and social class. On page 106 of the peace monitoring report, there are two tables in which issues of class, gender and religion are put into one matrix that shows the interplay that exists between them. There are two tables: the top table is "Not FSME", which means people who are not on the free school meal entitlement, and the lower table is for those on the free school meal entitlement, which is usually taken as a proxy for social or economic disadvantage. I am drawing your attention to that, because it is a telling set of figures that shows how extreme the gaps can be when taking account of all those factors. The top table, "Not FSME", shows that 74·2% of Catholic girls in rural grammar schools get two or more A levels. The other end of that gap in the lower table is about free school meal entitlement, and it shows that 11·6% of Protestant boys in urban areas achieve two or more A levels. So, that is a huge gap in attainment. That is the result of the accelerator effect, whereby you get a compound effect if you put gender, class and religion together like that. However, a lot of different factors are at work, and there is interplay between them. Class is certainly a hugely important factor.

I will run through your other points very briefly. You are right to say that there is under-reporting in Northern Ireland. However, when you do the comparisons, you should bear in mind that there is also under-reporting in England, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. So, there is a degree of under-reporting everywhere. Is there more under-reporting here than elsewhere? There is no convincing evidence to suggest that that is the case. You can look at the official crime statistics for recorded crime, but the crime surveys are much more revealing, because they are survey based and support the view that, although there is domestic and sexual violence in Northern Ireland, it has been at lower levels than elsewhere. That is odd, but it is the case. There has been a change in the past year, and we got a sudden spike in rape crimes in 2011, which we need to monitor. Wherever I can, I make comparisons with the Republic of Ireland. It is not always possible because of the way that the data are collected, and it can be like comparing apples and pears. However, I made that comparison where I was able to.

You made a point about neutral space and the celebration of diversity. I do not like those things to be put in any kind of dichotomy where one element, such as equality, is against another, such as diversity. As you said, we need a culture that will accept people wearing different football tops in the city centre and one where that can be respected and not attacked. We get that when we create spaces where diversity is accepted. I use the term "neutral space" to signify that, not to suggest that everyone should remove their football top when coming into the city centre. Although that is good, the city centre should be neutral in the sense that everyone feels that they have equal entitlement to it. So, there should be respect for different cultures.

You asked about the PSNI using agency staff. That is problematic and regrettable. I want to get as much objective data as I can so that we can make those comparisons valid. However, as I understand it, the PSNI does not intend to continue with that, but you will know more from the Policing Board.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you, Paul, for your presentation. There are a number of issues that I want to ask about. I represent North Belfast, and one of the issues that you raised is particularly pertinent for urban constituencies in Belfast. I will go through your report and the points as you presented them.

Paramilitarism remains a threat. I do not think that anybody would doubt that; in fact, paramilitary activity continues under the surface, and anyone who denies that is not living in the real world. When you were digging down into the facts for this report, how much of the downfall in the issue is because crime is not being reported to the police? Punishment shootings or punishment beatings, where someone is beaten to the edge of their life, will obviously be reported, because the emergency services are involved, but if some people get hammerings, as happens all the time, that is not reported to the police.

Dr Nolan: That is the case, just as it is with all crime. Not all crime gets reported, and there are all sorts of reasons for that. Sometimes it is because people do not trust the police, or sometimes it is because they do not actually think it will do any good and they do not think that any prosecution will follow.

Mr Humphrey: They may be frightened to go to the police.

Dr Nolan: They may be frightened or feel intimidated. In some cases, it is because they do not even think that it was a crime. There are all sorts of reasons for that. If we look at not just the statistics for recorded crime but the British crime survey and the Northern Ireland crime survey, we will see that they do not operate on the basis of what has been reported. They survey people to ask them whether they have ever been the victim of a crime or whether they know anyone who has ever been the victim of a crime. Those are anonymised surveys, and social scientists accept them as accurate. When it comes to making comparisons, the Northern Ireland crime survey uses exactly the same methodology as the British crime survey, and if they are in any way wrong, they are wrong in the same way, so you can make comparisons from one to the other. I accept what you say. There are people who get a warning from paramilitaries. That is intimidation, but they do not report it. They may get a beating, and they still do not report it. They may even be shot in the leg and still do not report it. The report shows that the rate of prosecutions is under 4% for beatings and shootings. If you talk to the PSNI about that, it will say that there is a real problem, which is that the victims will not come forward and give evidence, and, for all the reasons that we understand, nor will the people who know anything about it. So, there is a very real problem in this society with paramilitarism and with the acceptance of paramilitarism. Paramilitarism survives because there is a tolerance for it.

Mr Humphrey: I agree with your last assertion, because I do not believe that a lot of the crimes are not reported because people cannot or will not approach the police; it is because they are frightened of intimidation, or, indeed, further attacks on their families. That is clearly the case.

You mentioned that 30% of the police force is now Catholic and that Patten's target has been reached. I am a unionist, and I have dealt with lots of young people coming through my office who simply could not get into the police because of their religion. Many have described it as reverse discrimination, and there is a confidence issue in the Protestant community with that that is not often highlighted or accepted.

Dr Nolan: I included the figures for that, and —

Mr Humphrey: I am not challenging your figures; I am just saying that, clearly, young Protestants have not been able to get access to join the police because of the Patten proposals. Although it is understood why that had to be done, if we are to create a normal society in Northern Ireland, it has to be based on merit. Everything else is based on merit, and there has to be consistency in that.

You mentioned that Catholic officers leave at a greater rate than Protestant officers. How much of that is because dissidents have targeted people such as Stephen Carroll and Ronan Kerr? Fortunately, Peadar Heffron was not murdered, but he was very brutally injured.

Dr Nolan: The answer is that I do not know. I do not think that anyone can know. There is a combination of factors here, but I would be sure that it is a factor. However, I could not get any data on the number of PSNI officers who have left their homes in Catholic areas, and I doubt that the PSNI is ever going to publish that. I think it is reasonable to assume that there is a percentage and that it is one of the reasons why Catholics may be leaving the police force in greater numbers than Protestants, although, again, I add the rider that this set of figures is for one year. We really need to wait until we do this again next year and the following year to see whether, if we turn this snapshot into a moving film, this is a real trend or a temporary blip. The PSNI's view is that this is just a temporary blip.

Mr Humphrey: As for youth unemployment being potentially destabilising, the biggest fear for paramilitary organisations is a normal society, in my view. The abnormality of paramilitaries having control or seeming to be in control of or running an area is exactly what they want in order to keep the people down and keep people in fear. Providing good education — preschool, primary school and post-primary school — as well as quality training that will lead to meaningful long-term employment is, therefore, hugely important.

We had the junior Ministers here a few weeks ago, and I put to them this point that I now put to you: I believe the way to tackle this is to have zones where there is joined-up governance to address these issues between the Departments here, local councils and education and library boards. There is a particular problem with young Protestant males, but there is now only 2% of difference between them and young Catholic males in working class areas; they are not getting access to meaningful employment. This has to be addressed by Government across the city, and I am speaking about Belfast, because it is Belfast that I know best. What is your view on that?

Dr Nolan: I do not really want to venture opinions on what should be done, because I am not in the business of creating a political manifesto or a set of prescriptions out of this. I really am just monitoring the situation so that you — our legislators — can have evidence before you when you try to tackle these problems.

To take your earlier point about NEETs; between one quarter and one third of NEETs in Northern Ireland have no educational qualifications whatsoever. I think there is a real difficulty about getting anybody into employment if they do not have qualifications and that needs to be looked at.

Mr Humphrey: Finally, in relation to our community and society being perhaps more divided than before; we have more peace walls in the city of Belfast, and there is more requirement for interface workers. A lot of good work is done across interfaces by communities, police and individuals. I watched the news at lunchtime, and a journalist said that the Olympic torch is able to travel around Northern Ireland untroubled, apart from a few idiots, who represent no one, getting involved in trying to disrupt it. If we are progressing towards a more normal society, and that is to be welcomed and is something I agree with, why, in your opinion, do we have an increasingly more divided city with more peace walls having to be built in Belfast?

Dr Nolan: There is no getting around the fact that there are more peace walls, but there are differing interpretations of what that means. There is a view that says, well, at the time of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, there were 22 peace walls, and there are now 99, therefore the Good Friday Agreement got it all wrong. I do not think that is a logical progression. There is a sort of reductionism in that. I find that when outside commentators, and some commentators from inside Northern Ireland, want to express a politically pessimistic viewpoint, they use that as their sole indicator. I am trying to say, "Look, there are a lot of other indicators we can use". Peace walls are important and are a significant indicator of division because they are the most visible. People tend to pay attention to them because you can photograph them, count them and see how many there were last year and will be next year. However, bear in mind that they are concentrated mainly in one part of Northern Ireland — north Belfast, where there is a pretty obdurate problem over territory that I do not see being resolved for many years. I do not have that expectation. North Belfast is the hardest knot, as it were, to unravel.

I do not want to try to interpret all of Northern Ireland through just that one lens of the peace walls. Yes, they are there. Yes, they are terrible. Yes, they tend to attract world attention.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you.

The Chairperson: On the 4% detection rate in incidents of so-called paramilitary beatings, it should be noted, Dr Nolan, that this Committee facilitated a series of round-table discussions with the Community Relations Council (CRC), during which, at least one opinion that was tabled was that we would like to see surveillance cameras installed as a way of deterring such attacks and, if they take place, to assist police enquiries. I think that there is an appetite there; the point being that a surveillance camera can be destroyed but not intimidated.

Mr Lyttle: Thanks Chair and thank you for your presentation, Paul, on what I think is an extremely important piece of work. In a region where quite a lot of things are contested, it is extremely useful to have a robust piece of work that benchmarks peace and progress. I welcome the information that levels of violence are down. We all know that, but my personal ambition for Northern Ireland is higher

than just avoiding the hell on earth that was the Troubles or reaching some sort of mutual acceptance of people who happen to have different ideas from mine.

I know that, as a professional, you want to avoid being prescriptive. However, I will try to get a judgement or assessment out of you about your findings. You say that 90% of public housing is segregated; 90% of pupils are in segregated education; 500 children are turned away from integrated schools each year; there is approximately an 80% preference for mixed neighbourhoods; and there are some concerns around paramilitary control being tolerated, as evidenced in orchestrated violence and paramilitary attacks by appointment. Is that the "benign apartheid" that you suggested at the start that your report sought to examine?

Dr Nolan: Yes. I did not come up with the phrase "benign apartheid", and I do not like it. I do not think that apartheid can ever be benign. I think that apartheid is an evil. I have tried to ask what the evidence is. It is frequently asserted that we have "benign apartheid" or a "shared out society". I am trying to show the direction of travel, year-on-year. Are we getting more integration in our housing, public spaces and schooling? In a way, this is the baseline.

I do not whether people are surprised by those figures. I think that many of them are pretty widely known — 6·5% in integrated schools or 90% in segregated housing. I get the impression that people have a slightly exaggerated idea, at times, of the degree of division. For example, they may think that the figure of 90% living in single-identity communities represents the whole of housing in Northern Ireland, as opposed to just the 16% that is social housing. So, yes there is division, and there is no getting round that.

Again, it is a matter of interpretation. It often seems to be thought that people who live in segregated social housing have somehow made a sectarian choice; I do not think that that is the case. I think that those in social housing find themselves in that situation. They do not have much social mobility or freedom of choice, so I do not take those figures to be necessarily an expression of a sectarian attitude held by the inhabitants. They simply find themselves living in those spaces. In the report, I have tried to state the number of people who are in those spaces.

Incidentally, it strikes me as curious that the term "segregated" is used about public housing in Northern Ireland. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) does not allow "segregated" to be used about education; it is not the opposite of integrated schooling. People make a choice, and that is not segregation; it is a choice. The Housing Executive has allowed the term "segregation" to be applied to its social housing, while the only body that could be segregating is the Housing Executive itself. It does not; it gives people the choice.

Mr Lyttle: I struggle with the issue that 500 children every year not getting to exercise their choice. We were scheduled to hear from Gráinne Kelly on her report, and I will try to weave that into the debate. That report concludes that ours is a deeply divided society at institutional levels and that, if that is to change, it will require profound change. Do you agree with that, based on your research?

Dr Nolan: I think that this society is deeply divided. This society is often described as a post-conflict society. The conflict is not over. The divisions remain and the conflict remains. It is important to me not to characterise it as being this type of society or that type of society, because that seems to suggest that these are essentialist qualities that will never go away. This is a society that is on a journey, and I am trying to measure it. It is not a journey that is happening at the same speed in every sector, and there are contrary and contradictory trends. The evidence of the report tends to be more positive than negative. That is not how it was reported in the press, incidentally. The changes that are being attempted here are massive. As we know, this conflict goes back for centuries, and to try to escape from that conflict will take a very long time. I do not expect that we will see dramatic changes in some of some of the deeper patterns of housing and education in the next immediate period, but we are looking for incremental steps. We hope that, when we report next year, there will be evidence of that.

Mr Lyttle: I will keep my ambitions higher.

Dr Nolan: They may be big increments.

The Chairperson: Another travel analogy slipped in there.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you very much, Paul, for coming and presenting your report. It is a very useful report for us, and it lays down a number of challenges on where we need to go, especially on issues of reconciliation and dealing with the past. There are things that we can do and which are possible there.

I see one omission from the report. It is localised to Derry, but, potentially, it is an important issue. It is that of Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD). In recent days, we have seen the potential for destabilising a political process in certain communities. I do not know whether you have any evidence or have done any work on this. I am concerned, as are a number of other people, about the potential for this to spill out of control. Only last week, we saw that RAAD has turned to attacking police officers. We need to be very mindful of that and be prepared to tackle it. I would like to hear your thoughts on that.

Dr Nolan: I have been working on it since the report was published. When I was collecting the evidence, it was for 2011, and, of course, the RAAD phenomenon has developed suddenly. It started in 2009, so it is not entirely new, but the attack on the police seems to take that group away from the role that it claims to occupy as a one-issue organisation concerned about drugs. It has presented itself as pro-peace process and anti-drugs. I read it as evidence of something that is not specific to your city but as evidence of a tolerance across this whole society for paramilitary solutions to local problems. You can see that in phone-ins such as 'The Nolan Show' when people are asked what they feel about paramilitary action against drug dealers, and, across society, there is a tolerance, which RAAD is exploiting. It is one local manifestation of a more general problem. Representatives from other parts of Northern Ireland, such as north Belfast, will say that there is tolerance of paramilitaries elsewhere for them to play certain limited roles. We know that when they move outside that role, if they try to represent themselves for electoral office, for example, the community will not support it, but there is a tolerance of rough justice if it is dealing with a local problem to do with antisocial behaviour.

Mr Eastwood: Yes; there is a certain tolerance, and that is partly society's fault because maybe we are not dealing with the issues that we say we are. However, I think that can be solved by proving that shooting people in the legs does not stop people from taking drugs or dealing in drugs. There is a more fundamental issue developing in certain communities around the politicization of these groups and the fact that they are using their activities to exploit some difficulties within communities and within the broader republican community. That is a scary prospect. I do not know whether you have any —

Dr Nolan: If you are asking whether I have any answers to it, I am afraid I do not. I can only observe that there has been a change. Take, for example, the report that is done every year by the Government reviewer Robert Whalley on the use of emergency legislation in Northern Ireland. He writes a report about this legislation and its implementation, and his job is as a watchdog. He has used the term "residual terrorism" every year, and of course what that phrase conveys is that this is a leftover from the earlier period. I do not think that we can see it that way any longer. The kind of paramilitary activity that we see now is not simply left over from another period; it is of this period, and everything suggests that that will continue.

A survey was done by the 'Belfast Telegraph' at the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis of the tolerance for dissident republicans through not reporting to the police, and Professor Jonathan Tonge from Liverpool University surveyed some of the housing estates in mid-Ulster. What you see is a tacit acceptance of dissident activities by people who would not call themselves dissident supporters, and that is mirrored on the other side by a tacit support for loyalist paramilitary activities. Across society, paramilitarism has not left us.

The Chairperson: It is an interesting point, and I do not think that everyone around the table would accept your premise. However, it is another debate.

Mr Molloy: Thank you very much for the presentation. I was curious about the policing issue. Perhaps you have the information regarding whether the big number of Catholic police officers who left the police in that year was because of the ending of the Patten package. If they did not accept that package at that time, they would have lost it. I do not know whether that is part of the issue.

The whole issue of breaking the link between generations that continue on in a violent conflict situation is maybe one of the key things that your document points towards having to resolve, but I think the big issue is youth unemployment and how we create a new type of training that brings people into

employment. I have found in my local area that an awful lot of young people have never had the experience of being on a shop floor. They had not had that experience or seen it until they were given the opportunity of doing so. To go back to what many of us went through, the old training-centre system gave people experience. Maybe we have to rebuild that sort of structure.

Another point that a local business person come up with was that, in the east Tyrone area, only one person, out of something like five grammar schools, went on to graduate in mechanical engineering at a higher level, and yet the indications are that that type of business is where the jobs are. Is there a need for redirecting the higher level of education for people to follow streams of education that will give them jobs and, at the lower level of education, to bring people into training that, again, will result in their being able to get real jobs?

Dr Nolan: Before I took on this project, I worked in education. I worked for the Worker's Educational Association and then I worked at Queen's University in charge of lifelong learning. The intent was always to try to align the educational or training programmes with job opportunities. The world of education and the employers' bodies have never mastered the art of predicting skills needs in the economy; it is very difficult to be sure that certain courses are likely to lead to employment. I do not want to be too prescriptive about that; I am simply recording what is happening.

As I said, it is not as alarming as it sometimes seems. If you relied simply on newspaper headlines, you would get the impression that there is a huge crisis with youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. There is a problem, but it is not as great as it is in other parts of the UK. It is not on the scale that it is in Spain, where it is 50%, or in Greece or in situations right across Europe. Youth unemployment is a major global crisis; it is not specific to Northern Ireland.

The danger, of course, is that if general problems occur here, they will take a different character. If 20% youth unemployment meant riots in the street, that, in England, might mean that they break into shops and steal trainers, but, here, a riot will inevitably take on a sectarian character. However, Belfast was one of the cities that did not riot last August as part of that kind of inflammation that spread across England. I do not see anything that suggests that we are in that territory.

Mr A Maskey: Thank you, Paul, for your very comprehensive handling of this so far. It is a lengthy report; there is a lot in it. To be honest with you, I am not quite sure what I am supposed to do with it. You said earlier that it is evidence for policymakers and so on. To that extent, a lot of it is very important. I very much appreciate that you have tried to be positive in virtually every one of your responses. That is quite difficult sometimes in this place because, obviously, the whole thrust is to be negative and to criticise everything. Nothing is ever right, especially if you look at the media, which still has not quite reached the post-conflict situation; everything is just a nightmare scenario.

I am a wee bit curious about some of the premises. As Caitríona mentioned earlier, you referred to:

"a new, confident, neutral, urban culture".

That is grand in the way in which you explained it. However, for a lot of other people who interpret that, it is supposed to mean that we are all zombies when we go into the city centre; we are not allowed to have any opinions. You have countered that, but the common narrative today — from what I would call some of the great and the good — is that we are all supposed to go everywhere now and have no opinions; we all love one another and there are no differences. We are not supposed to be different —

Dr Nolan: It is hard to love somebody who does not have an opinion.

Mr A Maskey: The Good Friday agreement was supposed to be about respecting differences.

Dr Nolan: I have lived in this city all my life. I have to pinch myself sometimes. There was a conference a couple of weeks ago called 'Belfast One City'. It took place over two days: on the first evening, it was up in An Cultúrlann on the Falls Road and, the next day, it was in the Titanic centre. You can take one of those to be the symbolic heart of republican west Belfast and the other to be the symbolic heart of Protestant east Belfast. People went from one to the other without seeming to notice. I take that to be a very positive sign.

As far as I can tell, the Titanic centre has been welcomed by all sections of the community; there does not seem to have been any nationalist chill factor. People might complain about the cost of coffee and

a scone when you go to it, but it has not been boycotted. Things are happening daily, and the tempo is such that you hardly notice any more. Take, for example, the Balmoral Review celebration a couple of weeks ago. That could not have happened 10 years ago. All sorts of things that happen do not get written up as being of particular note because we tend to take them almost for granted now. However, someone coming here who believes that this is a conflict society would be amazed at some of the changes that have taken place.

I do not interpret the shared space as being some kind of antiseptic zone; I take it to be the notion that we can all live together in one city without attacking somebody because of the jersey that they are wearing.

Mr A Maskey: That is why I am saying that I appreciate the fact that you are, at all times, trying to be positive. It is important that we do not be complacent for one second. You have dealt with why we cannot afford to be complacent. An awful lot of good work is going on, but I do not always see it reflected in reports, and certainly not in the headlines.

Dr Nolan: If you want a headline, you do not say that things are OK. You get headlines by focusing on the negative.

I will go back to your first observation that there is a lot of evidence and what do you do with it. You will notice that I am refusing to be drawn on policy prescriptions because that is not my job. However, in the preface to a report issued last year on literacy and numeracy in schools, Sir Robert Salisbury, who chaired that working group, said that he noticed that nobody in Northern Ireland paid any attention to evidence. People stuck to their own narratives no matter what the evidence showed. In this case, no particular axe is being ground with the report; it is simply evidence. It takes quite a lot of unpacking, and I hope that the people who make policy in the Assembly, the Departments or local councils will heed the evidence that it contains, and I hope that it might be in some way useful.

Mr A Maskey: Thanks for that, Paul. I will go back to the premise of some of the points you make. I am trying to work out what I would do with it, because there are clearly tables and actual evidence on a range of issues. However, I would suggest that other points are a little more subjective, such as those on the Good Friday Agreement or even Patten. You said earlier that, broadly, Patten's targets were met. They were not met, and we made that very clear at the time. It was never 30% — it was 30% plus the additional 10% at least and with no cap, and Patten never said that it should stop. He gave mechanisms on how to redress the imbalance in a 10-year time frame, which included the 30% but also 10% by way of an additional reserve. People tend to forget those minor details, but they are very important.

There is a bit on the agreement. An awful lot of people are still not fully aware of what the Good Friday Agreement is supposed to be about. You saw the way in which people referred to the likes of peace lines, for example, and that was because at least some people in those communities who had been crying out for one for years had a voice, which they did not have prior to that, if you know what I mean. I use that as only one little example. A bit of catch-up is needed, although an awful lot of work is going on. I have been involved in some of it, and a lot of work is going on in virtually each and every one of those areas. We need to do a lot more of course. However, sometimes, the people who live in those areas are not the problem, and other organisations and, I suppose, political failures have led to some of the difficulties. In a way, some of the problems are imposed on local communities.

If this is to be done next year, so be it. However, the subjectivity needs to be looked at. For example, the report says that no new political party has emerged since the agreement. What is that supposed to mean? Who said that that should happen? When you go through it further, it says that the DUP and Sinn Féin are at the heart of the power-sharing Government. Well, there are five parties in the Government at the minute, and, in an earlier incarnation, the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP were at the heart of the Executive. The parties are decided by the people. I am not sure that I am comfortable with some of it, such as where it talks about:

"one large Catholic party and one large Protestant party."

I do not see that. I do not represent a Catholic party, and I do not represent a tribe or a camp. If you are writing a report and want people to buy in to it, the subjectivity needs to be looked at again.

It is a very comprehensive report, and there is a lot of good stuff in it. I have not had time to read it, and I am qualifying my remarks by saying that. It is very interesting, and some of it jumps out as being

quite good. I very much appreciate the fact that you have tried to be very positive every time that you have given a response to people.

The Chairperson: Do you want to answer any of those points?

Dr Nolan: I take the points. The main body of the report is made up entirely of facts that I pulled together, and all of them are from open sources, incidentally. It is not neutral, in the sense that it comes from a value base. That value base is one that would try to privilege sharing over separation, peace over violence, and so on. Inevitably, some subjectivity may creep into it, but the intention is to keep this as much possible simply a dispassionate account of what is happening in society. So, I note those points.

The Chairperson: I have two quick questions to ask to finish. Have you been asked, or have you had the opportunity, to brief the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister?

Dr Nolan: No, I have not been asked. I am trying to remember whether I asked them. When the report came out, I sent a letter to everybody, including all the political parties, saying that I would be happy to come to party conferences or to do briefings for anyone, so I would be more than happy to do that for the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

The Chairperson: The peace and the political processes have been characterised by transport analogies — the plane has taken off, the boat is sailing or the train is leaving. Indeed, you said that we were on a journey. To an extent, what you have here is the departure point to which you will come back and use as a measure so that we can get some sense of the direction of travel. However, unless we are on a magical mystery tour, we would have identified the destination before we departed. I am not sure that, politically, the five parties have an agreed destination. Should that be an entirely shared future, or should we take cognisance of the fact that we respect single-identity groups under certain circumstances and would, perhaps, wish to do so for the foreseeable future?

Dr Nolan: That is a key point. When we set this up — I use "we", because there was an advisory group for this — one of the issues that we looked at was how we would measure a peace process that does not have a destination. How do you know whether you are halfway there or whether you have maybe arrived? There is a sharp distinction to be drawn here, in that unionists saw the Good Friday Agreement as a necessary compromise to allow them to arrive at a settlement that would be the final resolution of the constitutional issue, whereas, for republicans, it was a stage on a journey with the different destination of a united Ireland. So, how can you measure progress? We tried to resolve that through measuring political progress not by the extent to which it has moved towards either of those destinations but just by the degree to which political parties in Northern Ireland can resolve their differences around a table. That is what we count as political progress.

The Chairperson: Have I opened something?

Mr Humphrey: I entirely agree with what the Chair just said. If we are to create the society that we all want across the piece in Northern Ireland, I am confident of my political persuasion and viewpoint, as others will be of theirs, and I am confident of my cultural identity, as others will be of theirs. We are never going to agree on those things, but we have to learn to respect, appreciate and tolerate each other's cultural identities. I think that we have moved on somewhat on that. However, we have to increasingly see diversity as a strength, not a weakness. For too long, it was seen as a weakness, because people profited from it. My experience is that "residual paramilitarism", which is the term that you attributed to someone else, is absolutely alive and well. It is alive and well for one reason: lifestyle. There are people driving BMWs who could not spell "BMW". In truth, that is because they lead a lifestyle that is fed by a mafia society.

Mr Lyttle: I know that you did not want any interruptions, Chair, but may I ask one very quick —

The Chairperson: No; we are not opening up a whole new round.

Mr Lyttle: I have just one brief point to make. The Good Friday Agreement also had reconciliation at its heart, and Gráinne Kelly's report went into that in detail. The Good Friday Agreement states that "essential" to "reconciliation" is the facilitation of "integrated education and mixed housing". We can respect identity, but I do not hope that, in 2012, we are going down the road of rewriting some of the core objectives of the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr Clarke: I thought that we had parked that.

The Chairperson: Dr Nolan, thank you, and we will leave it there. Hopefully, we will see you again.

Mr Kinahan: Chair, I am keen to ask what Dr Nolan feels the influence of gatekeepers is. In many places that I been involved in and worked in, when trying to get people involved, I found that gatekeepers, whether they are political, paramilitary or otherwise, often close doors. That stops people getting involved in their own communities and societies. Can you comment on that?

Dr Nolan: Implicit in the phrase "gatekeeper" is the idea that the gate is sometimes open and sometimes closed. There is an issue if the control and management of public resources slips away from public representatives towards unelected authorities. That is a deep problem for any society. If, as is the case in Northern Ireland, those unelected authorities coincide with paramilitary allegiances, that is a very deep problem. It is odd that they are sometimes legitimated.

The Chairperson: Dr Nolan, thank you very much.

Dr Nolan: Thank you very much for listening to me for so long. I thought that I was going to be here for only 15 minutes.

The Chairperson: We appreciate it.