

Contents:

Introduction	2
Community Relations & Victims	5
Consumer Issues	5
Culture, Sport & Tourism	6
Comhoibriú Thuaidh-Theas agus an Ghaeilge	7
Education	9
Enterprise, Trade & Employment	10
Environment	13
Farming & Marine	14
Finance & Public Services	15
Health & Social Services	17
Housing, Community & Rural Development	18
Human Rights & Equality	19
Justice and Policing	21
Public Safety & Emergency Planning	22
Social Inclusion & Social Security	22
Transport & Infrastructure	23

Introduction

The pace of North-South co-operation has intensified since the Good Friday Agreement. Evidence is to be seen in the investment by the Irish government in the City of Derry airport, the success of Tourism Ireland in boosting tourist numbers, the development of the Belfast-Dublin road, the increasing number of cross-border hospital service contracts, movement towards a single energy market for the whole island and plans to create an integrated North-South gas supply. These initiatives – and many others – highlight the ‘normalisation’ of practical co-operation with mutually beneficial outcomes.

Indeed, the success of North-South co-operation in recent years is such that there is no longer a question over its capacity to deliver economic and social benefits on both sides of the border, nor of the need for political direction to ensure its success.

But the current scale of North-South co-operation is only a fraction of its potential. Moreover, this part of the Agreement has been unfairly hindered by suspension. Executive business is conducted by Direct Rule Ministers. British-Irish Council business continues. The SDLP is determined to ensure that the potential of the North-South agenda is fully realised and that co-operation does not become a hostage to political stalemate.

That is why we are publishing the detailed proposals contained in this document. We want to see North-South co-operation raised to a new level of development – and we want it achieved under the auspices of restored political institutions.

Beyond the political and practical case for broad-based North-South co-operation, there is growing acknowledgement of its importance in building trust and good relations between our communities within the North and across the island. As Co-operation Ireland has stated - “The promotion of effective North-South co-operation is an integral part of building peace on the island of Ireland.”¹

¹ “Proposals for Effective North-South Co-operation”, Co-operation Ireland 2004, p.21

The Good Friday Agreement created not only a framework for political co-operation and partnership in Northern Ireland, it also widened and extended the basis for co-operation and partnership to the whole island of Ireland, and included a new framework for policy development with partners in a new British-Irish relationship as well, which we fully support.

Initial steps were taken to realise the potential offered within these new frameworks with the establishment of the North-South Ministerial Council, the creation of North-South Implementation Bodies as well as the establishment of the British-Irish Council.

Suspension of the Assembly and its Executive as well as the political impasse that has persisted since October 2002, have impeded progress of the North-South agenda in particular. But now with a fresh determination to restore the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement, the SDLP is focusing renewed attention on that agenda. In this policy document we outline the direction in which we are working to realise the huge benefits which the North-South agenda offers people throughout Ireland.

We can do more together to get more together in terms of both more strategic outcomes and procurement and delivery gains. Our economies, North and South, face common challenges, so it makes sense to find common solutions. That is what the North South agenda is all about.

To maximise the benefits North-South co-operation must mean a step-change towards much more integrated planning and delivery of projects. No where is this more needed than in infrastructural development where between 90 and 100 billion euros are to be spent on the island’s infrastructure. We believe that unprecedented opportunities exist for not only the joint planning of projects with a North-South dimension but for their joint delivery as well.

Obstacles of many kinds continue to impede North-South co-operation and partnerships, some minor, others of a substantial kind. These range from double charging and unnecessary delays in effecting financial transactions, to roaming charges and taxation anomalies arising from residence in one jurisdiction and work in the other. These need to be tackled with a real commitment to resolving the problems caused and removing barriers to mobility in people, goods and services throughout Ireland.

Our detailed proposals include plans for a new Transport and Infrastructure body, an all-Ireland Research Alliance, Marketing and Investment Co-operation, a Public Safety body and a joined-up anti-poverty strategy. In addition there are many other recommendations covering issues in health, education, the environment, agriculture, energy, etc. where enhanced forms of co-operation would yield enormous benefits.

When it comes to such proposals, the real question has to be ‘why not?’ more than ‘why?’ But North South can answer both questions and should no longer have to work so hard to justify itself or get a political start.

Because North South makes sense - and the arguments against it lack substance. It can deliver benefits to all of us: as consumers, as public service users, as workers, as entrepreneurs and investors, as service providers and as taxpayers. Not just along the eastern corridor between Dublin and Belfast, but for people living West of the Bann and West of the Shannon as well - where real investment is most needed.

We can - and should - have a shared economy, shared spatial planning, shared approaches to community and social services, shared cultural experiences, shared health and educational services, etc. – all shared in a spirit of mutual respect and a common commitment to upholding human and civil rights in the manner set out in the Good Friday Agreement.

The following sections set out key SDLP proposals for the main areas of North-South co-operation and partnership.

Community Relations and Victims

The conflict of the last decades involved individuals and communities North and South of the border. Work towards a sustainable peace and true reconciliation must equally embrace all on the island. The SDLP has detailed proposals to address community relations and victims’ issues but we also believe that the broader North-South agenda for co-operation on social and economic issues will help build trust and good relations on the island.

As noted in the introduction, there is widespread acknowledgement that North-South co-operation is critical in this task. Co-operation Ireland states: “The promotion of effective North-South co-operation is an integral part of building peace on the island of Ireland.”² In their North-South discussion paper, academics Coakley, O’Caoidealbháin & Wilson³ argue that reconciliation should be adopted as an over-arching aim of North-South development, which could embrace and go beyond economic and social objectives. In this sense, we believe all of the proposals listed throughout this document will have a positive impact on trust and community relations. Nevertheless there is a need for a specific programme of action to address the needs of victims and dedicated work on community relations.

Priorities:

- Development of an all-Ireland **victim-centred mechanism for truth and remembrance**.
- Development of common, **effective incitement to hatred laws**, North and South.
- Joint action to **promote community relations and reconciliation**, North and South.

Consumer Issues

From roaming charges to banking charges, consumers face a number of obstacles adding to the cost of cross-border living and working and damaging economic prospects as a consequence.

Priorities:

- **Work with governments, regulators and operators to secure standard and affordable national rates for mobile phone calls whether they cross the border or not.** Current all-Ireland tariffs are prohibitively expensive so accurate signal detection by masts would still leave border communities with high charges due to social connections and cross-border living and working.

²“Proposals for Effective North-South Co-operation”, Co-operation Ireland 2004, p.21

³“The Operation of North-South Bodies”, Coakley, O’Caoidealbháin & Wilson 2005

- Work with banks and regulators to **address cross-border banking charges – e.g. require banks to publicise the availability of IBAN numbers** which can, for example, allow fee-free payment of southern mobile phone contracts from northern-based bank accounts.
- **Create an integrated postal service** to remove the burdensome “European” stamp tariff and eliminate inefficiencies involved in the sorting and delivery of mail.

Culture, Sport & Tourism

The rich diversity of cultural, linguistic and sporting traditions and activities across Ireland offers considerable scope for co-operation, not only in promoting our indigenous traditions but also those of recent immigrants to Ireland. In doing so we can encourage a greater appreciation of those traditions, support their development and strengthen friendship between our communities.

There is, in addition, significant economic potential in the development of arts, cultural activities and sport island-wide. Such an approach could further support the work of Tourism Ireland in its efforts to market the island as a tourist destination.

- **Arts & Culture** – Co-operation between governments on funding is required so that both Arts Councils are operating on an equal basis. The Councils should co-operate in the funding of cross-border projects and all-Ireland projects. A separate funding programme should be introduced by both councils as a clear commitment to promoting and advocating cross border working. We would welcome greater joint working between the Councils with a view to developing large-scale indigenous arts events that can be toured and promoted internationally. Building on existing international success there is scope for the development of all-Ireland Centres of Artistic Excellence in different art-forms such as literature, drama etc. Through co-operation, both Councils should take a more active role in the research and development of creativity within the formal education sector.
- **Sports** – The new sports strategy being developed in the North must seize opportunities to expand North-South co-operation, for example in coaching and in the development of modern, shared facilities in border areas. There is considerable scope for the development of all-Ireland Centres for Sporting Excellence. Cross-border funding should be allocated to suitable projects such as sports leagues and youth competitions.
- **Television** – Many households in the North can now access RTE & TG4 channels through stronger signals or via satellite television. However there are still areas where access is still not available. Securing all-Ireland coverage of these channels is important.

Both Governments should optimise opportunities presented by emerging technologies such as digitalisation and explore opportunities for digitalisation on an island-wide basis. A joint strategy should be developed by RTE and the BBC to work more closely together in the development, production and transmission of indigenous product. A new joint commissioning scheme should be developed to encourage the creation of new work.

- **Tourism** – Tourism Ireland has successfully marketed the island of Ireland abroad, resulting in a 7% increase in visitor numbers despite an adverse global environment. We want to develop this all-Ireland approach by facilitating greater co-operation between Tourist Boards North and South developing practical approaches such as the integration of websites. By merging the *Discover Northern Ireland* and the *Ireland.ie* websites, all-island tourist information would be accessible online. An all-island accommodation booking system should be part of this project. An all-Island strategy for the growth area of cultural tourism should be developed so as to maximise the benefits to be derived from the island’s heritage both North and South
- **NI Events Company** – Greater cross-border co-operation is required to attract world-class events such as the World Rally Championships being pursued jointly at present. The success of the Special Olympics World Games 2003 is evidence of the benefits that can be realised. With London hosting the Olympics in 2012, there are opportunities to market Ireland as a whole to the Olympic movement in terms of offering coaching and training facilities and preparatory events.

Comhoibriú Thuaidh-Theas agus an Ghaeilge

Na Forais Trasteorann agus An Ghaeilge

Is den riachtanas go mbeadh polasaí ceart teangan ag na forais trasteorann a chomhlíonann na dualgaisí a leagtar ar fhorais phoiblí sa Deisceart de réir Act na dTeangacha.

Iontaobhas Uile-Éireann le Forbairt na Gaelscolaíochta

Tacaíonn muid le bunú Iontaobhais uile-Éireann chun Forbairt na Gaelscolaíochta ar fud an oileáin a mhaoiniú mar a dhéanann Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta ó thuaidh faoi láthair. Táimid i dtús an Tionscnaimh faoi láthair i gcomhar le hIontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta. Ar an ábhar go bhfuil an chuma ar an scéal go bhfuil deireadh le maoiniú rialtas Thuaisceart na hÉireann d’fhorbairt na gaelscolaíochta ó thuaidh, gléas a bheidh san Iontaobhas úr le foinse úr airgid a bheith ann d’fhorbairt soláthar úr.

Ba mhaith linn coimítmint a fheiceáil ó na forais trasteorann don Ghaeilge sna tuairiscí a chuireann siad amach agus sa litríocht a chuireann siad os comhair an phobail. Lena chois sin ceapann muid gur choir dóibh a bheith oile agus eolach ar an bhealach ina dtéann a gcuid oibre i bhfeidhm ar an teanga. Mar shampla d’fhéadfadh an foras idirthrádála litríocht a chur ar fáil dírithe ar chomhlachtaí beaga a bhfuil an Ghaeilge lárnach iontu agus dul i dteagmháil leo trí mheán na Gaeilge ar an suíomh idirlín nó sna meáin.

Foram Thuaidh-Theas don Ghaelscolaíocht

Ba chabhair mhór do lucht gaelscolaíochta thuaidh theas foram a chur ar bun

- le heolas, dea-chleachtadh, agus comhoibriú a roinnt thuaidh theas
- le áiseanna teagaisc agus foghlama a mheas agus a mhalartú
- le cuairteanna a eagrú taobh istigh den tír agus thar lear dóibh siúd a mhaoiníonn, a chothaíonn, agus atá freagrach as an ghaelscolaíocht ag leibhéal éagsúla d’fhonn a gcuid eolais a chruinniú agus a dtáithí a shaibhriú agus le teagmhálacha fadtéarmacha a chothú
- leis an eolas a chruinnítear ar an bhealach seo a scaipeadh tríd an earnáil.

Teagasc agus Foghlaim na Gaeilge

Tá géargá le áiseanna foghlama agus teagaisc sna bunscoileanna agus sna meánscoileanna ó thuaidh.

Léiríonn cás na dtéacsleabhar Gaeilge i dTuaisceart Éireann na fadhbanna a ghabhann le foghlaim agus teagasc na teanga. Creideann múinteoirí Gaeilge i dTuaisceart na hÉireann go bhfuil an teanga go mór ar chúl na dteangacha eile ó thaobh áiseanna foghlama de agus cé go bhfuil Áisaonad curtha ar bun i gColáiste Mhuire i mBéal Feirste le áiseanna foghlama agus teagaisc a chur ar fáil do na Gaelscoileanna níl freastal cuí a dhéanamh ar fhoghlaimoirí sna meánscoileanna Béarla áit a bhfuil líon mór acu. San am i láthair níl ach beagán leabhar ar fáil d’fhoghlaimoirí agus do mhúinteoirí Gaeilge le freastal ar an réimse leathan cumais atá sna daltaí.

Cé go bhfuil idir fhoghlaimoirí agus mhúinteoirí buíoch do na daoine agus do na foilsitheoirí a chuir na téacsleabhair seo ar fáil is mór idir iad agus na háiseanna foghlama atá ar fáil do na teangacha eile, má dhéantar comparáid is léir go bhfuil an Ghaeilge in áit na leathphingine. Go dtí le fíordéanaí ní raibh oiread agus pictiúr daite amháin i gceann ar bith de na téacsleabhair atá ar fáil sna scoileanna iarbhunoideachais sa Tuaisceart.

Creidimid go bhfuil géargha le infheistiú suntasach airgid in áiseanna teagaisc don Ghaeilge i scoileanna Béarla sa Tuaisceart, go háirithe i dtéacsleabhar, i mbogearraí ríomhaireachta, agus in áiseanna ar líne. Tuigtear nach bhfuil an margadh mór go leor do na chomhlachtaí móra infheistiú a dhéanamh sna leabhair is nua-aimseartha agus mar gheall air sin is ábhar cuí é seo le haghaidh Foras na Gaeilge a aird a dhíriú air. Molaimid comhoibriú i dteicneolaíocht an eolais, ag tógáil ar na féidireachtaí a chuireann leithéidí C2k, Learning Northern Ireland, Skool.ie, srl ar fáil.

Ba cheart dul i gcomhar le NICILT i Scoil an Oideachais, Ollscoil na Banríona, Béal Feirste chun tuiscint a fháil agus taighde a dhéanamh ar na moltaí, na modhanna agus na háiseanna is nua-aoisí i dteagasc agus foghlaim teangacha go gineáralta. Polasaithe teangacha a iniúchadh i gcomhthéacs na hEorpa, agus na noileán seo.

Education

Education is a critical area in which to promote co-operation especially in terms of encouraging greater understanding between the people of Ireland, their history and traditions.

Co-operation at all levels of education presents opportunities to promote reconciliation and greater understanding North and South, as well as creating conditions for greater cross-border mobility. In the field of educational employment itself, addressing barriers to the movement of teachers can help schools tackle supply problems and deliver better education to students.

Following decades of conflict, our society cannot afford – either socially or economically – to allow our young people to grow up in total ignorance of those living short distances away. Advancing exchange programmes has the potential help to tackle distrust between communities and promote better relations.

With high-level skills now central to the success of the modern economy, there is also a clear economic case for co-operation in Further and Higher Education and improved collaboration with business, island-wide. The North has lessons to learn from the success of the Irish government in identifying critical sectors of the economy and investing in education accordingly. Our education policy must be shaped and informed to a significant degree by ongoing analysis of the economic climate.

Priorities:

- **Expand School, Youth & Teacher Exchanges**
The SDLP proposes developing the role of the North/South Exchange Consortium to deliver a more integrated and coherent approach to exchanges, including the clarification of policy objectives, targets and common criteria for the assessment of exchanges. This should further include expansion into sectors which have not previously participated. There is a need for mechanisms to facilitate co-operation in the area of youth exchanges including linkages between the Youth Council for Northern Ireland and the Irish National Youth Council. We welcome the launch in January of the North South Education and Training Standards Committee, which will have responsibility for the professional endorsement of courses and programmes of education and training in youth work.
- **Remove barriers to the movement of teachers**
Difficulties remain regarding the Irish Language requirement (see below), superannuation entitlements and approval of qualifications. The development of General Teaching Councils in both jurisdictions and co-operation between them, could help rationalise approaches to teacher qualifications.

The SDLP proposes close co-operation between Marino College and one of the third-level institutions in the North to offer the Irish language qualification (Scrúdu Cailíochta na Gaeilge) examination as part of initial and in-service training.

- **Establish a North-South Further and Higher Education body**
Building on the work of Universities Ireland (which brings together the nine universities on the island), and the memorandum of understanding agreed by ANIC (Association of NI Colleges) and the Council of Directors of the Institutes of Technology in the South, the new body should encourage collaboration in policy, teaching, research, evaluation, recognition of qualifications and models of excellence.
- **Develop strong island-wide links between FE colleges across Ireland**
A specific emphasis is required on linking the skills training offered, to the current and projected needs of the business sector.
- **Invest jointly in Research and Development**
The SDLP calls on the two governments to establish a fund which would facilitate co-operative research projects between third level institutions on a N/S basis aimed at the promotion of economic and industrial development. See also Enterprise section.
- **Advance Co-operation on Special Needs Education**
Completion of the work on the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism is long overdue. There are further opportunities for co-operation within special needs education in general and the possibility of joint research on specific areas should be examined.
- **Establish an Irish-Medium Education Forum**
The forum should provide for the examination of specific issues relating to Irish-Medium Education with facilities for research into areas common to experience North and South.

Enterprise, Trade & Employment

As global competition for jobs intensifies, Ireland, North and South, must compete to be part of the world-wide knowledge economy, creating high-wage, high-skill, stable jobs.

Economic success for the whole of Ireland requires that both parts of the country come together to create an all-island economy built on their respective strengths so that genuine synergies can be realised. The aim must be to create those synergies that would result in the emergence of clusters of firms and industries working together to increase local sourcing and establish networks that enable the island as a whole to significantly raise its performance in the global marketplace and gain competitive advantage.

The degree of North-South economic co-operation promoted by the Good Friday Agreement has marked a new beginning. But this must now be further developed and a step change achieved that will pave the way to an island wide economy. Separate economic policy making must, therefore, be replaced by an integrated approach that aims at achieving what is best for both parts of Ireland.

Potential investors visiting the island have to contend with two fiscal regimes, and two regulatory regimes on an island smaller than many American states. North-South supply chains are still poorly developed and much cross-border trade is in traditional, low-technology products. Meanwhile, as a community, we face similar problems North and South such as under-investment in the rural west, and expense and lack of choice in our energy supplies.

Indigenous businesses in such areas tend to be small in size and lack capacity to invest adequately in research and development. Collaboration between businesses and research institutions island-wide can remedy this difficulty, stimulating growth and creating jobs.

Labour supply is a key issue for economic development. On a small island and in the context of EU membership, there is no excuse for barriers impeding the flow of workers up and down the country as our economies require. Greater co-operation between North and South can ensure that we have maximum labour mobility and tackle any emerging skills shortages.

Given that businesses North and South have agreed proposals for “Economic Co-operation and International Competitiveness”, it behoves the two administrations to work together urgently to advance this agenda.

Priorities:

Enterprise & Trade

- **Establish an all-Ireland economic policy unit** under the auspices of the North-South Ministerial Council.
- **Develop a North-South strategy to maximise overseas investment.**
We welcome the Taoiseach’s initiative in inviting northern businesses to join the recent trade mission to India – we need to build on this to attract overseas investors. Co-operation should be examined from the perspective of maximising the attraction of Ireland for investors e.g. by ensuring that in particular sectors the supply of a skilled workforce is maintained through co-operation with universities, colleges, institutes of technology and training agencies both North and South. We should also ensure that the range of relevant R&D support takes account of provision throughout Ireland.
- **Extend the brief of InterTrade Ireland** to include development of overseas investment opportunities. InterTrade Ireland has successfully demonstrated the benefits of strong North-South links. They have pioneered innovative programmes which have created trade and business development networks across the island.

Programmes such as Fusion, Expertise Ireland and partnerships such as All-Ireland Software Network, have greatly contributed to the promotion of an island economy and enhanced competitiveness North and South. InterTrade Ireland, together with the INI and the IDA, should develop a common strategy to attract investment from overseas, promoting the island as a whole and working with individual companies to tailor specific packages to help them take advantage of the separate and shared strengths of the different regimes North and South.

- **Establish a Cross-Border Economic Development Zone:** promote development in the border, midland and western region, south of the border and western counties to the north of the border collectively designated as a cross border development zone.
- **Implement the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council’s 20 Key Actions** for economic co-operation and international competitiveness.

Research

- Establish an **all-Ireland research fund** to develop capacity in target sectors and help maximise the commercial potential of research as quickly as possible. The Georgia Research Alliance model in the US should be adapted for this purpose, linking HE institutions with business to provide a ‘mix-and-match’ service.
- Commission **economic research bodies** North & South to work together to produce proposals for further all-Ireland co-operation and **development in social and economic policy**.

Energy

- Accelerate opening of an **all-Ireland energy market on a strong and viable basis**.
- Encourage Northern Ireland Authority for Energy Regulation & the Commission for Energy Regulation to work together to develop a new **all-Ireland energy planning network to anticipate future demand and sources of supply**.
- Advocate recognition of Ireland North and South as a **European Energy Zone**, to assist us in reducing costs, meeting targets and improving planning.

Training, Skills & Employment

- **Advance mutual recognition of training qualifications** and ensure that trainees can undergo training North or South with assurance that they will receive relevant support.

- **Address skills shortages:** Share information and experience between government departments and develop mechanism for identifying and addressing skills shortages on all-Ireland basis e.g. current shortages affecting the construction, information technology, mechanical engineering and hospitality industries.
- **Establish a cross-border employment forum,** bringing together stakeholders from the business and education sectors to help pre-empt labour shortages and match skills to the needs of the market.
- **Advance mutual recognition of professional qualifications.** While progress has been made in some areas, potentially mobile workers such as the health professions cite lack of recognition as a key difficulty, reducing our capacity to tackle labour shortages around the island.
- **Co-operate on migrant labour issues and workplace diversity.** We have much to learn from the Southern experience of the benefits of migrant labour. While there are important opportunities for employers and the economy, there are also implications for training as well as public services and housing provision. Around 20,000 migrant labourers in Northern Ireland, 30% of whom live in Belfast with the other 70% being spread fairly evenly throughout the rest of NI.

Environment

Our environment and clean, green image cannot be protected other than on a cross-border basis. Pollution and other threats recognise no borders - on an island the size of Ireland the imperative to co-operate is absolute.

In recent years there have been many fine examples of cross-border co-operation on waste issues including the joint approach by health boards North and South to the disposal of clinical waste as well as the treatment of waste water in border areas. The SDLP believes that both governments must build on existing co-operation and work together on waste management issues and we are disappointed to note that the Direct Rule Administration failed to further explore this in their recent waste management consultation Towards Resource Management.

One of the clearest examples of the need for joint working is in relation to illegal dumping, where the border is being exploited for financial gain. Key to ensuring the necessary levels of monitoring, protection and management is the establishment of an all-Ireland Environmental Protection Agency to advise and direct on policies in this area.

Priorities:

- **Waste Management** – Develop a waste management strategy on the basis of North-South co-operation, to move away from landfill and maximise opportunities to ‘reduce, reuse and recycle’.

- **Recycling** – Secure an all Ireland approach to market development for recyclable material and, as part of this project, a feasibility study on a paper mill for the island.
- **Illegal dumping** – Build on recent progress in terms of the new North-South Waste Enforcement Network by:
 - securing effective enforcement powers North & South;
 - addressing the differential in the cost of landfill;
 - improving PSNI/Garda co-operation; and
 - developing a waste disposal smart card system throughout Ireland.
- **Establish an independent all-Ireland Environmental Protection Agency** to improve public and private sector accountability on the environment.

Farming and Marine

Agriculture and fishing are key industries on the island and face similar challenges, North and South. The highest possible level of co-operation on farming, fisheries and food would be in the best economic interests of those living on both sides of the border.

The geography of the island makes it essential to achieve maximum co-operation on animal health for example. The border does not stop disease and the benefits of existing co-operation were clearly seen tackling Foot and Mouth some years ago.

Ireland as a whole benefits from a ‘clean, green’ image, which should be exploited more fully to commercial benefit of food producers.

Northern farmers and fishermen have suffered for decades under British policy, which simply does not reflect their interests. These industries, North and South, have much more in common with each other than with colleagues in Britain or indeed in Europe. They have much to gain from joining forces to tackle common problems, address long-term viability issues and negotiate effectively in Europe.

Priorities:

- Establish a new **all-Ireland Food Marketing Body** to improve branding of local produce and conduct a vigorous international marketing campaign capitalising on the green, clean image of Ireland.
- Develop an all-Ireland **food-labelling scheme** for the island.
- Complete an **all-Ireland Animal Health Strategy** – centred on the development of an effective contingency plan, with greater control of restricted herds and improved monitoring. This should include co-operation in the area of animal by-products.

- Develop and promote a **border regions agricultural liaison group** to deal specifically with animal health issues.
- Develop and promote an **all-Ireland agenda** for farming and fishing.
- Develop **an all-Ireland position on reform of the Common Fisheries Policy** to secure the future of Irish fishing.
- Agree an all-Ireland approach to **EU fish quotas**.
- Formalise co-operation on registration of **horses**.
- Ensure that **research on farming and marine** issues is conducted on an all-island basis.

Finance & Public Services

Exclusive dependence on Britain results in continued peripherality for Northern Ireland, a relatively low standard of living among UK regions and the likely perpetuation of ‘external’ aid in the form of transfers to maintain public finances and public services and the consequential lack of dynamism in Northern Ireland’s economy.

The creation of an all-island economy demands a level playing field and this will only be achieved with a greater degree of tax harmonisation, particularly as regards the business sector. It is essential therefore that the case for a degree of fiscal autonomy be addressed to allow, among other objectives, for tax harmonisation with the South where low corporation tax has been the single most important driver of inward investment over the past several decades.

Tax harmonisation would present great opportunities – and challenges – for potential investors. According to the Industrial Task Force “If we (Northern Ireland) are to compete effectively for investment in the global market place and get a chance to capitalise on our undoubted attractions as a host location able to deliver world-class performance we must have a corporate tax rate no less favourable than that in the Republic.”

But there are also other steps that could be taken to address anomalies and difficulties with a view to promoting trade and growth. If we are serious about delivering greater efficiency for tax-payers in terms of public spending, we must investigate opportunities to save money through all-Ireland funding to secure economies of scale on infrastructure and services.

Lack of co-operation on personal taxation and pensions make cross-border living and working unnecessarily difficult, which in turn has a negative effect on labour mobility and the broader economy. In this regard the SDLP is pressing for the implementation of the recommendations of the North-South “Obstacles to Mobility” Study commissioned in 2001 by the NSMC.

Priorities:

- Create a number of **all-Ireland funds**:
 - **Strategic Capital Funds**: to support the type of infrastructure and capital spending referred to by Minister Brian Cowen (see transport and infrastructure section). Each jurisdiction would contribute to dedicated North-South funds for part of such spending, taking account of regional imbalance. The funds would be deployed through joint planning & spending to achieve shared benefits. Similar to the ‘Executive Programme Funds’ on an all-Ireland basis, they would be subject to cross-departmental bids and bids from outside government to promote partnership, innovation and efficiency. The investment decisions and their delivery would bring together the strategic capacities of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) and its counterpart the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA).
 - **Services, Community & Enterprise Funds**: to fund programmes and services rather than capital investment and to help counter the fall-off in EU funding. Like EU programs, they could support short and medium-term projects in cycles of 1-3-5 years with smaller amounts discretely committed. They would be available to the community & voluntary sector and for rural & community development and services. They could also support pilots and other cross-border public sector initiatives encouraging bids from departments and other bodies. They could further provide enterprise support through appropriate measures on both a sub-regional and national basis.
 - **Common Fiscal Platform**: created through fiscal latitude, e.g. corporation tax (see below), tax concessions. These could be applied to particular geographic areas or economic sectors (e.g. for companies straddling the border, a facility to nominate one administration to deal with). InterTrade Ireland has worked and vindicated the SDLP argument on the benefits of co-operation on trade etc but we also wanted co-operation on investment and there is an urgent case for it. We need to ensure that, where there are labour shortages in respect of proposed jobs in the South, the North can benefit (see section on Enterprise & Trade).
- **Create a single all-Ireland corporation tax regime at 12.5%**. We acknowledge the challenge that this poses but submit in the first instance, that such an investment in our economy would pay for itself in returns to the Treasury within 10 years. There have already been breaches of the principle of a single tax regime for the UK in the concessions on climate change and the aggregates levy which rightly recognise the North’s unique position (in the UK) in having a land-border with another state.

We would further contend that the alternative proposals to promote business (such as tax concessions related to investment in marketing and R&D) would not add up to the same straightforward headline attraction for investment. The SDLP would want to see increased returns to the public purse enable investment in strong public services and North-South development as part of the dedicated funds proposed above.

- Promote greater **co-operation** and information exchange between the **Comptrollers and Auditors General** on the island, with a view to improving value for money in public services in each jurisdiction given the similarity of challenges faced in delivering efficiency in services North and South.
- Promote **dual currency** use.
- **Remove tax barriers imposed on cross-border workers** - those living on one side of the border and working on another-including the recommendations of the Study on Obstacles to Mobility. Workers could be allowed to nominate one administration to deal with in terms of paying income tax and national insurance/PRSI etc.
- Build on work of Centre for Cross-Border Studies, Co-operation Ireland and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in running **joint training for civil and public servants. Increased exchanges and secondments** of public sector workers and civil servants can promote innovation and efficiency, enable sharing of best practice and support North-South development.

Health & Social Services

The Health Services North and South face very similar challenges, such as long waiting lists and the need to upgrade and/or replace existing infrastructure. Co-operation can assist in addressing these challenges and pressures while joint strategic planning can ensure that the best possible use is made of resources and that overall a first class service is provided to people throughout the island in urban and rural communities. The Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) partnership illustrates the benefits that can be achieved for people living in the border region by collaborative working between health and social care organisations on a cross-border basis. There are important opportunities to maximise investment in specialist services and equipment, for example, which would otherwise be unaffordable in either jurisdiction.

Priorities:

- Extend and develop opportunities for **shared use of specialist facilities**, building on recent announcements on radiotherapy as well as ongoing ad hoc arrangements such as those between Altnagelvin and southern border county hospitals.

- Advance **island-wide co-operation in the provision of Mental Health services** providing better services for child and adult psychiatry. An all-Ireland Conference on Mental Health would assist in the development of such an approach.
- Develop an **all-Ireland approach to suicide prevention**. Launched in September, Reach Out, the Irish Suicide Prevention Strategy is achievable and draws from international examples of best practice. By developing an all-Ireland strategy we can co-ordinate approaches and resources to reduce the alarming number of suicides on the island.
- Agree **shared provision of specialised units and services** for young people with **drug/alcohol addiction** and eating disorders. Given today’s trends of increased underage drinking and the “binge drinking “culture, we should be planning to deal with the inevitable consequences of alcohol abuse and associated medical conditions on an all Ireland basis.
- Advance **mutual recognition of health workers’ qualifications** and registration.

See also Public Safety section below.

Housing, Community & Rural Development

From availability to affordability issues, the challenge of meeting housing demand has presented similar difficulties North and South. There is much to learn from sharing experience as we strive to ensure a cohesive community and a vibrant economy.

All-Ireland co-operation can produce new perspectives and result in mutual learning. It needs to be extensive, visible and ongoing, and involve the public, private and voluntary sectors. Likewise, the particular needs of border areas can best be addressed through co-operative approaches, sharing best practice and lessons learned.

North-South co-operation between social partners will produce knock-on benefits across other areas thereby helping to build relationships and advance North-South development generally.

The SDLP welcomes the recent initiative by the Centre for Cross-Border Studies and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in establishing the North-South Forum for Sustainable Communities and believes the project has great potential.

Priorities

- Co-operation in tackling problems of affordability issues for first-time buyers, sharing experience of programmes and approaches such as the Affordable Housing Scheme.
- Address the shortage of construction workers on an all-Ireland basis to deal with housing supply issues. North/South linkages should aim to facilitate free and easy movement of such skilled workers from south to north and vice versa.
- Advance co-operation on initiatives to promote sustainable rural development, particularly in border areas.

Human Rights & Equality

The SDLP worked hard to ensure that human rights and equality underpinned the Good Friday Agreement, which seeks to establish a culture of rights across the whole of Ireland. As a party firmly rooted in the campaign for civil and human rights, the SDLP is seeking to ensure that every appropriate measure is taken to make those commitments a reality across the island. Much of this work can best be done on a North South basis.

We also believe that children’s services merit a co-ordinated approach, particularly in border areas to ensure continuity and promote an all-Ireland approach on Children’s issues.

In particular, it is vital that there is an all Ireland approach to Child Protection to permit cross border co-operation on vetting services and complementary management of Sex Offenders & Young Witness Programmes.

Equally, we believe that there is much that would be better done on a North South basis to deliver services for older people and for disabled people.

Priorities:

Human Rights

- Work to agree an **all-Ireland Charter of Rights**, to guarantee the highest standards of human rights throughout the North.

Race

- **Develop North/South aspects of Action Plans against Racism.** Action against racism is a common challenge facing North and South. In both jurisdictions the growth of minority ethnic communities is a relatively new phenomenon – making coordination of approaches on this all the more important.

- **Address Travellers’ issues** including the right to appropriate accommodation including transit sites. Traveller accommodation is an all-Ireland issue which requires coordination in terms of planning – especially since there is cross-border mobility.

Children

- Establish a **North-South Multi-Agency Forum on Child Protection**.
- Create a **North-South Sex Offenders Register**, strengthen vetting and enhance co-operation in the management of sex offenders generally.
- Agree **joint policy on children’s services**, especially in border areas.
- Develop **cross-border Delivery of Children’s services** eg use of Young Witness Service in South.

See also section on Social Inclusion below

Older People

- **Address duplication of services and support groups** in the border areas e.g. carers’ support groups.
- Create an **all-Ireland free travel scheme** and other travel incentives, such as the extension of free passports for pensioners in the North.
- Deliver a **co-ordinated safe home scheme**. Joint working would allow more funds to be spent directly on ensuring that older people feel secure in their homes.
- **Develop and deliver a services-framework for older people**. This may be a medium-longer term project but will prove beneficial given our ageing populations.

Disability

- Establish all-island **co-operation on identification of disability health issues** which would bring economies of scale.
- **Co-ordinate Employment Support Services** and address mobility issues and rural transport for disabled people, which would bring particular benefits for those living in border areas and would ensure continuity of service.

Justice and Policing

Criminals should not be allowed to exploit the border. There are clear opportunities to offer better public protection in respect of organised crime, drugs trafficking and sex offenders, through North-South co-operation.

While justice and policing matters are not yet devolved, that should not inhibit the Northern Ireland Office from working co-operatively with the South on them. Further, once justice powers are devolved, we believe that there will be enormous scope for increasing co-operation on a North-South basis.

Irrespective of all the political and bureaucratic difficulties, the SDLP wants to achieve the harmonisation of civil and criminal law, North and South.

Priorities:

- **Full Implementation of North/South Criminal Justice Treaty.** The importance of the work programme set out under the Treaty speaks for itself.
- Particular priority should be given to the **exchange of personnel** both on the criminal justice and policing sides (eg. court clerks, administrators, prison officers, police officers and even members of the Judiciary.) This would encourage sharing of good practice. It could also be used to combat the under-representation of Catholics at higher levels of the criminal justice system in the North.
- An **all-Ireland Criminal Assets Bureau** – based on the stronger powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau in the South. This would mean an end to the bureaucratic difficulties caused by the limitations on the powers of the ARA at present (eg. they can only handle cases passed to them by the PSNI). It would also allow better targeting of cross border crime. The Criminal Assets Bureau believes that approximately 35% of its work has a cross border dimension.
- An **all-Ireland Law Commission** to research and promote harmonisation of laws between North and South.
- **Further joint co-operation between the Human Rights Commissions North/South.** Work in relation to the All Ireland Rights Charter should be completed – as envisaged by the Good Friday Agreement.
- An **all-Ireland Intelligence Agency** serviced by a joint PSNI and Gardai unit to combat crime and terrorism North/South. This could be a very important development in terms of All Ireland policing.
- **All-Ireland police training.**
- **All-Ireland Sex Offenders register** to prevent criminals exploiting the border.

Public Safety and Emergency Planning

There is enormous potential for emergency services to work together to benefit all on the island. Current debate on the possibility of an avian flu pandemic, underlines the need for further co-operation and development on this score. We welcome the establishment of the North-South working group on public health – the benefits of joint working were clear in respect of Foot and Mouth disease and future emergencies must not be left to chance.

Priorities:

- Create an **all-Ireland Public Safety Body** to build on the successful collaboration on road safety advertising and education initiatives. This would promote a strong safety culture and work systematically to bring down the incidence of injury and fatalities arising from accidents in the home, at work and on the roads.
- **Harmonise road safety measures** on the island, including the creation of an enforceable penalty point system to operate regardless of jurisdiction as well as greater co-operation on enforcement generally. Co-operation on advertising has been effective and further collaboration between the National Safety Council, the Road Safety Council and their respective government departments, could help to address the high road traffic accident rates on border roads.
- **Formalise and develop existing co-operation between emergency services** to ensure a rapid and co-ordinated response to save lives and alleviate staff pressures in the case of major incidents.

Social Inclusion and Social Security

Despite the relative wealth of both jurisdictions, we share high levels of poverty and inequality. Child poverty levels North and South, for example, are some of the highest in Europe. We face many common problems in addressing such an appalling situation and have much to gain from working together, particularly in border areas. Co-operation in research is essential to broadening ideas and suggesting policy lessons.

Progress is being made in respect of sharing information on social security entitlements North and South through advice networks and agencies but there remain significant problems in respect of pensions transfer.

Priorities:

- **Comprehensive all-Ireland research on anti-poverty measures.** The Economic and Social Research Institute in Dublin and the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland should be supported in joint working.

- **Sharing of experience in respect of the anti-poverty measures** North and South and their relative successes and failures in tackling inequality, poverty and social exclusion. Southern policies specifically targeted at the most vulnerable in society, particularly older people, must be highlighted and visibly endorsed, e.g. free passports for older people.
- **Co-operation on EU funding** - securing and implementing the PEACE II extension and in negotiating new funding for the island for the 2007-13 period.
- Negotiate arrangements to **make pension schemes transferable** to ensure that workers and pensioners are not disadvantaged by moving jurisdictions.

Transport and Infrastructure

As recent projects have proven, there are tremendous benefits to be gained from closer working and joint planning on major infrastructure projects. Indeed, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Brian Cowen, pointed out in his speech in Derry in April 2005:

“the combined spend on infrastructure on the island, North and South, over the next ten years could be of the order of €90 to €100 billion. That is a possibility of potentially profound significance. Surely, it makes the most basic sense that we should pool our thinking, planning and resources to ensure that the potential of this unprecedented opportunity for the future is maximised to the full?”

SDLP Proposals:

- **Create an all-Ireland transport and infrastructure body** to produce a strategic development framework for the island, networking air and sea ports and economic corridors and co-ordinating key projects such as the construction of TENS (Trans-European Networks). The body should assist in the planning and development of infrastructure on a North/South basis, co-ordinating the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland with the National Development Plan for 2007-13.
- **Co-ordinate and upgrade the North-South rail network** particularly the Dublin/Belfast and Belfast/Derry rail routes with extensions to the Donegal and North West corridor. The Enterprise timetable requires further work, as the current schedule does not meet the needs of commuters. Greater North/South co-operation is needed on rail safety to meet the standards required for the implementation of EU Rail Packages.

- **Harmonise road safety measures and enforcement** on the island, including the creation of an enforceable penalty point system to operate regardless of jurisdiction. Co-operation on advertising has been effective and further collaboration between the National Safety Council, the Road Safety Council and their respective government departments, could help to address the high road traffic accident rates on border roads.
- Agree an **all-Ireland free travel scheme** for people of pensionable age and for those who are registered disabled.
- Integrate the **National Spatial Strategy** and the **Regional Development Strategy**, building on the work of the newly established International Centre for Local and Regional Development, the result of a North-South-US partnership⁴. It is vitally important that both governments invest the required resources to implement the recommendations of the ICLRD Report in order to co-ordinate and support the creation of sustainable and balanced economic, commercial and employment opportunities.

February 2006

⁴The Centre is the result of a partnership programme involving Harvard University, NUI Maynooth and the University of Ulster. The programme is headed by John Driscoll from the Center for Urban Development Studies at Harvard University.