

FUTURE POLITICS: Delivering Effective Government

A platform for ambitious new political ideas, policies and solutions

Discussion Paper

Delivered by

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Conference Overview

Almost 25 years from the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, our political institutions have been subject to a series of shocks that have highlighted both the flexibility and inertia in our system of governance.

The product of compromise, providing for electorally inclusive power sharing, framed to show regard for different communal identities, our devolved institutions are struggling to sustain the duration of an electoral cycle and deliver consistent governance.

Political differences within them, as well as wider events and pressures around them, have bearings on the performance and perception of any democratic institutions. This may be pointedly true in respect of our devolved experience but there remains wider questions around how public policy choices are deliberated and public priorities delivered.

Leadership is not easy and political leadership even less so. The day to day running of government, of legislating, and of representation does not usually afford the time or space for strategic consideration of the infrastructure that frames our politics and public policy processes.

These conversations are relegated to times of high-octane political crises and the resolutions to the sphere of challenging political party negotiations and compromises. Sometimes with unintended consequences; sometimes with unimplemented consequences.

Six years following the referendum on the UK exit from the EU, the wider structures of governance implemented through the Belfast/Good Friday have also seen change and challenge.

This has disrupted the dynamic of devolution and its interaction with North/South, East/West institutions, which have had relevance in a number of public policy areas such as health and environment; but there is the potential - and the need - to continue with and enhance cooperation and coordination on shared policy issues.

This conference seeks to provide the opportunity to reflect on how our political system operates, its relationship with policy development and the wider political framework in which it sits and consider workable solutions that could yield better outcomes for people and communities.

Importantly, this conference is not seeking to pre-empt, or speculate on, any particular proposals for changing rules or structures in our institutions. Observations of given problems may well be shared in the course of contributions, but the day is not about finding political fault or prescribing overnight fixes.

Instead, it is about opening up a more reflective political discourse. The event is aimed at politicians and other public policy makers, and it is about taking what we have and improving on it without prejudice to individual national and constitutional aspirations or respective attitudes to possible institutional changes.

Objective

The conference brings together politicians, policy makers and others to consider and put forward ideas to address our shared challenges through six panels:

- 25 years since devolution; what does good government look like and how do we achieve it?
- Cutting through the noise: creating a more reflective political discourse
- Delivering better outcomes for people; the architecture and culture of policy making
- Whose culture is it anyway? Moving away from a binary state
- Making the three strands work for prosperity: North-South, East-West in a post-Brexit world
- Our place in the world; resetting our transatlantic relationships

Strategic Intent, Inputs and Outputs

This discussion paper seeks to prompt thinking about discussions that will take place at the conference, and to focus on optimising the short amount of time we have available for each panel. However, this is a longer-term project, with conversations on the day providing a starting point for the working groups that will bring forward proposals over the next 12 months.

The content of the conference panels, as well as input from audience members, will be captured and reflected in the framing of each of the groups, and terms of reference will be determined by the members of each. Membership will be drawn from political, policy and stakeholder organisations, which will take forward ideas emerging from the event and consider solutions based on expert input.

It is anticipated that there will be a series of seminars in support of these areas across the year that will report back at the second conference in 2023.

Discussion Paper

Panel 1:

Almost 25 years since devolution: what does good government look like and how do we achieve it?

With the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement now nearly 25 years old, and significant change in the social, economic, and environmental landscape, our political infrastructure is struggling to respond to the new realities. What elements remain essential and useful? What needs to change? What of our relationships with the UK and Irish Governments, as well as the other devolved regions?

Panellists will be asked to reflect on the following questions:

1. Does the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement need reform, and if so, what aspects?
2. What mechanisms exist to deliver this, and how can this be achieved?
3. What can we learn from other jurisdictions?

Panel 2:

Cutting through the noise: creating a more reflective political discourse

Politics is the art of persuasion, however in the era of instant media and social media, it has become more and more challenging for politicians to engage in reflective political discourse. This is often antagonised by the framing of political discourse within the media, making it difficult for consensus or indeed a change in views.

This session will consider the role of media and social media in relation to politics, how we can encourage more civility and create space for more reflective and thoughtful conversations.

1. What role does social media play in creating a polarised society, and how do we cut through the noise?
2. Can and should we balance accountability and reporting with bigger picture politics?
3. Who leads - the people or politicians? And how does social media shape and inform this?
4. How can we move away from megaphone diplomacy and engagement by press release?

Panel 3:

Delivering better outcomes for people: the architecture and culture of policy making

In 2016, Northern Ireland committed to a new approach to public policy through placing wellbeing at the heart of its ambitions, and adopting the Outcomes Based Approach. Whilst there was support for this both politically and across wider civic society, the delivery of this has struggled without significant change to the architecture and culture of policy making both politically and within NICS, as well as its interaction with local government.

Panellists will reflect on the progress and potential of policy making and make proposals as to how Northern Ireland can deliver on the outcomes approach, adopt, and plan for long-term policy and better engage with the systems of governance it sits within.

Key questions for consideration:

1. How do we move towards longer-term thinking and planning, and sustain these policy commitments against the backdrop of electoral cycles?
2. How do we improve cross-departmental co-operation on key issues?
3. How do we improve the link between local government, the Executive and UK Government?

Panel 4:
Whose culture is it anyway? Moving away from a binary state

How do we deal with the challenges of politics and identity? Can we be British, Irish, neither or both? Can a shared identity be forged in a landscape whereby identity and constitutional ideologies still dominate our politics?

This panel will explore the future of identity in shaping and influencing our politics, and how our institutions can play a useful role in this while not being defined or limited by some of the more contested elements of debates.

1. At a time when many societies seek to embrace multi-culturalism, is there any point/need/desire to develop a shared identity for Northern Ireland?
2. What is the relationship between culture and sectarianism, and how do we address it?
3. What is the future of culture and what can we do to detoxify it for our younger people?

Panel 5:
Making the three strands work for prosperity: North-South, East-West in a post-Brexit world

Brexit has fundamentally altered the political and economic landscape across these islands. The need to reshape our economy doesn't always align with political ideologies, and debates around Northern Ireland's relationship within the UK, as well as with the Republic of Ireland, have challenged relationships across these islands.

Years of debating the issue have failed to yield an acceptable solution to all parties, and so it is perhaps time to change the entry point we come at this from, looking towards future relations rather than historic ones.

1. What is the step change required to move away from ideologically driven conversations to an agreed pathway to prosperity?
2. How do we optimise the potential for an all-island economy that works in tandem with the UK internal market?

3. How do we optimise NSEW bodies and cooperate on key policy issues?

Panel 6:

Our place in the world: resetting our Transatlantic relationships

The United States played a key role in the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement, and continues to take an interest in our politics. But what does that mean as US-European relationships evolve? The “Asian pivot”, the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union, Ukraine, and the changing contours of US politics have meaning for how Northern Ireland and the United States interact and cooperate.

The panel will reflect on those changes, their meaning, and how political, business, and community leaders on both sides of the Atlantic can engage productively. Moreover, the panel will discuss ways to deepen transatlantic relationships and include all communities on the island of Ireland and the United States.

1. How do we optimise our special relationship with the US, and how do we ensure we remain engaged?
2. What is NI’s place in the world post-Brexit? How are we perceived and how do we communicate the opportunities?

Panellists

Panel 1

- David Ford, Former Justice Minister, Alliance Leader and MLA
- Dawn Purvis, Former PUP leader and MLA
- Jarlath Kearney, Former Sinn Féin SpAd; Strategy Advisor and Equality Commissioner
- Lauren Kerr, UUP Policy Officer; Candidate in 2022 Assembly Election
- Mark Durkan, Former deputy First Minister; Foyle MP and SDLP Leader
- Richard Bullick, Former DUP SpAd

Panel 2

- Brendan Hughes, Political Reporter, Belfast Live
- Kezia Dugdale, Director John Smith Centre; Former Leader of the Scottish Labour Party and MSP
- Dr Olga Jurasz, Senior Law Lecturer, Open University
- Sara Canning, Board Member, John and Pat Hume Foundation

Panel 3

- Alison Allen, Chief Executive, NILGA
- Lord Bob Kerslake, Former Head of the Civil Service (England); Chair of UK2070 Commission
- Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary, Executive Office
- Professor Duncan Morrow, Director of Community Engagement, Ulster University
- Jennifer Wallace, Director, Carnegie UK Trust

Panel 4

- Andrew McCormick, Activist, Let's Talk Loyalism
- Colin Davidson, Artist; Chancellor of Ulster University; Patron of WAVE Trauma Centre
- Labhras Ó Murchú; Ardstiúrthóir, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann; Former Senator in Irish Senate
- Professor Pete Shirlow, Director, Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool
- Ryan Shaw, Youth Worker, Youth Action

Panel 5

- Andrew McCormick, Former Permanent Secretary and Director General of International Relations, Executive Office
- Danny McCoy, Chief Executive, IBEC
- Professor Katy Hayward, Political Sociologist, Queen's University Belfast
- Kirsty McManus, National Director, IOD
- Lee Reynolds, Former DUP SpAd

Panel 6

- Ian Hunter, US Director, OCO Global
- Jackie King, Executive Director of International Business, IBEC Global
- Paddy Hart, Chairman, International Fund for Ireland
- TBC
- Dr Bob Mauro, Executive Director of Irish Institute, Boston College

Draft Running Order

TIME	SEGMENT
8.45 - 9.15	Arrival
9.15	Welcome and running order
9.30	Mix the City video
9.35 - 9.45	Youth Action Northern Ireland speaker
9.45 - 10.45	25 years since devolution
10.45 - 11.00	COFFEE BREAK
11.00 - 11.45	Cutting through the noise
11.45 - 12.00	Nandi Jola, Spoken Word Poet
12.00 - 12.45	Making the three strands work
12.45 - 13.30	LUNCH
13.30 - 14.15	Delivering better outcomes
14.15 - 14.30	Ajendance
14.30 - 15.15	Whose culture is it anyway?
15.15 - 15.30	COFFEE BREAK
15.30 - 16.15	Resetting transatlantic relationships
16.15 - 16.30	Mix the City video
16.30 - 16.45	Close
16.45 - 18.00	Drinks reception

Suggested Reading List

Carnegie UK

Working Together for Wellbeing: The report of the Northern Ireland Embedding Wellbeing in Local Government Programme

<https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/working-together-for-wellbeing-full-report/>

Carnegie UK

Rethinking Northern Ireland: Reports from a seminar series on wellbeing in Northern Ireland

https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/pex_carnegie2021/2022/02/01102558/v0.2-NI-Workshop-report.pdf

Institute for Government

Devolution at 20

<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Devolution%20at%202020.pdf>

Institute for Government

North-South cooperation on the island of Ireland

<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/north-south-cooperation-island-ireland>

Pivotal

Good Government in Northern Ireland

<https://www.pivotalppf.org/cmsfiles/Publications/Good-Government-in-Northern-Ireland.pdf>

The Constitution Society

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and Brexit A briefing

<https://consoc.org.uk/publications/the-belfast-good-friday-agreement-and-brexit-by-andrew-mccormick/>

UK in a Changing Europe

Brexit Interview: Andrew McCormick

<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/interview-pdf/?personid=49219>

UK Government

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement>

UK Government

New Decade, New Approach

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf

Queen's University Belfast (Katy Hayward)

Brexit and the NI Protocol: changing constitutional relations?

https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/250001662/writ_2.pdf