

Northern Ireland Executive

Draft Programme for Government

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PREFACE

We have great pleasure in presenting to the Northern Ireland Assembly our first draft Programme for Government. This document and the draft Budget document seek the views of the Assembly on the future direction of our work. They demonstrate how the Executive will work together, to seek to make a real difference for the people of Northern Ireland.

The Programme for Government is a central focus of the Executive's work. It is however not intended to be a static document. It is to be reviewed each year. We believe it must develop a great deal in the coming year, as we work together and refine existing policies and programmes and create new ones, tailored to the specific needs of Northern Ireland.

As will be clear from this draft, the key policies can only be delivered successfully if departments work together, across traditional boundaries, to meet the needs of the public. Further, we need to work with organisations outside central Government to see how they can contribute to the new direction we are giving. For this reason, we also welcome views on this draft from all interested groups and individuals.*

Help us to achieve the goal of making a difference to the lives of people, enabling us to grow together as a peaceful, fair and inclusive community.

RT HON DAVID TRIMBLE MP MLA
MLA
First Minister

SÉAMUS MALLON MP
Deputy First Minister

*Details of where to forward comments are given on p.7.

CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT PROGRAMME

1. This document sets out the Executive Committee's proposals for the Programme for Government. The Programme is subject to approval by the Assembly after scrutiny in Assembly Committees, on a cross-community basis. The Executive has asked the Assembly and its Committees to examine the proposals contained in this document.
2. As part of developing the Programme for Government, work will commence with departments to draw up Public Service Agreements which will include objectives, actions and targets linked to budgets for each department. In the New Year the Executive will present to the Assembly a more detailed Programme for Government incorporating the draft Public Service Agreements. The Assembly will be asked to approve the detailed document.
3. The Executive has requested that the Assembly Committees provide views on this draft document, particularly on actions which are relevant to the first year of the Programme, so that comments may be considered in taking forward the detailed work on specifying departmental Public Service Agreements, and in helping to reach decisions on the Budget proposals for next year.
4. The Executive has also invited views on its Programme proposals from the Civic Forum, and would also welcome comments from other bodies and the public. In line with the requirements of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Executive is also consulting on the equality impact of the Programme for Government proposals. A statement on the Equality Impact Assessment is included at Annex B of this document.
5. It would be very helpful to the Executive in developing its Programme if comments were sent, by 21 November 2000, to: Economic Policy Unit, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Room E5.20 Castle Buildings, Stormont, BELFAST BT4 3SG. Comments can also be sent by email to: pfg@ofmdfmi.gov.uk
6. The draft Programme for Government will be further debated by the Assembly in the New Year, when the Public Service Agreements will be incorporated. If there are further comments on the nature of the Programme, relating to 2002/03 and 2003/04, these can be received up to 15 January 2001.

1. MAKING A DIFFERENCE

1.1 Introduction

In the Belfast Agreement, as a key part of the way we would work together for the better government of Northern Ireland, it was agreed that:

“The Executive Committee will seek to agree each year, and review as necessary a programme incorporating an agreed budget linked to policies and programmes, subject to approval by the Assembly, after scrutiny in Assembly Committees, on a cross-community basis”.

This draft Programme for Government sets out the Executive’s proposed strategic aims and priorities which will be pursued, working with and for all the people. Each year we will consult on the revision of this Programme. It will provide an important focus of co-operation, to enable us to create a better future for ourselves and for our children.

Shortly after the restoration of devolution we produced an Agenda for Government. It demonstrated our commitment to work together to agree some early actions to improve and modernise our society. This draft Programme for Government builds on our Agenda and sets out much more comprehensively our plans for next year and the longer term, although it does not seek to cover every activity.

1.2 Our Vision for the Future

As we enter the new Millennium, after a long and difficult period in our history, and commit ourselves to work together for the common good, we need a shared vision for our society.

Our vision – as set out in the Agreement - is of a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society, firmly founded on the “achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and the protection and vindication of the human rights of all”. It is a vision also based on “partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South and between these islands”.

We commit ourselves to good government. Different departments and agencies will work together to give the best possible service to the public and develop policies in the priority areas we describe below. We also want to foster debate and co-operation between the Executive and the Assembly. Our joint aim must be to improve our policies and programmes and create the best legislative

framework for the future. We must govern in an open, efficient and accountable way.

And we wish to develop our role as a region. We want to co-operate for the benefit of all and to develop a much more outward looking approach.

We also have something to give. Our efforts to resolve our conflict can be an inspiration and help to other areas in the world.

On many issues – for example on the environment, agriculture and economy – policy is developed at national and international levels. We accept our responsibilities to play our full part in these institutions and at the same time to look after our interests. In particular, the arrangements for co-operation, set out in the Agreement, create a new opportunity for us all.

We therefore set out our draft Programme for Government for the Assembly's approval and with the aim that other organisations can see our priorities, and can see how they can work with us to achieve our vision.

1.3 A Cohesive, Inclusive and Just Society

In working together to create a new future, we have to deal with the very deep and painful divisions in our society. After decades of division and 30 years of conflict there is a high level of distrust between the two main traditions within our community.

We each must continue to develop a capacity for compromise and respect, seeking to resolve conflict and creating new links and building trust. This will not be an easy or short-term task, and in undertaking it we have to give particular attention to the needs of victims.

Our vision is set out in the New Targeting Social Need (TSN) Policy by which we are committed to tackling community differentials in unemployment and the significant levels of deprivation, long term unemployment and benefit dependency which have blighted our society. We recognise the inequalities in the life experiences of our citizens in terms of poverty, health, housing, educational and economic opportunity and disability and we are determined to tackle them.

We must promote a just society where everyone enjoys equality of opportunity, whatever their religion, gender, ethnic origin and personal background, and whether they live in the cities or the countryside. We will seek to improve opportunities for those with disabilities.

We are committed to policies which actively promote equality of opportunity and adhere to international standards of human rights. We will tackle unjust

discrimination through strong and effective laws. Through New TSN we will redirect resources and efforts towards people, groups and areas in greatest need. All must have an equal opportunity to participate in the life of this society.

We also wish to address directly religious and political division, seeking to create greater mutual understanding and respect for diversity, supporting dialogue and understanding among the communities. In short, we accept that we must seek to be a driving and unifying force for the whole community in the new political circumstances.

These three themes – cohesion, inclusion and justice - underpin the implementation of all our policies and programmes. The way we provide public services, the way we educate our young people, the means by which we encourage economic growth, all impact on the society in which we live.

1.4 A Healthy Society

A vision of a modern, successful society must include major improvements in the health of our people. We recognise the links between poor health and low incomes and will target our resources accordingly. We also recognise the rising cost of healthcare and will aim to maximise the effectiveness of both our health and social services.

1.5 A Future for Our Children

Central to our vision for the future must be a focus on our young people. Ours is the third youngest population of all the regions in the European Union. On their development lies our future and we need to ensure that our policies and programmes take account of their needs. At the same time we share in the broader EU trend (albeit to a lesser degree) of significant numbers of people moving into old age, with an important contribution to make, but with the right to look to the rest of us for support to maintain their quality of life. Shifts in family structure and growth in the population will mean that we will have to take account of an anticipated 250,000 new households over the next 25 years.

1.6 Education for All

We need to improve significantly the educational successes of so many of the young people in our schools, colleges and universities. Our vision is to extend accessibility, choice and excellence throughout our education system, raise standards and eliminate low achievement. Our aim is to allow everyone to fulfil his or her personal development and contribute fully to societal development. We will create a highly educated society in which all school leavers have the

qualifications and aptitudes to achieve self-fulfilment to proceed to further or higher education, receive vocational or professional training for participation in a modern workforce and have lifelong opportunities to update their knowledge, skills and qualifications.

1.7 Creating jobs in the New Economy

Our vision is also of a dynamic, competitive economy, creating opportunities for all in a wide range of sectors, with many more skilled jobs in the new knowledge-based economy. Strategy 2010 has set out one perspective for achieving this. We are aware of the challenge of global competition and the real structural weaknesses of this economy, over-dependent on a number of declining or slow-growing industries and on the public sector. Our confidence in the future is built on the significant successes we have achieved in recent years, with increasing employment and manufacturing output and falling unemployment. Unemployment, however, remains relatively high and creating jobs must be a key element of our vision.

1.8 A Better Environment

We also appreciate the importance of ensuring that this development is sustainable, in environmental as well as in social and economic terms. A good quality built and natural environment is key to our economy, helping for example to attract investors and visitors as well as being integral to the future of agriculture. It is also of major importance to the personal health of everyone, now and in the future. Sustainability must therefore be a key theme that will run through the Executive's work, integrating social, economic and environmental objectives in a way that leads to the greatest gains in quality of life and well-being.

1.9 A New Basis for the Rural Economy

An important aspect of our economy and society that has been neglected in the past is that in the rural areas. This covers not only agriculture, forestry and fisheries, but also the economy in our rural towns and support for rural society. We need to integrate our approach here, creating new skills and new job opportunities while ensuring that public services are accessible. Only in this way can we sustain the rural life and our countryside for the future.

1.10 A Renewed Infrastructure

The provision of infrastructure and major public services such as public transport, roads, water and sewerage are essential for the social and economic wellbeing of the region. Serious deficiencies in our essential infrastructure assets have been identified as a result of years of under investment. This is giving rise to real public safety and public health concerns. We need to act now if we are to reverse the unacceptable deterioration in the quality and reliability of our infrastructure and to comply with EC Directives.

1.11 The Wider Context

Our future depends crucially on the development of our neighbours and the European Union. Therefore, we intend to give particular emphasis to developing Northern Ireland's external relations, within the Belfast Agreement and within the European Union, to secure the maximum benefit and to contribute to the development of our neighbours.

1.12 Our Priority Areas

In the light of these challenges, and building on our Agenda for Government of June 2000, we have agreed that our mission in the coming years is:

“to make a difference to the lives of our people, enabling them to grow as a peaceful, fair and inclusive community. We will in particular seek to work together to combat poverty and social exclusion and to improve health; to untap the creative potential of our community by investing in the education and skills of all our people; and, through renewed infrastructure and innovative policies, secure the basis for a competitive, sustainable economy. We will seek to develop our relationships, working on a North/South, East/West and international level. We will work together to develop the new democratic structures and efficient, accountable public services”.

In particular we need to focus our work in the coming years on the following areas, working together across departments and agencies, to tackle the fundamental problems of our society.

THE EXECUTIVE'S PRIORITIES

- **Growing as a Community**
- **Working for a Healthier People**
- **Investing in Education and Skills**
- **Securing a Competitive Economy**
- **Developing North/South, East/West and International Relations**

Within each of these Priority areas the Executive will tackle a number of broad policy issues and implement a range of actions. By linking them together under these priorities we will give better overall direction to this work.

1.13 The Executive Programme Funds

A key element of our approach is the creation of targeted Executive Programme Funds (EPFs) which we will use to support programmes or projects which are of major importance to the Executive, or which will assist the development of activity across departments, or where resources are needed to support activity which an individual department may not be able to support from its own resources.

EXECUTIVE PROGRAMME FUNDS

Social Inclusion/Community Regeneration Fund

Service Modernisation Fund

New Directions Fund

Infrastructure/Capital Renewal Fund

Children's Fund

Objectives

EPFs will assist the development of new policies and programmes, and new, improved services, as well as dealing with major infrastructure projects. EPFs will

have particular regard to the Executive's Priorities as set out in the Programme for Government and also its commitments to equality and New TSN.

The main policy issues that they will cover include:-

- (a) **Social Inclusion/Community Regeneration**
This relates to action against poverty and supporting community measures in both urban and rural settings, as well as actions on community relations and for cultural diversity. In this policy area, linkages to EU Structural Funds and Community Initiatives will be highly relevant.
- (b) **Service Modernisation**
The objective will be to promote efficiency and innovation within our own departments and the wider public sector. Actions that might be included are e-government, improvement in the focus and quality of services to the public, "invest to save" measures and administrative reforms.
- (c) **New Directions**
The objective will be to promote innovation in our programmes. This could embrace aspects of change in the health service, educational development as well as new approaches to economic strategy, the development of the creative industries and new directions for agriculture and the rural economy.
- (d) **Infrastructure/Capital Renewal**
The objective will be to support strategic projects including roads, rail, energy and telecommunications, where appropriate related to the use of the Private Finance Initiative and Public Private Partnerships.
- (e) **Children**
This will provide support for children in need and young people at risk, drawing on the experiences so far from the Chancellor's Children's Fund.

Principles

The focus on the funds is on policy and service innovation, on tackling weaknesses in infrastructure and on ensuring effective targeting of programmes on individuals, groups and areas in greatest need.

Proposals will by nature either be of major regional importance or cross-cutting in their nature. EPFs should in many cases help lever in other resources, from a

number of departments or even elsewhere, to create new funding bases for cross-cutting programmes.

1.14 Working Together

It is vital that we improve the way in which we work together within our 11 departments. Our administration needs to be accessible, accountable and responsive, creating services that meet the needs of the public. We also need to press for a fair allocation of UK public expenditure to Northern Ireland and find new ways to finance key services. These challenges are addressed in chapter 7.

In addition, in each of our priority areas we will improve the co-ordination of our departments and agencies, ensuring that services are delivered in a way that meets the needs of the public. We will also work together on joint policy development and help define longer term expenditure priorities.

1.15 Public Service Agreements

Later this year, we will develop individual Public Service Agreements for each department, which will support the Executive's priorities and commitments. These agreements will set out for each department its aims, objectives, programme budget allocation and key targets, and help develop a linking of public funds to the achievement of agreed outcomes. The Public Service Agreements will form part of the finalised Programme for Government.

1.16 Equality

Our commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and tackling social disadvantage has also underpinned and informed the Programme for Government and shaped departments' priorities. Key elements of the New TSN Action Plans have been incorporated in the Programme for Government and the equality implications of proposed actions and targets have been central to their final selection.

Annex B contains an Equality Impact Assessment statement relating to the Programme for Government. The Programme for Government will be sent to all relevant groups for comment as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process before finalisation.

2. GROWING AS A COMMUNITY

2.1 Introduction

If we are to build a cohesive, inclusive and just society, we must address a range of hard issues. Inequalities and divisions in society will only disappear if there are consistent, focused and effective policies. We will focus on:

- **the promotion of equality and human rights;**
- **tackling poverty and social disadvantage;**
- **the renewal of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods;**
- **sustaining and enhancing local communities, particularly in the most disadvantaged urban and rural areas; and**
- **improving community relations and tackling the divisions in our society.**

2.1.1 Overview

Each of these policy areas is important in its own right. But as an Executive we believe that we need to see the linkages between all these issues and seek to develop a wider approach to help make a real change in our society.

Only if we are confident in our rights and responsibilities, only if we create security for the individual from poverty and communities from disadvantage, only if we can help the confidence of a community to express its needs can we build a firm foundation for tackling the divisions in our society. In short we must create a feeling of justice for all, and ensure that there can be real inclusion of all individuals before we can fully secure a cohesive society. Among the most vulnerable individuals in society are the victims of our prolonged conflict, along with those who care for them and the relatives of all victims, whether surviving or dead. This society has a special obligation to ensure that those who suffered so much in conflict will have their needs addressed in peace.

Regeneration of our society - in the fullest sense – means that we have to tackle all these issues at the same time. This involves responsibilities as well as rights. This will not be achieved overnight. These are some of the most stubborn problems that we have to address. It will take generations for much of the pain and hurt of our history to be handled. However that should not lessen our commitment to work together to find reconciliation.

In tackling these issues, we have the advantage of a vibrant and extensive community and voluntary sector which already makes significant and critical contributions to many areas of life. A key challenge will be to build on this community capacity and to involve it in policies and programmes aimed at strengthening our community well-being.

In achieving our objectives we are committed to partnership working. We will build on the experience of existing partnership structures, such as District Partnerships, which epitomise real partnership in action – local people providing local solutions to local problems. Such partnerships have a key role in ensuring that the most disadvantaged benefit. The Programme for Government will build on this experience, and the European Union's Peace II programme will play an important complementary role.

2.2 The Promotion of Equality and Human Rights

2.2.1 *We will ensure the effective promotion of equality and human rights*

The protection of human rights and the promotion of equality are central to the Agreement. These policies are prerequisites for improving community relations and building community capacity, particularly in areas of greatest need.

We will therefore:

- implement all Equality Schemes, as approved by the Equality Commission;
- ensure that our legislation, policy and administrative practice comply with the Human Rights Act 1998, referring draft legislation to the NI Human Rights Commission and ensuring the highest human rights standards;
- ensure that anti-discrimination legislation fully meets the implementation requirements of EC Directives and the requirements of Section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Actions

We will also take the following actions:

- implement cross-departmental policies to tackle gender inequality within a strategic framework for the period 2001-2003;
- implement cross-departmental policies to tackle racial inequality within a strategic framework for the period 2001-2003, including targeted support for ethnic minority groups and projects;
- by April 2001, consult on a Single Equality Bill, to be introduced in 2002; and
- by December 2002, complete an evaluation of the New TSN Policy.

We will ensure that our programmes take these issues properly into account. For example, we will:

- ensure that Health and Personal Social Services caters for the needs of different users in terms of community background, social class, need and language;
- in 2001/02, increase training and employment support for people with disabilities by providing an additional 400 offers under the Access to Work Scheme; an additional 50 places under the Employment Support Programme; and an additional 60 work trials under the Job Introduction Scheme;
- promote equality and fair treatment in the workplace by establishing, in 2001/02, arbitration schemes for tribunal complaints; 3 additional chairpersons for Fair Employment Tribunals; and 3 additional chairpersons for Industrial Tribunals;
- by May 2001, develop a programme to improve accessibility to culture and leisure facilities, in particular for people with disabilities or who are socially disadvantaged, based on an audit of an initial 40 culture, arts and leisure venues;
- by April 2002, improve transparency and achieve equality in the distribution of funds to schools by introducing a new formula for determining school budgets under Local Management of Schools, which will be common to all boards and all school types;

- ensure in particular that the equality dimension of cross-Departmental policy and practice in relation to the procurement of goods and services by the public sector is subjected to equality impact assessment; and
- by June 2001, complete a review of the appointment and promotion procedures of the NI Senior Civil Service, with a view to tackling under-representation as quickly and effectively as possible.

2.2.2 We will address the needs of victims

In seeking to create a new future, and as an important part of addressing human rights, it is important that special attention is paid to the needs of those who have been most directly affected by the violence of the last 30 years. The needs of victims and survivors are complex, ranging from coping with serious injury through to physical and emotional trauma, along with dealing with often adverse economic circumstances. We aim, through meeting victims' needs, to promote models of community healing (both within and between communities) and to enable growth in confidence and empowerment for individual victims and survivors.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by April 2001, put in place a cross-departmental strategy for ensuring that the needs of victims are met through effective, high quality help and services. This will be facilitated by an inter-departmental working group on victims;
- by April 2001, ensure that capacity building takes place among victims' groups and also, importantly, among policy makers, to raise awareness of victims' issues;
- by April 2001, ensure that contact has been made with as many victims' groups and individuals as possible and that a publicity exercise will have been carried out to inform the community about the presence and aims of the Victims Unit;
- by April 2002, assess what improvements to services for victims have taken place and what further steps need to be taken; and
- on-going collaboration and liaison with the Northern Ireland Office will ensure that close attention is paid to possible gaps in service delivery.

2.3 Tackling Poverty and Social Disadvantage

2.3.1 *We will combat social exclusion and poverty, with a particular emphasis on children*

Poverty has for too long blighted the lives of individuals and whole communities. We are committed to tackling both its causes and its effects. Our New TSN policy seeks to focus the activities of departments and agencies to address deprivation. We will in particular ensure that housing, social security, education and training programmes and social services are properly co-ordinated. We will work to combat unemployment and differentials in employment rates. We will also work for the advancement of women in economic and public life.

We will therefore:

- implement all targets and actions in the New TSN Action Plans, updating them in 2001 and 2002, and publishing Annual Reports on progress; and
- through the Promoting Social Inclusion dimension of TSN, identify ways of tackling factors which can cause social exclusion which need a cross-departmental approach.

Actions

For example, the following actions will be taken:

- the Executive will bring forward proposals to introduce free travel on public transport for older people;
- by April 2002, we will implement the reform of Child Support;
- by March 2004, we will implement fully the ONE initiative, involving DSD, DHFETE and other Government Agencies in providing joined up welfare and employment services in all areas of Northern Ireland;
- by April 2004, we will assist the Inland Revenue to implement the Integrated Child Credit to provide increased financial support for people on low incomes;
- by March 2002, we will ensure that the provision of Social Security services respects and responds to the diverse needs of ethnic and minority groups;
- from 2001, we will help households suffering from fuel poverty by introducing a new energy efficiency grants scheme designed to improve the insulation and heating standards of their dwellings;

- in 2001/02, we will establish a taskforce on Employability to drive forward action to increase employability and reduce long-term unemployment. This group will focus on the factors that make people employable, not just knowledge, skills and motivation but also considerations such as childcare and readiness or ability to travel to find work;
- from 2001, we will develop appropriate permanent accommodation which best meets Travellers' needs by:
 - i. the NI Housing Executive taking over responsibility for serviced sites; and
 - ii. funding the provision of pilot group housing schemes by Housing Associations;
- we will ensure appropriate measures are taken to address the educational needs of Traveller children and children from other ethnic minorities.

2.3.2 We will work to provide high quality affordable social housing for those on low incomes

We are committed to ensuring that appropriate, accessible and high quality housing is available, especially for those in highest social need. We will ensure that existing housing is best adapted to meet the requirements of those with special needs.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- continue a replacement programme designed to:
 - i. provide more affordable and effective heating systems and
 - ii. upgrade kitchens and bathrooms of Housing Executive tenants;
- sustain the current level of co-ownership activity which enables 570 families on low incomes to gain a foothold on the home ownership ladder each year;
- from 2002, increase the number of families who can purchase their houses from Housing Associations by compensating Associations for discounts on sales (36 per annum); and
- from 2001, increase the number of adaptations to existing buildings to make them accessible to people with disabilities by providing funding to the Housing Executive to enable 1,500 major adaptations to be carried out.

2.4 The renewal of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods

2.4.1 *We will work to regenerate our towns, cities and rural areas, particularly the most disadvantaged*

We will take a co-ordinated approach to breathing new life into our towns, cities and rural communities, especially those which have become most depressed through social disadvantage, the difficulties facing agriculture or the effects of conflict. It is important that this regeneration works in partnership with local communities, seeks to develop local integrated approaches (using mechanisms such as "City Visioning") and develops opportunities for building the social economy. We will use EU Community Initiatives, LEADER + and URBAN II, to strengthen our approach.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by early 2001, launch our new strategy for urban regeneration;
- by 2001, consult on and begin to deliver comprehensive regeneration strategies for the most disadvantaged communities in our two major cities with the objective of reducing social and economic disadvantage in such areas;
- from 2001, begin to put in place partnerships of the community, voluntary, private and public sectors in the most deprived urban areas as Neighbourhood Regeneration Taskforces with the objective of reducing social and economic disadvantage in such areas;
- by 2001, under URBAN II, in partnership with the local community, launch a regeneration initiative;
- during 2001, complete the review of the formula for the calculation of the resources element of the General Exchequer Grant to district councils to take account of relative socio-economic disadvantage;
- by 2001, agree a strategy for reinvigorating city and town centres across Northern Ireland;
- under the new Rural Development Programme, target disadvantage and continue to give priority to projects, programmes and strategies which

address identified needs aimed at equalising economic and social opportunities across the rural areas; and

- under LEADER+, develop cross-border network links, alongside the cross-border component of PEACE II. We will also work with our Irish partners to develop and enhance different sectors of the rural economy and rural society on a cross-border basis, in particular under a rural regeneration measure under INTERREG III.

2.4.2 We will sustain and enhance local communities

Our voluntary and community sectors have a particular strength and vibrancy. We are committed to working with them to improve the quality of life for all our people. Strong communities are central to economic, social and cultural development.

We will take action to develop the necessary community infrastructure in the most disadvantaged areas and where it is weakest, encouraging people to take responsibility in and for their own communities, increasing community activity, broadening the volunteering base and generally reinforcing the development of sustainable and inclusive communities. We will seek to review and monitor the likely impact of decisions by Government and its agencies, and of any other factors, on the integrity and viability of traditional and distinct communities and neighbourhoods, both urban and rural.

Actions

We will implement the following actions:

- from 2001, introduce a programme of action and support to strengthen areas of weakest community infrastructure, with the objective of reducing social and economic disadvantage;
- continue to work with regional voluntary organisations in the field of advice services to improve access particularly for those in deprived areas;
- from 2001, encourage and support greater community participation, particularly from those groups under-represented in volunteering activities, to increase the number of active community groups and volunteers;
- by 2001, put in place locally based partnerships to administer the Partnership Priority III of the Peace II Programme with the objective of increasing reconciliation and reducing multiple social and economic disadvantage;

- by 2001, develop our programme of grant aid to the Housing Rights Service and the Northern Ireland Tenants' Action Programme to provide advice, support, information and training on a wide range of housing issues which will help strengthen the areas of weakest community infrastructure across Northern Ireland;
- by April 2002, produce a strategy for the development of centres of curiosity and imagination, establishing 4 centres to provide co-ordinated, community-based programmes for maximising individual creativity;
- by April 2002, implement a plan with the Arts Council to target support which will tackle barriers to participation in the arts by socially disadvantaged people;
- by June 2001, establish a forum to co-ordinate and promote the cultural arts and leisure dimension to the "Cultural Quarter" concept of designated areas for locating cultural activity with a view to creating synergy and co-operation;
- by April 2001, produce a strategy for developing community-based arts and by June 2001 work with District Councils to enable them to develop integrated local plans for culture, arts and leisure;
- by April 2002, widen community access to information by developing the role of libraries as community information hubs; and
- extend the interim Safe Sports Grounds scheme to improve physical infrastructure of sporting facilities.

2.5 Tackling the divisions

2.5.1 We will work to improve community relations

We will place renewed emphasis on the need for all our people to work together. We will examine the impact of existing patterns of housing and services such as education and seek to respond positively where people wish to live and learn closer together. However, there is no simple panacea for the divisions in our society. We will however be undertaking the following initiatives:

Actions

We will implement the following actions:

- by 2003, review and put in place a cross-departmental strategy for the promotion of community relations, leading to measurable improvements in community relations;
- by 2001, implement new viability criteria to help promote integrated education; and
- promote the concept of citizenship among children and young people as part of their personal and social development through a revised school curriculum.

2.5.2 We will respect, support and celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity

People value their different identities and their cultural and linguistic diversity. Building dialogue, mutual understanding and trust among our people must be the immediate priority. By December 2001, in accordance with the Agreement, we will for example develop a policy in respect to linguistic diversity, which includes Irish, Ulster Scots, ethnic minority languages and British and Irish Sign Languages. We will also take forward the work of the North/South Language Body.

Actions

We will also implement the following actions:

- by April 2001, make key information available in languages other than English through the development of services for Irish and Ulster Scots in support of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;
- by 2001, implement new viability criteria to help promote Irish-medium education;
- by 2001, extend the Diversity 21 initiative to promote greater respect and understanding of our cultural diversity and shared heritage, including Northern Ireland's maritime and industrial heritage through participation in cultural and leisure activities; and
- during 2001, develop an Environment and Heritage Service Education Strategy which includes specific measures to target disadvantaged communities and groups.

The departments with the main involvement are:

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Department for Social Development
Department of Education
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Department for Regional Development
Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment
Department of Finance and Personnel

3. WORKING FOR A HEALTHIER PEOPLE

Introduction

3.1 Our overall priority to improve public health focuses on:

- **reducing preventable disease, ill-health and health inequalities;**
- **ensuring that the environment supports healthy living and that recreational facilities are improved;**
- **modernising and improving hospital and primary care services to ensure more timely and effective care and treatment for patients;**
- **enabling those suffering from disability or chronic, mental or terminal illness to live normal lives, and contribute to society; and**
- **promoting the health and social development of children.**

3.1.1 Overview

Our general health record is not good. Death rates from coronary heart disease and some cancers are amongst the highest in Western Europe. So too, for example, are our teenage pregnancy rates. Overall, our life expectancy is lower than many other developed countries. Further, there is clear evidence that levels of ill-health are closely linked to social disadvantage – long-term sickness rates are 3 times greater in some districts than others. Finally, in the services we provide to treat illness we fall behind Great Britain – for example, we have a higher proportion (18%) of patients on hospital waiting lists for 12 months or longer.

3.1.2 Tackling the causes of ill-health

Too many of our community die early or suffer ill-health as a result of preventable disease. If we are to tackle these problems effectively it is essential

that we focus on their causes and ensure that our policies and programmes strike at these. A range of factors, including low income; the environment; poor housing and community infrastructure; and inadequate working conditions impact adversely on health and well-being status. Family breakdown, domestic violence and levels of disability have also an impact, as do lifestyle factors such as smoking, inappropriate diet and a lack of physical activity. Smoking alone is responsible for some 3,000 deaths each year.

We need to create the right socio-economic conditions and break into the cycle of disadvantage which is the major cause of ill-health. We must support and maintain families and prevent the weak and vulnerable being marginalised. We need to tackle the clear inequalities in health and social well-being to ensure that there is equal opportunity for all. We need to ensure that working conditions are such that they do not cause harm to the health of employees or members of the public and that, wherever possible, the workplace is used as a place to promote good practices. We also need to foster greater willingness by individuals to take responsibility for their own health. In particular we must support people in adopting healthy lifestyles with for example better diets, more exercise and no smoking.

Action has to be taken and services provided to the public by a number of departments and agencies working together to help them make the choices that will improve the quality of their lives. As other countries have done, we must look at this problem afresh and put in place new and innovative arrangements to address it.

3.1.3 Providing timely and effective treatment

We all will need health care or support from the care system during our lifetimes. A major focus of the Executive will be on the quality of care and to ensure that it can be provided in the most effective and timely way to meet individual need.

3.1.4 Caring in the Community

Personal social and health care services provide vital services to many physically disabled people, older people, people with a mental illness and those with a learning disability. There are at present in excess of 15,000 people receiving intensive community health and social care support services. Despite increased provision in recent years, there are some 4,000 people waiting for support and demographic changes will place increasing pressure on resources.

3.1.5 The Well-being of our Children

We have one of the youngest populations in the EU, but an unacceptable proportion live in conditions of poverty. Over a quarter of children come from households dependent on Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support. There is a close relationship between family poverty and higher infant mortality, poor levels of general health and increased risk of social problems. The Executive Programme Fund for Children will be a source of support for children in need.

Children in the worst-off families have a 20% higher death rate in the first years of life, and people of working age in the poorest socio-economic groups are more than twice as likely to die prematurely as those in the highest group. The number of children in care is significantly higher than in England and there is a need for a very substantial increase in the number of residential child-care places with a range of specialised facilities. There is continuing concern about road safety, particularly the levels of road accident casualties and deaths, and emphasis will continue to be placed on improving road safety through education, engineering and enforcement in an effort to reduce these levels.

3.2 *We will work to reduce preventable disease, ill-health and health inequalities.*

An effective strategy to improve our poor health status is one which must involve North/South and cross-departmental activity, focusing on the causes of ill-health and injury in a way that makes transparent the contributions and responsibilities of different sectors and policy areas. The actions and targets set out in the other priority areas for action of this Programme for Government – in relation to the community, education, skills and the economy - are fundamental in tackling the root causes of ill-health and injury. The measures set out in relation to working together and developing relationships on a North/South, East/West and international level will support and underpin the action needed. Together, they will help to create the social and economic conditions needed for good health.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by April 2001, after full public consultation, develop a cross-cutting public health strategy which maximises, across all sectors, our efforts to improve health and well being and reduce health inequalities;
- produce detailed cross-departmental plans for securing reductions in the main causes of ill-health with the objective of achieving a level of health

and well being that is at least as good as the best of our European neighbours;

- take specific measures, underpinned by challenging targets, on a cross-Departmental basis to:
 - reduce the proportion of the population who smoke
 - increase physical activity
 - reduce unplanned births to mothers under 20
 - improve diet
 - increase uptake rate for primary immunisations
 - reduce the number of deaths from accidents
 - reduce the misuse of drugs and alcohol;
- ensure a cross-departmental response to the drugs strategy which is aimed particularly at reducing drug misuse among young people; involving local committees in addressing drug misuse; giving treatment for drug users; and reducing the availability of drugs;
- by 2001, ensure that Health and Social Services Boards implement New TSN Action Plans which include measures for tackling inequalities in areas of accidents, cancers, circulatory diseases, diabetes, immunisation, infant mortality, nutrition, smoking, physical activity and alcohol consumption;
- over a 3 year period, implement the agreed recommendations of the Capitation Formula Review Group to ensure more equitable distribution of resources to Health & Social Services Boards;
- early in 2001, launch a new road safety strategy for the next decade, identifying measures which will contribute to a reduction in road traffic casualties, including improvements in road safety education, increasing the number of road safety officers and the level of promotional activity;
- take steps to improve tobacco control including bringing forward measures to ban tobacco advertising;
- by August 2001, publish an Approved Code of Practice on passive smoking;
- by December 2001, in co-operation with District Councils, develop a strategy for improving health and well-being through participation in culture and leisure activities and increase health-related physical activity by increasing opportunities for participation in sport, especially by young people, women and people with disabilities;

- by April 2003, develop an Occupational Health strategy for Northern Ireland; and
- take forward work in the North South Ministerial Council, giving immediate priority to cancer research, health promotion, accident and emergency planning, major emergencies and co-operation on high technology equipment.

3.3 We will work to ensure that the environment supports healthy living and the safe production of food

We will work to ensure the improvement of air, land and water quality. We will not only fulfil our EU obligations but also seek to ensure that development takes place in a sustainable way. Ensuring the highest standards of animal health and building confidence in the safety of local food products are also important public health considerations. We will ensure that our people continue to have access to high quality recreational facilities.

Actions

We will implement the following actions:

- support the work of the Food Standards Agency and the North/South Food Safety Promotion Board to ensure the safety of food and foster confidence in the local food supply;
- by March 2001, finalise arrangements for formal co-operation on animal health on the island of Ireland;
- by March 2002, develop joint strategies for the improvement of animal health on both sides of the border;
- by March 2002, make progress towards the eradication of scrapie in sheep;
- by April 2001, prepare a Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland incorporating a set of indicators of progress including health-related measures;
- progressively eliminate the backlog in transposing and implementing EC Directives on air, land and water quality;
- by March 2003, achieve a 20% reduction on the 1996 level in the number of high and medium severity water pollution incidents; and

- by end 2002, have in place a policy and legislative framework to deliver our contribution to the targets in the UK Air Quality Strategy.

3.4 *We will modernise and improve hospital and primary care services to ensure more timely and effective care and treatment for patients*

Everyone has a right to timely quality care based on clinical and social need. The health and social care system must be able to respond to assessed individual needs and provide modern flexible services which will make full use of new technologies. At the same time the users of these services must use them with consideration in order that scarce resources are not wasted. We will therefore develop proposals for a modern acute hospital service and take steps where possible to maintain safe and effective services at smaller hospitals.

Actions

We will also implement the following actions:

- work to reduce waiting lists and to ensure improved capacity to meet winter pressures by increasing high dependency beds, implementing a range of new management arrangements and recruiting additional nursing and other front-line staff;
- finalise a strategy for the development of the ambulance services and begin the implementation of an investment programme which will be targeted initially at essential fleet replacement;
- provide some 40-50 extra specialist medical, nursing and other staff to improve provision in services for breast, lung and colorectal cancers to consolidate progress made on the implementation of the cancer strategy;
- continue the major capital redevelopment programmes at the Royal Victoria Hospital and Altnagelvin hospital sites, accelerate the development of ICT systems based on a new ICT strategy and aim to reduce the backlog in essential health and safety/Firecode work;
- finalise a strategy which will replace the GP Fundholding Scheme with fairer, less bureaucratic arrangements in primary care designed to strengthen structures for delivering high quality primary care services in local communities;
- review cardiac services to assess efficiency and effectiveness and develop best practice;

- review the implementation of the community care policy, paying particular attention to hospital admissions and discharge arrangements;
- put in place a framework to raise the quality of services provided to the community, and tackle issues of poor performance; and
- maximise the resources going to front-line care.

3.5 *We will work to enable those suffering from disability or chronic, mental or terminal illness to live normal lives and contribute to society.*

We need to support those with chronic and mental illness, disability or terminal illness to live independently, supporting them and their carers, wherever possible in their own homes and communities. Effective social care should be available to those who have not the means or other resources to get the help they need.

Actions

We will implement the following actions:

- enhance the provision of high quality care for those waiting in the community for suitable care packages by the provision of an additional 230 community care packages;
- provide for enhanced community teams which will facilitate the resettlement of some 35 long-stay patients from hospitals;
- establish a Northern Ireland Social Care Council to regulate the personal social services workforce and raise standards of practice; and
- by 2001, develop a Carers' Strategy which will seek to address properly the needs of this group.

3.6 *We will protect and promote the health and social development of children.*

A healthy start to life is the necessary preparation for a healthy life. We need to reduce infant mortality and take steps to break the cycle of deprivation through

early sustained measures to promote healthy social and emotional development. In particular, we need to improve provision for children in care and support for families. We also need to recognise the important role of play in promoting the health and social development of children and ensure that play facilities are given appropriate priority.

Actions

We will implement the following actions:

- increase coverage of the Sure Start programme targeted at children under 4 in areas of social disadvantage from 11,000 children to 16,000;
- by December 2001, provide some 12 additional residential care places;
- issue new Child Protection guidance, introduce legislation which will put the Pre-employment Consultancy Service register on a statutory footing in line with the Protection of Children Act 1999 and extend the new provisions to cover vulnerable adults;
- introduce legislation to help young people move from care into independent living;
- by December 2001, provide 10 additional child and adolescent inpatient psychiatric beds;
- develop, by December 2001, a strategy for establishing state of the art community play facilities in collaboration with the District Councils and the community and voluntary sector; and
- by 2002, revise the curriculum for schools to enhance the status and impact of health education.

The departments with the main involvement are :

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Department of Environment.
Department for Social Development.
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Department of Education

4. INVESTING IN EDUCATION AND SKILLS

4.1 Introduction

Education and training have a central role to play in our Programme for Government, not only for the social and community development of our society, but as a major engine of our economy. The basic right to education opens new opportunities for the individual and aiding personal and community development. It is essential that we equip our young people particularly with the confidence, abilities and values to live their lives to the full and create a stronger, peaceful society. We will focus on:

- **seeking to provide high quality education to all, with equal access for all;**
- **seeking to ensure that all our young people have the skills and qualifications to gain employment in a modern economy;**
- **enabling people to update their knowledge, skill and qualifications; and**
- **assisting and supporting the socially excluded to enable them to enter or return to the workforce.**

4.1.2 Overview

The underlying objective for our education system is to ensure the highest possible standard of education for all children and young people which will motivate them to achieve their potential, build their confidence and enrich their lives. This will in turn help them to enrich the lives of others and provide the foundation for an inclusive society, a strong and vibrant economy and an incentive for lifelong learning. Education can also help people lead healthier lifestyles.

We are undertaking major reviews of the curriculum, of the structure of second-level education and of school funding. In these reviews, and in the wider development of our policies for education and training at all levels, we will draw on best practice elsewhere in the world, but will focus on meeting the specific and distinctive needs of our own young people and our wider society.

The increasing worldwide focus on knowledge as the key to economic growth underlines the need to get our education and skills policies right. Only in this way will we create and secure a competitive economy.

We already have several advantages to help us meet this challenge. We have a young, expanding population; a high proportion of our young people achieving very good GCSE and A level results; and a high rate of participation in third-level education (although too many of our young people are leaving the region because of the shortage of university places).

That said, there are also major problems of low and under-achievement within schools still to be addressed. We have a high proportion of young people who do not achieve in school and they should be given every opportunity to succeed through access to quality higher and further education. Technical and vocational education and training through further and higher education makes a real contribution at individual, community and economic level. There is, however, a need to raise standards, including the quality of buildings and equipment, to the levels which have been achieved in some other countries. There is also concern that current arrangements for student financial support are an impediment to some with the desire and ability to enter Further and Higher Education and to some students completing their courses. In addition, comparative survey evidence shows that a far lower proportion of Northern Ireland employees have received off-the-job training, and average earnings are only 86% of the UK average.

Furthermore, among the existing workforce there is a significant proportion with few or no formal qualifications and with poor standards of literacy and numeracy. It is those without or with very low qualifications, whether new entrants or members of the existing workforce, who are most vulnerable in a rapidly changing, global economy, and who have most difficulty finding better and higher paid jobs.

Significant inroads into the problem of long-term unemployment have been made. On the other hand, increasing inactivity - particularly among older males - combined with continuing relatively lower activity rates among females suggest that impediments to employment remain. Many of the relevant policies, such as tax, lie at the UK level. But we can still make a difference. We must in particular focus on the needs of the long-term unemployed and on areas of high unemployment, including rural areas.

Our challenge is to equip all of our workforce with the skills, education and aptitudes for a global economy in a way which balances the needs of three groups – new entrants to the labour market; those in employment; and those unemployed who seek employment. These skills have to be suited for the opportunities of the next decade, with an emphasis on higher value-added

business, built on new technology and skills. This will have a major impact on job creation, as set out in the next chapter.

We need an important emphasis on creativity, in all aspects of our economy, including more traditional sectors such as tourism, to realise the unique talents and abilities of individuals that will be essential to building our new economy.

In this Priority area, EU support will play an important complementary role.

4.2 *We will seek to provide high quality education to all, with equal access for all*

In order to improve education for all our young people, we need to give them the best possible start by expanding and enriching pre-school provision. We need a curriculum, assessment and examination system fit for the 21st century and we need to target underachievement, raising standards of literacy and numeracy. Long-term strategies must be complemented by urgent action to support schools serving the most disadvantaged catchments and our funding formula must ensure an equitable distribution of resources sensitive to educational and social need. In addition, we will use the agreed agenda for North/South co-operation to focus on the key areas of underachievement, special educational needs, teacher qualifications and exchanges.

Actions

We will implement the following actions:

- by June 2001, complete the Review of Selection and make decisions on future structures for post-primary education;
- improve school performance by supporting under-achieving schools, small primary schools and increased out of school learning opportunities;
- increase the number of teachers trained in ICT and of schools fully participating in Classroom 2000 technology;
- by 2002/03, provide one year of pre-school education for every child;
- establish an Education Partnership through which all the education partners can participate directly in developing key education strategies;
- provide positive and safe learning conditions for young people by tackling bullying and disruptive behaviour; and

- take forward co-operation in education in the North South Ministerial Council, and specifically to address on a North/South basis educational underachievement and special educational needs and to facilitate the mobility of teachers and school, youth and teacher exchanges.

4.3 *We will seek to ensure that all our young people have the skills and qualifications to gain employment in a modern economy*

Along with our neighbours to the south, we have one of the youngest populations in Europe. It is vital that we make the best possible use of our schools system, further education and training sector, universities and other resources for learning such as libraries and agricultural colleges if our young people are to be properly prepared for their futures. This includes the need for a focus on individual creativity. We also must counter the emergence of the 'digital divide' and explore ways of equipping those living in the most disadvantaged areas to exploit opportunities of technology.

Actions

We will implement the following actions:

- by March 2002, improve ICT and other facilities in Further Education colleges so that we will provide 1 networked PC per 5 students in 17 colleges and complete initial PFI tests for at least one major building project;
- by September 2001, develop an action plan to promote greater integration of entrepreneurship and education;
- by March 2002, increase the proportion of the workforce in agriculture holding vocational qualifications at NVQ Level 3 or higher to 9%;
- in October 2001, initiate a pilot scheme for the development of Foundation Degrees in Northern Ireland;
- during 2001/02, working with the private sector, enhance university research under the Support Programme for University Research (SPUR) initiative;
- extend existing plans for 4,200 additional undergraduate places by 2004 at the University of Ulster and Queen's University, Belfast to 4,400 places by 2004;
- give early and full consideration to the outcome of the Student Support Review;

- invest in the development of Further Education staff to improve standards and student achievement of full or unit passes at NVQ levels 2 to 4 by 5% over 2000/01;
- by September 2001, develop an action plan to identify the opportunities for the enhancement and development of individual creativity; and
- from 2001, assist Youth Service providers to extend access for socially disadvantaged children and young people, including those with severe learning disabilities.

4.4 We will provide lifelong learning opportunities to enable people to update their knowledge, skill and qualifications

Individuals must have access to continuing education and training, including up-to-date learning resources, to maintain and enhance their employability in a fast-changing world. It is also in the interest of employers to invest in and retain their people to maintain their competitiveness. This includes the need in the agricultural sector for new skills to be available to farmers, and also the skills that allow the employed to establish their own businesses.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by April 2002, develop public libraries' technology in support of the National Grid for Learning and Community Grids for Learning;
- during 2001/02, increase the proportions of people in companies who have relevant qualifications. New emphasis will be given to encouraging small companies, including tourism companies, to develop their workforces and managements and enabling them to compete successfully internationally. Sixty small companies (40 from TSN areas) will be targeted to undertake programmes to enhance qualifications and skills and 30 medium/large companies to initiate qualifications/skills improvement programmes related to high growth projects;
- by March 2004, taking account of New TSN principles, provide an additional 12,000 business development training places for farmers;
- encourage the development of a system of lecturer exchange between universities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;
- by November 2001, develop, in partnership with the Arts Council, tailored education and training programmes for individual artists to allow them to

develop to the maximum their potential and offer support and expertise to the emerging creative industries; and

- by April 2001, develop, in conjunction with the Arts Council, an action plan to encourage audience development and increase participation in the arts consistent with the enhancement of opportunities for lifelong learning.

4.5 *We will assist and support the socially excluded to enable them to enter or return to the workforce*

Reducing long-term unemployment is fundamental to tackling a whole range of social and economic problems facing our society – child poverty, community differentials, dependence on the state, alienation and crime among others. The Executive is committed to ensuring that programmes such as New Deal and Welfare Reform Programme give people the skills and incentives which they need to get jobs and escape the cycle of deprivation. In addition it is important that we equip people with those skills, including ICT skills, which are increasingly necessary in the labour market and enable older people to stay in employment if they so choose.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by March 2002, pilot a new training programme for adults with basic literacy and numeracy problems;
- create awareness of entrepreneurship that presents self employment and starting up in business as positive options; and
- by April 2001, put in place facilities to exchange job vacancy information with the Republic of Ireland.

The departments with the main involvement are:

Department of Education
Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Department for Social Development
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

5. SECURING A COMPETITIVE ECONOMY

5.1 Introduction

If we are to achieve a cohesive, inclusive and just society which places people and communities at its centre, it is essential that we create a vibrant economy, to produce employment and wealth for the future. Doing this we must recognise the needs of all; provide sufficient employment opportunities; protect the environment by using our natural resources prudently; and at the same time maintain a high and stable level of economic growth. We will focus on:

- working to ensure that our communications, energy, and physical infrastructure is of the standard that a modern information age economy requires;
- creating a more co-ordinated and efficient planning process;
- promoting competitiveness, enterprise, innovation and creativity;
- working to make Northern Ireland more attractive for inward investment;
- working to increase Northern Ireland's attractiveness to visitors;
- working to improve efficiency in our economy and ensuring that businesses and consumers have access to regulatory services of an international standard;
- working together to regenerate the rural economy; and
- ensuring the protection and enhancement of the environment.

In this priority area, EU support will play an important complementary role.

5.1.1 Creating the infrastructure for competitive regional development

A competitive, knowledge based economy requires the right education, skills and infrastructure policies. While we have good physical infrastructure in certain fields, for example, ports and airports, in recent years we have become acutely aware of deficiencies in the roads, public transport, energy, telecommunications and water and sewerage infrastructure. We face tough decisions on where money can be best spent.

This infrastructure not only serves the economy's needs but also helps to create an improved quality of life in terms of housing, leisure and recreational facilities and access to public services. The development of an effective, safe and reliable road network and a quality public transport system, providing choice while minimising congestion and environmental harm, is central to the future development of the region. The Regional Development Strategy will provide an important planning framework for tackling the deficiencies in our infrastructure and helping the overall development of our economy and society.

5.1.2 Creating the conditions for economic growth

Creating the right conditions for economic growth depends, of course, on much more than putting the physical infrastructure in place. The promotion of enterprise, innovation and creativity are vital if local industry is to compete and prosper in the global economy. So too are policies for business regulation and consumer and employee potential.

Strategy 2010 set out a vision for a knowledge-based economy and recognised the need to integrate a range of industrial development policies, including inward investment, Research & Development, enterprise and the Information Age Initiative, to promote the innovation capacity to achieve this vision. The contribution of education and training, as recognised in the "Investing in Education and Skills" priority, will be huge: the knowledge based economy will need not just skills in new and emerging technologies but creative skills across our economic activity if it is to prosper.

We will take advantage of the North/South Trade and Tourism bodies and any linkages developed via the British-Irish Council.

Creating the right conditions for growth also includes developing the legal framework in relation to matters such as property rights and inheritance. It is affected by fiscal policy and the institutional and legal framework within which finance is available. It requires more positive attitudes to risk. It also involves support for innovation and creativity and the ability to market ourselves abroad as a centre for tourism and investment.

While many of the factors that encourage or inhibit the economy are outside the control of the Executive, we can act in a number of areas. We can for example, at relatively little expense provide information, improve planning and regulation and provide better co-ordination of local economic development.

5.1.3 Regenerating our rural economy

In the rural areas, falling incomes in recent years have increased the difficulties of rural areas and fishing ports. There is a need to assist the modernisation of the agricultural industry and to promote other sources of income generation in the rural economy. We need to support farmers and others who choose to live in the country, as well as addressing access to public services, such as schools, hospitals and transport.

5.1.4 Protection of the Environment

A related issue, particularly relevant to the rural economy, is the protection of the environment. Key aspects of this have been dealt with in relation to public health but it is also of major importance in relation to the development of our economy and infrastructure. The philosophy of sustainability must be integrated into the development of our economy, ensuring that we pass on a high quality environment to our children.

5.2 The Infrastructure for Competition

5.2.1 *We will work to ensure that our transport and communications infrastructure is of the standard that our economy requires*

Business is increasingly being conducted electronically and in order to compete effectively in the global economy, we must have a cutting-edge telecommunications infrastructure, and the Executive will work hard to encourage this. We will also ensure that access to the opportunities provided by e-business is available to all sections of our society and all areas.

The movement of people and goods are equally important, particularly in light of increasing congestion on our road network and long-term under-investment in public transport, especially since a high proportion of households have no access to cars. We must, therefore, use resources innovatively to keep our economy moving while minimising harm to our environment. We also need to provide genuine choice of forms of transport for all, whether we live in rural or urban communities.

We will undertake a programme of roads structural maintenance based on good practice treatments. This will, in time, cut the significant backlog in roads maintenance that has built up over recent years. It will target specifically the non-motorway and non-trunk route network which accounts for 94% of the total network. We must undertake high priority maintenance projects on large bridges, including the Craigavon Bridge, to ensure that key routes are kept open.

We will ensure that the policy and regulatory framework within which ports and airports operate is kept under review. We plan a legislative programme aimed at extending the power of the Trust Ports and improving their public accountability.

We will work in the North/South and East/West contexts to develop co-operation in strategic communications and transport networks with the potential of generating economies of scale. We will also ensure that the EU INTERREG Programme is implemented successfully.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by December 2001, working with the private sector, develop and begin to implement a strategy that will ensure that all of Northern Ireland has a world class telecommunications infrastructure in terms of broadband capacity, access and cost;
- by the summer of 2001, produce a 10-Year Regional Transportation Strategy that will include consideration of new funding sources;
- agree and implement, from the spring of 2001, a strategy for tackling the under investment in rail services in Northern Ireland;
- from 2001, assist Translink to replace its buses after 18 years of service and its coaches after 12 years;
- by spring of 2002, complete a Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan;
- early in 2001, publish the first tranche of legislative proposals for Trust Ports;
- provide assistance for the introduction of a new ticketing system for Translink;

- initiate work on a number of the Strategic Route Improvement schemes announced by the Chancellor in May 1998 and the Minister in April 1999. Network improvements will include 12km of single carriageway and 8km of dual carriageway;
- advance a Railways Safety Bill to provide a new legislative framework to support modern and safe rail travel;
- advance a Transport Bill to facilitate the development of public private partnerships to improve bus and rail services, road user charging and work place car parking levies; and
- by 2001, put into operation 15 rural community transport partnerships.

5.2.2 We will work to ensure that our energy infrastructure meets the standards that our economy requires

Our energy market is relatively small. We must seek to strengthen gas and electricity interconnection North/South and East/West. We also need the progressive opening of these markets. This should help improve business competitiveness and create greater consumer choice at affordable prices.

This approach needs to be linked to a sustainable development policy, which will promote action in all sectors to reduce consumption and encourage the development of renewable sources of energy.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by December 2001, prepare an energy market strategy for Northern Ireland in an all-island and European context;
- by April 2001, working with our Southern counterparts, seek to secure firm private sector proposals for North/South and North/West gas pipelines; and
- by April 2001, seek to secure Northern Ireland Electricity/Electricity Supply Board agreement on action to address the conclusions of a joint feasibility study into further interconnection between their networks.

5.2.3 We will create a more co-ordinated and efficient planning process

We must give careful consideration to where people live and work and other key social, environmental and community factors so that we can plan our public infrastructure most effectively. A Regional Development Strategy will provide the strategic planning framework for this purpose. This will require innovative arrangements at the sub-regional level and regular monitoring to ensure that the Strategy is sufficiently flexible to enable it, Area Development Plans and the Development Control process to respond to emerging trends and opportunities. It will also be necessary, and appropriate to take account of the cross-border context.

Actions

The following actions will be taken:

- the Executive will agree a Regional Development Strategy and seek the Assembly's agreement;
- from the spring of 2001 onwards, we will co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of the Regional Development Strategy;
- in 2001/02, we will issue Regional Planning Policy Statements on Transportation and Land Use, Housing and Settlements, and Retailing and Town centres, and initiate the process to prepare a Regional Planning Policy Statement on the Countryside;
- by end December 2002, we aim to eliminate the backlog of planning applications;
- by end December 2001, we will review the systems for operational planning policy, development planning and development control;
- by end March 2003, we will adopt 5 development plans and publish 7 in draft form;
- we will examine the scope for closer co-ordination with the relevant southern authorities on regional planning, spatial and development issues;
- we will develop and enhance the mapping and geographic information infrastructure by :
 - (a) developing a geographic information policy for Northern Ireland by June 2002; and
 - (b) capturing and providing all significant topographic changes into mapping databases.

5.3 Promoting Economic Growth

5.3.1 *We will promote enterprise, innovation and creativity*

The range of assistance measures to competitive indigenous business continue to be important. We will reassess the contribution of equity and loan capital and Selective Financial Assistance to the achievement of an enterprising, knowledge-based economy.

We must also ensure that administration can contribute most effectively to improving the economy. In the Agenda for Government we announced the reorganisation of the DETI economic development agencies. We will restructure the agencies next year to more effectively focus on the new economic challenges.

We will seek to increase competitiveness in areas such as skills availability, telecommunications, information technology, electronic commerce and supply side management. The work of the North South Trade and Business Development Body will assist us in this.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by March 2002, publish a Northern Ireland Regional Innovation Strategy and separate departmental Research & Development/Innovation strategies;
- promote collaboration between researchers North and South;
- during 2001/02, stimulate the private sector to increase the level and scope of research and development expenditure by 10%;
- by March 2002, increase, in collaboration with the newly established Science Park at Titanic Quarter, QUB and UU, the capacity in research based incubation units across Northern Ireland to sustain 50 high technology/value added new start-up companies each year;
- during 2001/02, promote Northern Ireland as a world-class centre for e-commerce following the strategy set out in *Leapfrog to the Information Age* and working in co-operation on the question with the North/South Trade and Business Development Body and with the British-Irish Council in sectoral format to achieve progress;

- review provision of venture capital in particular seed capital for Small and Medium sized Enterprises, taking account of the work of the North/South Trade and Business Development Body;
- during 2001, implement a small business strategy with a view to achieving better co-ordination and effectiveness of local enterprise support, particularly within disadvantaged and rural areas;
- by April 2001, develop a strategy for the creation of more sustainable business start ups with the potential for future growth;
- by June 2002, complete a programme of research on the potential development of creative industries;
- provide grant aid for private fish farms to improve competitiveness internationally;
- increase further education and training provision in priority skills areas by providing, by March 2002, an additional 500 places in skills shortage areas; and
- by April 2001, working in conjunction with the voluntary and community sectors, agree an integrated approach to the development of the social economy in order to maximise its contribution.

5.3.2 We will work to make Northern Ireland more attractive for inward investment

Inward investment can play a useful role in seeding new sectors and skills in the local economy and increasing high quality employment opportunities. A challenge will be to change international perceptions to ensure that we can be a competitive location for investment and to ensure sufficient investment in areas of disadvantage and high unemployment. We will aim to attract 75% of all first time inward investment projects to such areas. Other actions of the Executive, particularly in relation to skills and education, will be of major importance.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- during 2001/02, working with the universities, further education colleges and the private sector, seek to attract investments by 25 knowledge-based businesses;

- work with the regional groupings of District Councils to co-ordinate marketing information about Northern Ireland and the Council areas as a location for inward investment; and
- complete current work on branding Northern Ireland as an inward investment location and, from June 2001 onwards, roll out agreed new marketing initiatives.

5.3.3 We will work to increase Northern Ireland's attractiveness to visitors

While we are experiencing significant international interest and goodwill we must work to ensure that tourism is developed in a way which exceeds the expectations of visitors and respects our cultural and natural environment. It must also be acceptable to the people who live here as well as being economically viable in the long term. An agreed strategy for the development of tourism will identify priorities for: product development in the area of cultural tourism including events that are unique to Northern Ireland; product development in the area of activity tourism including opportunities for visitors to access our countryside, waterways and coast; visitor servicing including the provision of visitor information; and visitor management in recognition of the need to ensure that the cultural and natural resources available for tourism are not undermined.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by October 2001, have in place a marketing strategy for the promotion of Northern Ireland. This will be taken forward in conjunction with the tourism marketing company for the whole island and with the tourism industry;
- by October 2001, have in place a market focused strategy for the development of tourism. This will be developed by NITB in conjunction with the industry and relevant partners in government;
- by June 2001, develop a programme to enhance the range and quality of culture and leisure facilities;
- take forward the work of Waterways Ireland;
- by March 2003, prepare a strategy to develop the recreational potential of inland waterways as a tourist attraction;

- by March 2002, prepare and initiate an action plan for the development of the public angling estate and make it more attractive to local anglers and visitors from abroad;
- by April 2001, launch a Water Based Tourism Programme; and
- support the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission in its role, including the promotion of the Loughs, aquaculture licensing and marine tourism.

5.3.4 *We will work to improve efficiency in our economy and ensure that business and consumers have access to regulatory services of an international standard*

To improve efficiency in our economy, promote the right conditions for growth and protect consumer rights, it is important that efficient regulatory services - in relation, for example, to the conduct of business and the protection of consumers – are maintained and developed. Accidents and ill health in the work place also reduce the efficiency of the economy and we will continue to put in place, maintain and enforce an effective and up to date health and safety at work regulatory regime.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- from 2001, have in place legislation which updates, clarifies and provides effective remedial action in relation to street trading with the objective of reducing illegal street trading;
- by December 2001, develop and publish a new strategy to enhance consumer knowledge and protection, particularly amongst disadvantaged people and areas, and to encourage businesses to become more competitive by learning from consumers;
- by April 2001, establish an ICT based Information and Advice Centre with regional outlets to provide easy access to information and advice relating to health and safety at work issues;
- by April 2001, complete the first phase of a “Managing Risk – A Key Investment” campaign aimed at reducing the cost and burden of occupational accidents and ill health to the economy; and
- continue to work with the construction industry through the new Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland to promote new

standards for efficiency, innovation and excellence and to improve the public sector's procurement of its services.

5.4 Rural Regeneration

5.4.1 *We will work together to regenerate the rural economy.*

We will develop a programme to modernise and diversify the structure of farming and to assist fishery areas. Our aim will be to have more businesses producing food which people around the world will trust and buy; and to stimulate alternative sources of employment in the countryside, such as in tourism. We will also improve the management and co-ordination of local economic development initiatives in rural areas. This programme will involve close links to the actions in the "Investing in the Education and Skills" priority.

We will examine how public services can fairly be provided in these areas to improve social conditions. We need also to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the region's natural resources and heritage. We will ensure that the rural dimension is routinely considered as part of the making and implementation of policy, by a new process of "rural proofing". We will support the North South Implementation body to promote development of the Foyle and Carlingford areas.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- during 2001, consider the outcome of the Vision for Future of Agri-Food Industry exercise and implement appropriate measures based on these considerations. Examples could include:
 - integrated food information and learning centre;
 - organic farming; and
 - farm waste/nutrient management;
- by 2006/7, under the Beef Quality Initiative, increase the number of clean cattle achieving E/U and R grades to 30,000 and 150,000 respectively per annum;
- consider an enhanced Forestry Programme involving environmental and recreational improvements and expansion of woodlands;
- by December 2001, initiate a Natural Resource Rural Tourism Programme targeted at disadvantaged areas;

- between 2000-2006, assist the sea fishing industry to adjust its fishing effort in line with the availability of stocks, and to develop in a sustainable way;
- participate at European level in efforts to ensure the recovery of Irish Sea cod;
- establish a Ministerial-led Group to proof all government policies for their rural impact; and
- develop a strategy to promote rural development in a cross-border context.

5.5 Protecting the Environment

5.5.1 *We will work to ensure the protection and enhancement of the environment*

Environmental protection, to ensure sustainability for our economic activity, is essential. A key issue therefore is to ensure effective protection of the environment, to a high level, as an integral part of our economic planning, and ensuring that the polluter pays. A high quality environment with good quality water and air and an unpolluted environment are important parts of building our future economy, for example in tourism, and a major focus must be maintained on this issue. Protection, conservation and enhancement of the environment is a key aspect of our policy on the development of the countryside, as part of the regeneration of the rural economy.

Services such as water and sewerage, which are absolutely essential to quality of life, attract most attention when things go wrong. We will use whatever levers we can to ensure continuity of these basic services, and to promote competition where it leads to greater effectiveness. There has been a major under-investment in these services over the last decades, and along with transport there are serious problems that need to be addressed in the coming years. The provision of wholesome drinking water and effective wastewater disposal through the management of a modern water and sewerage network is critical to the future development of the region. This issue fits closely with chapter 7, "Working Together", in which the search for alternative sources of funding for public services will be considered.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by April 2001, publish a strategy for sustainable development;

- assist District Councils in implementing acceptable arrangements for the disposal of waste by production of Group Waste Management Plans;
- achieve 80% compliance with the waste water treatment works discharge standards set by the Environment and Heritage Service;
- maintain effective arrangements for the treatment and disposal of sewage and sewage sludge;
- achieve 98.2% compliance with drinking water standards set in the Water Quality Regulations (NI) 1994;
- during 2001, publish NI Biodiversity Strategy;
- work in the North South Ministerial Council on environmental co-operation, concentrating in the initial work programme on environmental research, water quality management and waste management;
- produce, by end of 2001, a strategy seeking to reduce eutrophication levels through a combination of advice and research;
- during 2001/2002, extend the area of woodland by 700 hectares and continue to manage our woodlands sustainably;
- by March 2004, taking account of New TSN, provide an additional 12,000 places for environmental training for farmers; and
- ensure the conservation and protection of fish stocks by providing grant-aid to the Fisheries Conservancy Board by April 2001 to enable the Board to carry out effectively its statutory conservation functions.

The departments with the main involvement are:

Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment
 Department of Further and Higher Education Training and Employment
 Department of the Environment
 Department for Regional Development
 Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
 Department of Culture Arts and Leisure
 Department of Finance and Personnel
 Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

6. DEVELOPING NORTH/SOUTH, EAST/WEST AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In the Agreement, unique structures were established within the Island of Ireland, within the United Kingdom, and East/West to provide a new basis for relationships.

6.2 North/South

We will take forward co-operation through the North/South Ministerial Council, and in particular through the Areas for Co-operation and the North/South implementation bodies agreed on the 18 December 1998.

This administration together with the Irish Government will be seeking to realise the full potential for enhanced co-operation.

As part of the implementation of the Programme for Government the Executive will consider tabling relevant sections in the North South Ministerial Council. A similar approach will be adopted for the British Irish Council and the Joint Ministerial Committee.

The North/South Ministerial Council brings together ministers from Northern Ireland and the Irish Government, under the authority of the NI Assembly and Oireachtas, on a regular basis, to develop consultation, co-operation and action on an all-island and cross-border basis on matters of mutual interest. The Council established a work programme in six specific Areas for Co-operation. These are Tourism, Agriculture, Environment, Transport, Education and Health, and include a North/South tourism marketing company.

In addition, six all-island Bodies, established by international agreement between the British and Irish Governments, came into being on 2 December 1999, and will implement the policies agreed by the ministers in the North/South Ministerial Council. The new bodies are: Waterways Ireland; the Food Safety Promotion Board; the Trade and Business Development Body; the Special EU Programmes Body; the North/South Language Body; and the Foyle, Carlingford & Irish Lights Commission.

The existing work programmes of the implementation bodies and areas of co-operation have been transcribed into the actions and targets of this Programme for Government under the first four of the five priorities. They are not

therefore reproduced in this overview chapter. Wherever they appear in this document, these actions are those agreed either on 18 December 1998 or in subsequent meetings of the North South Ministerial Council and the Implementation Bodies. The Executive will focus on delivering tangible actions for mutual benefit on an all-island and cross-border basis.

Actions

Some of the practical actions that we see developing in the short term include:

- a cross-cutting study on barriers to mobility and living/working North/South will be completed in 2000/01 and appropriate action considered;
- in 2000/01, consideration of proposals and of appropriate action on enhancing competitiveness of the two economies on the island; and
- in 2001, completion of a study of an independent North/South consultative forum. Such a forum if established would comprise representatives of civil society and serve to widen links at the level of people in both parts of the Island.

North/South co-operation and European Funding

North/South co-operation is particularly important as regards European Structural Funds Plans. A Common Chapter in the Structural Funds programmes North and South will help to build new and develop existing plans for co-operation on an all-island and a cross border basis. The Common Chapter will help to take forward not only the agreed co-operation areas including the Special EU programmes but also identifies other areas such as Energy, Communications and Electronic Commerce and Human Resource Development. The INTERREG Community initiative specifically promotes cross border development and there are important North/South dimensions to LEADER and PEACE. The PEACE II Programme and all of the Community initiatives, including URBAN, together with the Common Chapter, will be taken forward by the Special EU Programmes body, working with the lead departments North and South.

Actions

Key actions in relation to European Union Funds include:

- the development of the strategic framework for co-operation set out in the Common Chapter;

- the development, through the EU Special Programmes Body, of a co-ordinated approach to the Community Initiatives to deliver mutual benefit. This would involve spending of at least £100m over 2000-2006 in Northern Ireland;
- the minimum provision of 400 meuro (some £240m) over 2000-2006, in the Community Support Frameworks (CSFs) North and South, for North/South co-operation in joint fulfilment of the Common Chapter and to optimise the level of accompanying investment. Of this, 100 meuro (or some £60m) would be spent in the North. This objective will be monitored by the EU Special Programmes body;
- within the 400 meuro for North/South co-operation in the Community Support Frameworks, ensure that at least 15% of the Peace Programme is used to promote cross border reconciliation and to exploit the growing opportunities for cross border development. Areas will include business and culture, infrastructure, co-operation between public bodies and community reconciliation, particularly women, the young and the socially excluded.

6.3 Co-operation within the United Kingdom

Under the Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements between the UK Government, Scottish Ministers, the Cabinet for the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Executive, a Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC), which comprises representatives of the above administrations, has been established. The committee's role is to consider non-devolved matters that impinge on devolved responsibilities and vice-versa. It can also consider devolved matters where all parties agree that there is mutual benefit to sharing information. Sub-committees have already been established on:

- the knowledge economy;
- poverty;
- and health.

The Joint Ministerial Committee will also keep under review arrangements for liaison between the UK Government and the devolved administrations and consider disputes between the administrations.

The Executive will also play a role in other United Kingdom Committees as these evolve. These include the MINECOR Committee to co-ordinate the presentation of public policy towards Europe, the Sports Cabinet, the Creative Industries Task Force, the Drugs Task Force and the Agriculture Ministers Committee.

In the coming year we will take forward work in the JMCs and in other UK committees on issues including health, poverty and the knowledge economy.

6.4 East/West

The British-Irish Council has been established under the Agreement to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the people of these islands. It includes representatives of the UK Government, the Irish Government, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly and the administrations in the Isle of Man and Channel Islands as well as the Northern Ireland Executive.

The British Irish Inter-Governmental Conference has been established to bring together the British and Irish Governments and, where relevant, Executive Ministers to promote bilateral co-operation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competency of both governments, including non-devolved Northern Ireland matters.

Actions:

In the coming year we will:

- co-operate with other administrations particularly by playing an active role in the British Irish Council and the BIIGC;
- explore the more widespread availability of Irish language television channels in Northern Ireland;
- lead work in the British Irish Council on Transport and participate in the work on Social Inclusion, Environment, Drugs and other topics;
- in the BIIGC, continue to pursue the fuel tax issue and other matters of importance to Northern Ireland; and
- ensure coherence between developments in these bodies and our Programme for Government.

6.5 Europe

Our focus will be on developing effective links in the European institutions, and throughout Europe to further the interests of Northern Ireland.

The Executive Committee values the good relationship it has established with the European Institutions and acknowledges the unique level of support it has received especially through the Peace Reconciliation Fund.

The Executive will develop this relationship in particular by establishing an office in Brussels in the coming months. This will assist Ministers and their departments in ensuring that Northern Ireland's interests are represented as European policy is agreed.

We will develop strategies as appropriate in key areas such as Structural Funds, agriculture, competition, the internal market, environment and the Single Currency. Further we will seek to ensure that our interests in European Union issues are effectively represented in Whitehall, Brussels and Strasbourg.

We will organise a regular forum involving all major Northern Ireland organisations involved in EU issues together with the NI MEPs, members of the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, to review priorities and examine how we can co-operate to present the Northern Ireland case.

Further, other opportunities within Europe, to build links and to exchange information on policies with other regions, will be sought. For example, in 2001/02 we will implement the new EQUAL Initiative in Northern Ireland. Through this Community initiative, transnational partners will be able to test innovative ways of promoting employment for disadvantaged individuals and groups.

We will also seek to help build and develop knowledge, expertise and experience of European issues across all relevant sectors of the economy and society, so as to build the capacity to deal with the challenge of being part of the European Union.

6.6 North America

The Executive recognises the considerable help it receives from the Washington administration and the recent strong flows of investment from North America. We will take steps to better co-ordinate our activities and to establish the stronger image and identity associated with successful Devolution.

In 2001 we will consider how we might strengthen and reorganise the structure and working of the NI Bureau in Washington to better serve the Executive, and how we can use it and other organisations in North America to raise the profile and image of Northern Ireland. In this work we will consider how a programme of visits and exchanges between Northern Ireland and North America might be best used to build links.

6.7 International image of Northern Ireland

Our history has left the international image of Northern Ireland generally tarnished, although there is a growing awareness of the positive aspects of our society. It will be important that a consistent strategy is developed by a range of public and other organisations to help change perceptions world-wide.

In this work, the organisations promoting tourism, (including the North/South tourism marketing company) inward investment, and the region generally all have important roles to play. Likewise the development of tourism and promotional activities within Northern Ireland, including sporting and cultural events, and the promotional work carried out by the local councils, have important roles to play. The Executive Information Service also has a key communications role to play. There are also many organisations outside Northern Ireland which support our efforts. A high priority is the development of an agreed strategy on how we can co-operate to improve our international image.

Actions

We will take forward the following actions:

- implement a strategy for securing a programme of high profile international sporting and cultural events to Northern Ireland, attracting 2 world class events and 4-6 major international events annually;
- increase the proportion of funding by the private sector for these events;
- by December 2001, develop a marketing strategy to promote awareness of our cultural treasures and recreational facilities; and
- by March 2002, to work with the other stakeholders in developing a programme to support Northern Ireland's bid for 2008 European City of Culture.

The departments with the main involvement are:

While the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has lead responsibility in this area, all departments are involved.

7. WORKING TOGETHER

7.1 Introduction

A key aspect of the difference that the new Executive wants to make is in how it runs government. There will be the need, from the outset, for the Executive to lead the most effective and accountable form of government in Northern Ireland. We must use our resources to best effect, to make a real difference. We need to lead change, and draw in the many organisations that share our commitment to change. To be successful we recognise that we must operate in partnership with the other key stakeholders in society – the private, the voluntary and the community sectors. The delivery of our Programme for Government must harness the energy, dedication and resource of these stakeholders in genuine partnership to build a more tolerant, participative and inclusive society.

For this reason, within our departments, we must demonstrate effectiveness, efficiency and economy. And at the same time we must ensure accountability to the people of Northern Ireland.

7.1.1 Overview

There are several external and internal pressures driving this change process:

- the need to press for a fair allocation of UK public expenditure to Northern Ireland. The Barnett formula that is used to determine our levels of public expenditure fails to address our needs and will result in lower public expenditure growth in Northern Ireland than in England, Scotland and Wales. Further, with the need for significant investment in our infrastructure alternative means of financing this expenditure will need to be sought.
- the need to develop a more joined up and strategic approach to policy making than Northern Ireland has had in the past, with poor communications between departments. We are determined to provide services in a way that addresses public need, not the need of our departments or agencies. Further the public has a right to high quality and efficient public services, including the best use of modern technology. Our staff who serve the public are equally keen to achieve this and to be proud of the services they run.
- the need to consider the rationalisation of public administration so that resources can be used best to serve the public rather than maintaining bureaucratic structures. We have inherited from the last 30 years a wide range of public bodies. Their organisation and structure reflected the needs of those times. They helped maintain services at a time of very limited public accountability. But now that devolution has been achieved, there is a need for change that will provide not only greater accountability, but should

ensure that the organisations that deliver many key services throughout Northern Ireland are much more coherently organised.

It is therefore important that we set about a major process of reform in central government.

The previous chapters have set out the overall priorities of the Executive Committee. This will guide the work of the departments and their agencies. In particular it will set out the way in which cross-cutting policies will be taken forward in the Executive, seeking to provide the best value for money in terms of policy and service delivery. Only in this way can we tackle many of the tough social and economic issues that we face.

However, the Executive is only one of the bodies with responsibility for the future of Northern Ireland. Local government and the rich tradition of voluntary, community and other bodies have a great deal to give in creating the just and prosperous society that we all seek.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act has also created a requirement for full consultation with interested parties on the equality impact of policies, while the Civic Forum provides an opportunity to hear the views of a wide number of bodies. We will seek to use these organisations to the full, to seek views on the development of policy.

The Executive will develop its links with local government, the social partners and other organisations to improve both the process of policy development and of service delivery. Local authorities have a knowledge of the needs of their areas and a capacity to ensure effective co-ordination and leadership.

7.2 *We will modernise government and make it more open and accessible to the public*

We will ensure that public servants are appropriately skilled to provide better, more modern services, taking advantage of the opportunities posed by new technologies and taking account of rising public expectations.

Key to this will be to meet the needs of the public in a coherent way, linking together services provided by different departments and indeed different parts of the public sector, in an easily accessible, joined up way.

Part of this will involve the improved availability of information about government, and the development of ways to consult more widely about the development of policies, taking full account of the diversity in our society in terms of community background, social class, need and language. The policy development roles of the Assembly Committees and institutions such as the

Civic Forum will provide one basis for such wider consultation while Freedom of Information legislation will provide greater access. The Executive may seek additional ways to develop and expand dialogue with significant actors in other sectors of the community.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by March 2001, publish a Corporate Strategic Framework for e-government which will provide the foundation to co-ordinate the delivery of government services electronically and will address key issues such as social inclusion and freedom of information;
- by March 2001, publish a Corporate IT Strategy which will include the technical policies, standards and guidelines which will facilitate inter-connectivity and inter-operability of IT application in departments and enable the delivery of electronic services to citizens and businesses. In support of this work we will initiate projects such as the next phases of the Public Service Network to ensure consistency, security, resilience and efficiency of the ICT infrastructure;
- manage the provision of integrated network services which will provide cost-effective telecommunications services for departments; these services may be made available to appropriate parts of the wider public sector;
- set and monitor departmental progress towards meeting targets for electronic service delivery;
- develop a NI government portal on the Internet and manage an ongoing programme directed at simplifying the interactions between citizens and government;
- work with the community and voluntary sectors to maximise the opportunities for access to modern technologies; and
- introduce Freedom of Information legislation.

7.3 *We will improve the efficiency of public services*

There is a need to improve continuously the quality of public services and to maximise the output from the public sector. We will also look at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of how the public sector procures goods and

services. New means of achieving improvement, using new technology and new business approaches, need to be introduced into the Northern Ireland public sector to ensure the maximum benefit for the public.

We are undertaking two major change processes entitled "Roads Service: Delivering Excellence", and "Water Service: Moving Forward". The processes involve a wide ranging review of the policy and financial context within which both agencies operate, and aim to improve the efficiency and value for money with which Roads, Water and Sewerage Services are delivered.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- establish an effective system of regularly reviewing all major policy areas;
- establish an effective system of reviewing major service provision and all NDPBs;
- publish annual Service Delivery Agreements for all departments and agencies, setting out the expected levels of service the public can expect; and
- develop and implement proposals to improve Public Procurement.

7.4 We will reform public administration

There can be no doubt that, while a conscientious body of people displayed great commitment in running Northern Ireland's public services through the period of Direct Rule, many of them organised in Non-departmental Public Bodies and District Councils, different structures will be required under devolution. The Executive is committed to greater accountability than in the past at regional level, and will expect greater accountability for all services through a more efficient and effective structure of administration at local level.

We strongly endorse the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) policy "that all eligible persons have equal opportunity for employment and advancement in the NICS on the basis of their ability, qualifications and aptitude for the work".

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- complete the Review of Public Administration;

- by June 2001, in the context of an accommodation review, examine the scope for decentralisation of civil service jobs, taking account of a range of factors and relevant policies, including the number of such jobs already in an area in relation to the local workforce, equality of opportunity, New TSN, the regional planning strategy, business efficiency, service delivery and cost; and
- publish regular reports on the compositional profile of the NICS and on action being taken to address under-representation.

7.5 *We will find new ways of financing our public services*

The resources available from the taxpayer are finite, and in particular are stretched by the need to provide services for a higher proportion of young people and to tackle higher levels of social disadvantage than the UK average. We have however a major need for significant investment, in particular in areas of our infrastructure.

Addressing the deficiencies in our infrastructure will require us to continue to press for a fair allocation of UK public expenditure to Northern Ireland and to explore new ways of financing and providing public services.

We must also ensure that we obtain maximum benefit from National Lottery, EU and international funding sources while they are available.

In addition, we shall put in place arrangements which ensure that the rates provide an adequate level of funding for public expenditure and that there is an equitable distribution of the rate burden on households and businesses.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- by 2002, have reviewed the opportunities for the use of private finance in all major public service provisions and decided whether Public Private Partnership/Private Finance Initiative is practicable;
- by spring 2002, have considered the use of congestion and other charges, and decided whether their use is practicable; and
- by March 2002, complete a review of rating policy so as to have any required legislation in place to implement any policy changes by April 2003.

7.6 We will ensure that all public sector resources are used for the means intended.

Action

We will take the action across departments to reduce losses due to fraud. For example:

- in each of the years 2000/01, 2001/02 and 2002/03, we will reduce levels of Social Security fraud and error in Income Support, Job Seekers' Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Invalid Care Allowance by 5%;
- we will review on an annual basis progress against target of reducing prescription fraud by 50% against 1997/98 levels by 2003.

7.7 *We will seek to work in partnership with Local Government and the Social Partners*

In tackling many of the Programme for Government issues, we have the advantage of a vibrant and extensive community and voluntary sector which makes a significant and crucial contribution to many aspects of the social, economic, environmental and cultural life of Northern Ireland. We are committed to building stronger partnerships with the voluntary and community sector to work together as social partners to maximise benefits for society.

Actions

We will take the following actions:

- in 2001, we will promote the partnership between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector by developing a strategy to implement the COMPACT;
- during 2001, we will issue a strategy on the Government funding of the voluntary and community sector;
- in 2001, we will announce a new role, structure and remit for the Voluntary Activity Unit to better reflect our desire to work in partnership with the sector; and
- work with District Councils, social partners, the North/South Special EU Programmes Body and other bodies through the Monitoring Committees on

the EU Structural Funds, to ensure the Programmes are developed and implemented in a working partnership.

The departments with the main involvement are:

While the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and the Department of Finance and Personnel have lead responsibilities in many of these areas, all departments are involved. The Department for Social Development has the lead responsibility with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

8. ANNEXES

ANNEX A - FINANCING OUR WORK

Table A below summarises the overall Budget allocations to departments announced by the Minister of Finance and Personnel on 17 October. Table B shows the indicative allocations over the next three years made in the Budget to the five Executive Programme Funds.

TABLE A

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE PLANS: 2001/02 Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL)

	£ million
Agriculture and Rural Development	191
Culture, Arts and Leisure	71
Education	1332
Enterprise, Trade and Investment	259
Environment	100
Finance and Personnel	113
Health, Social Services and Public Safety	2284
Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment	544
Regional Development	460
Social Development	413
Office of the First and Deputy First Minister	29
Other Departments	5
Northern Ireland Assembly	39
TOTAL DEPARTMENTAL DEL	5839
Executive Programme Funds	16
EU Peace & Reconciliation Programmes (I & II)	89
Regional Rate and Other Items	-210
TOTAL OTHER DEL	-105
TOTAL OVERALL DEL	5734

Figures may not sum due to rounding

TABLE B

EXECUTIVE PROGRAMME FUNDS

£ million

	2001/02 Plans	2002/03 Plans	2003/04 Plans
<i>Social Inclusion/Community Regeneration</i>	3	15	30
<i>Service Modernisation</i>	3	10	20
<i>New Directions</i>	2	25	35
<i>Infrastructure/Capital Renewal</i>	6	40	100
<i>Children Fund</i>	2	10	15
<i>Total Funds</i>	16	100	200
TOTAL DEPARTMENTAL EXPENDITURE LIMIT	5734	6039	6360

ANNEX B - EQUALITY ASPECTS

Draft Programme for Government – An Equality Impact Assessment

1. Background

1.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:-

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

1.2 In addition, without prejudice to the above obligation, public authorities should also, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

1.3 Schedule 9 of the Act requires public authorities to prepare equality schemes, which should state, inter alia, arrangements for assessing the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. Schedule 9 also requires that a public authority, in publishing the results of an assessment, should give details of any consideration given to measures which might mitigate the adverse impact of that policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.

1.4 In the Equality Scheme for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), submitted to the Equality Commission in July 2000, there was a recognition that the Programme for Government was not a conventional policy or programme to which the standard approach to an Equality Impact Assessment, as laid down by the Equality Commission, could be applied. As indicated in the OFMDFM Equality Scheme, the Equality Commission has been consulted on how best to assess the Programme for Government.

1.5 The Programme for Government identifies the vision and priorities of the Executive Committee and also sets out key policies, programmes, actions and targets associated with each priority. In terms of its vision the Programme for Government is very much equality oriented:-

Our vision – as set out in the Agreement - is of a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society, firmly founded on the “achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and the protection and vindication of the human rights of all”. It is a vision also based on “partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South and between these islands”

- 1.6 The three themes – cohesion, inclusion and justice – are regarded in the Programme as relevant to the implementation of all policies and programmes. The New Targeting Social Need policy has also been adopted as a strategic approach to tackling social disadvantage by the devolved administration. This approach has been integrated into the Programme for Government.
- 1.7 Equality is also reflected in its priorities. The priority ‘Growing as a Community’ includes as a specific area for action the promotion of equality and human rights. It also includes actions on tackling poverty and social disadvantage and the regeneration of disadvantaged neighbourhoods which are likely to complement and reinforce actions directly aimed at promoting equality of opportunity as defined by Section 75. The priority ‘Working for a healthier people’ aims to tackle the underlying causes of ill-health including social and economic disadvantage. The remaining two priorities, “Investing in Education and Skills” and “Securing a Competitive Economy” can facilitate and underpin equality objectives. Education and training are often regarded as a means of ensuring greater equality of opportunity while a strong competitive economy can provide the growth in employment and incomes which allows equality objectives to be achieved more easily.
- 1.8 While it is possible to identify individual actions in the Programme for Government which directly promote equality objectives, it is not possible to carry out a detailed equality impact assessment on the overall, combined impact of the actions contained within the Programme for Government. These actions form part of Departmental policies which, when they have a significant impact on equality of opportunity, will be subject to equality impact assessment by individual departments as set out in their Equality Schemes.
- 1.9 Over time as this information becomes available it may be feasible to carry out more comprehensive equality impact assessments on future Programmes for Government, especially where the revisions seek a comparatively marginal shift in expenditure. The appropriate methodology to do this will need to be developed.

2. Consultation

- 2.1 Consultation is a key element of any Equality Impact Assessment; it has been an integral part of the development of the Programme for Government. Prior to

the publication and presentation to the Assembly of the first draft of the Programme for Government over 50 organisations were invited to make submissions on the key priorities and likely content of such a document.

- 2.2 This was followed up by a Stakeholders' conference on 2 October for the social partners including the community and voluntary sectors and a wide range of public services to further discuss their views. When making nominations each sector was asked to take account of the need to achieve balance of attendance which broadly reflected the composition of the community in terms of age, gender, community background and geographical distribution. Following the publication of the draft Programme and Budget documents a further consultation exercise, of which this draft is a central part, is planned. The draft Programme for Government is available on the internet and in a range of formats to maximise the opportunity for further consultation before it is finalised.
- 2.3 The review of the Programme will be an annual process. The timing of the production of this, the first draft Programme has proved difficult due to suspension, and because there was no existing template of a Programme on which to seek comment. The Economic Policy Unit will be examining how consultation can be built into the development of the Programme in 2001-02.
- 2.4 The following section gives an analysis of the equality impact of the different priority areas for action.

3. GROWING AS A COMMUNITY

This Priority directly addresses issues of equality of opportunity through actions by OFMDFM and other departments.

3.1 *Effective Promotion of Equality and Human Rights*

This underscores the fact that all parts of the devolved administration will be subject to Section 75 statutory obligations on equality of opportunity and to the provisions of the Human Rights Act. Equality considerations must be mainstreamed into the full range of their policies. In addition, it includes specific actions by OFMDFM and other departments which should enhance the equality of opportunity of specific Section 75 groups:

- strategic frameworks for tackling gender and race inequality;
- support for ethnic minority groups and projects;
- training and employment support for people with disabilities;
- access to cultural and leisure facilities for people with disabilities.

A proposed Single Equality Bill potentially could benefit a broad range of categories, taking into account developments in European Union law, as well as existing anti-discrimination law in Northern Ireland.

Other actions could also benefit a range of categories:

- Senior Civil Service review;
- provision of Health and Personal Social Services; and
- strengthening of Fair Employment and Industrial Tribunal system.

3.2 *Needs of Victims*

Victims of the conflict are overwhelmingly male. However, many women are represented among the relatives of victims and those responsible for the care of severely injured victims. Many victims have disabilities and may require services specific to their disability.

3.3 *Combating Social Exclusion and Poverty, with a Particular Emphasis on Children*

This will operate in the context of the New TSN policy to which the devolved administration is committed. As social disadvantage is unevenly distributed through the population (eg people with disabilities and elderly people are more likely to be deprived) implementation of this policy may indirectly advantage certain groups within the Section 75 categories. This is fully justified by the primary objective of the policy, ie reducing incidence of social disadvantage.

Those actions which target child poverty are directly discriminatory on the basis of age. This is, again, justifiable in terms of the social policy objective and the specific needs of children. Similar justification can be made for travel concessions for the elderly. Specific provision for Travellers' accommodation and education is justified by the special needs of that ethnic minority group.

Actions dealing with the integration of welfare and employment services, and employability will have a beneficial impact on the unemployed. In carrying forward the work on employability, account should be taken of the fact that some definitions of "unemployed" under-represent the numbers of women who are available and willing to work.

3.4 *Social Housing*

These actions concern the provision of social housing by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations. The provision of social housing is assessed by objective need on an individual/family basis. Within that general policy, particular provision for the elderly, people with disabilities and special groups (eg Travellers) is made.

Within the proposed actions, adaptations to buildings will clearly enhance equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. Other actions may involve prioritisation on an area basis. It would be necessary to ensure there is equitable treatment for areas with predominantly Protestant and Catholic populations, within the context of prioritisation by need.

3.5 *Regeneration of Towns, Cities and Rural areas, particularly the most Disadvantaged*

Most of the actions in this section target area disadvantage. This can be done using objective criteria of need. As with housing provision, it will be necessary to ensure that predominantly Protestant and predominantly Catholic neighbourhoods receive equitable treatment, within the context of targeting on the most needy neighbourhoods.

There is evidence that community development in Protestant areas is less developed than in Catholic areas. In the past, this is led to claims that Protestant areas are less able to avail of neighbourhood renewal programmes. Active outreach measures to disadvantaged working-class Protestant areas may help to ensure that this pattern is not repeated.

Community renewal projects also offer opportunities for enhancing the equality of opportunity of women. This will be particularly relevant in the Rural Development Programme and LEADER + to ensure that women play a full role in rural community regeneration.

3.6 *Sustaining and Enhancing Local Communities*

This includes both actions to enhance local community infrastructure and to provide cultural and leisure facilities at local level.

There are imbalances in the extent and strength of voluntary sector activity within the two main religio-political communities. Traditionally, working-class Protestant communities have been slower to organise effectively at community level and to participate in community development programmes. This pattern can be countered by active outreach measures. One of the actions proposed involves work on housing issues to help strengthen areas of weakest community infrastructure.

Actions for developing arts, culture and leisure provision at community level should also aim for equitable uptake by Protestants and Catholics. In addition, the need to ensure participation in these activities by women, people with disabilities, children, old people and members of ethnic minorities should be taken into account at the implementation stage. The development of the role of libraries as Community Information Hubs will improve overall access to information and knowledge.

One action involves a pilot capital fund to improve physical infrastructure of sporting facilities. Sport in Northern Ireland predominantly caters for men and, in some cases, particular sports and teams are associated with one or other of the main religio-political communities. In the implementation of the fund, particular care will need to be taken to ensure that there is no indirect discrimination in terms of gender or religion. The needs of people with disabilities, both as spectators and participants in sport, should also be taken into account.

3.7 *Improving Community Relations*

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act includes, not only obligations on equality of opportunity, but also a requirement to have regard to the desirability of improving relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. This section directly addresses community relations issues. It does so against the background of a long standing Government community relations programme and the changing social and political context brought about by the Belfast Agreement and devolution. Among the actions is the review and development of an inter-departmental strategy for community relations. This review will need to take into account the implications of the community relations programme for all of the Section 75 categories, not only Protestants and Catholics. The actions on integrated education and citizenship in the school curriculum impact directly on children and young people. This is fully justifiable, given the specific remit of the education service.

3.8 *Respecting and Celebrating Cultural and Linguistic Diversity*

This is also related to the promotion of good relations between people of different religion and racial group. Several of the actions relate to provision for minority languages in the context of the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. This Charter relates to indigenous minority languages (Irish and Ulster Scots). The Charter does not extend to the languages of ethnic minority communities. The linguistic needs of these communities will need to be taken into account, as well as those of Irish and Ulster Scots users.

Irish and Ulster Scots are closely associated with the Catholic community and the Protestant community respectively, though their promoters would deny that either is exclusive to those communities. It will be necessary to ensure equitable treatment between the two languages, taking account of different patterns of usage and levels of development.

The action on Diversity 21 will take account of the broad range of cultural heritage in Northern Ireland, including the traditions of the ethnic minority communities. It should also seek to ensure full participation by women, people of all ages and people with disabilities in cultural and leisure activities.

One of the actions relate to Irish medium education. Pupils and teachers in the Irish medium sector will be overwhelmingly of Catholic and Nationalist community background. To the extent that these actions are designed to provide pupils and teachers with facilities of a similar level to other sectors, this should not constitute indirect discrimination.

4. WORKING FOR A HEALTHIER PEOPLE

This Priority will potentially affect everyone in society and it provides opportunities to promote equality of opportunity in terms of all Section 75 categories. All individuals make direct use of organised health facilities at some point in their lives. Indirectly, the economy and society as a whole benefits from improvements in general levels of health. Reductions in the rate of accidents of all kinds make a positive impact on productivity.

However, some of the specific actions within this Priority have particular implications for certain of the Section 75 categories: men and women; people of different ages; people with dependants; people with disabilities.

In the following commentary on this Priority, special attention will be paid to those groups which have particular health needs - people with disabilities; women; children and young people under 18; people over 65.

4.1 Reduction of Preventable Disease, Ill-Health and Health Inequalities

This explicitly aims to reduce health inequalities and improve social wellbeing. Within the context of Section 75, several of the Actions are likely to have differential impacts on particular groups.

Children and young people - Reduction of teenage pregnancy and parenthood; primary immunisations; drugs strategy; increased participation in sport; road safety; reduction in proportion of the population who smoke.

Women - Reduction in teenage pregnancy and parenthood; increased participation in sport; reduction in proportion of the population who smoke.

People with disabilities - Increased participation in sport.

4.2 Ensuring that the Environment Supports Health Living

These Actions and Targets are of benefit to everyone in society and there is no evidence of differential impact or discrimination in terms of any Section 75 category.

4.3 Modernisation of Hospital and Primary Care Services

These Actions and Targets will potentially improve access to hospital care for all. Additional provision to meet winter pressures will directly benefit the medically vulnerable, including children and old people. Specialist provision for cancer treatment may have differential gender and age impacts.

Location of hospital facilities and access to ambulance services are often issues which give rise to concern at local level.

These Actions will directly benefit people with disabilities, elderly people and people with responsibility for dependants. Improved accessibility to cultural and leisure facilities will directly benefit people with disabilities. DHSSPS has undertaken to improve the quantitative and qualitative information it collects to ensure more effective monitoring of the implications of these actions for the Section 75 categories.

4.4 Enabling those suffering from chronic and mental illness, disability or terminal illness to live normal lives and contribute to society

These Actions and Targets will particularly benefit older people, people with disabilities and their dependants.

4.5 Health and Social Development of Children

These Actions and Targets will directly benefit children and young people. Legislation on the Pre-employment Consultancy Service register will not only have a direct benefit for vulnerable children, but also adults with learning disabilities.

In summary, many of the actions envisaged under this Priority directly target people with disabilities, women, children, and old people. This is fully justified by the particular health needs of these sectors of society. The Priority should make a genuine contribution to reducing inequalities. However, these actions also

have the potential to improve equality of opportunity for other Section 75 categories and it is important therefore to ensure ongoing monitoring of the impact of the actions for all categories. Potential unjustified differential impacts may only emerge during the implementation phase, eg in terms of gender and age for acute hospital and cancer provision, in terms of religion/political opinion for the location of hospital and ambulance services.

5. INVESTING IN EDUCATION AND SKILLS

This Priority will impact not only on children and young people, but also on adults in employment or seeking employment. This Priority may have particular implications for the following Section 75 categories: men and women; people of different ages; people with dependants; people with disabilities; people of different religion or political opinion; people of different racial group.

Aspects of this Priority relate to tackling long term unemployment. Higher percentages of Catholics than Protestants in the labour force (particularly males) experience long term unemployment. Measures to address the problems of the long term unemployed are thus likely to impact differentially in favour of Catholics. However, this would not constitute indirect discrimination, as these measures would be aimed at dealing with genuine social need, provided that objective criteria were used to determine eligibility.

5.1 High Quality Education with Equal Access for All

These Actions and Targets are related to the school system and hence impact exclusively on children and young people under 18. To the extent that actions will ultimately be targeted on individual schools, their implementation will need to be monitored to ensure that there is no differential impact in terms of gender or religion, and that New TSN principles are taken into account.

The action aimed at countering bullying and disruptive behaviour will directly benefit the vast majority of children. However, it will be important to ensure that any arrangements for excluding disruptive pupils do not deny them opportunities for their own education. Bullying may often involve sectarian, racist, sexist and homophobic aspects. Pupils with disabilities may be particular targets for bullying.

5.2 Skills and Qualifications for Young People

These Actions and Targets relate to the Further and Higher Education sector. As with schools, they impact primarily on people within a particular age band (16 - 25). This is inevitable, given the nature of the service provided. However, obstacles to mature students accessing the services should be minimised.

DHFETE will monitor these actions in terms of gender, religio-political community background, race and disability.

5.3 *Lifelong Learning Opportunities*

The uptake of these actions should also be monitored in line with the criteria above. In addition, as they are aimed at people throughout their working lives, there is a need to ensure that older people are able to avail fully of the opportunities.

In some cases, active outreach measures could encourage uptake by older people, women, people with disabilities and minorities.

5.4 *Socially Excluded Entering or Returning to the Workforce*

These actions have considerable potential for enhancing equality of opportunity. They directly target people in greatest social need. Given the community distribution of unemployment, some of these actions may have differential impact in favour of Catholics and Nationalists. This is justified by the clear social objective of reducing long term unemployment.

It would be important that, in assessing eligibility for these programmes, there is no indirectly discriminatory effect on women. Monitoring of uptake by community background, gender, race and disability would be advisable.

6. SECURING A COMPETITIVE ECONOMY

This Priority seeks to create conditions for economic growth which should ultimately benefit all in society. However, economic development may not initially benefit all equally. Governmental tax and benefits policies (which are largely outside the control of the devolved administration) help to ensure that those who prosper from economic growth contribute to the general welfare and that a safety net protects those in greatest need. However, without sustained economic growth, there can be no increase in employment which is the most effective enhancement to equality of opportunity for the individual.

6.1 *Transport and communications infrastructure*

This section aims to enhance communications infrastructure, some of which lies in the public sector (public transport, roads) with other important elements in the private sector (telecommunications).

The improvement of public transport directly enhances the equality of opportunity of those groups which are most likely to use it: women, children, old people, people with disabilities. All of these groups are statistically less likely

to have access to cars. Within the public transport policy area, DRD and the relevant agencies will need to carry out further impact assessments on specific policies flowing from the Programme for Government, including charging and ticketing arrangements, location of routes, times of services etc, all of which have potential implications for women, children, old people and people with disabilities. In addition, the location of services and routes has potential differential impact for the major religio-political communities. Future monitoring of the uptake of services could confirm that they are being accessed equitably.

Creating a world-class telecommunications infrastructure has wide potential benefits for the economy and society as a whole. However, the risk of a “digital divide” between those who have access to, and expertise in, information technology and those who do not, has been identified. Appropriate initiatives in the education and training fields should contribute to wider accessibility of information technology, ensuring that the benefits of this infrastructure benefit as wide a spectrum of society as possible.

6.2 *Energy Infrastructure*

A more efficient energy infrastructure should help to reduce cost for all consumers. The development of a gas network outside Belfast would bring benefits of competition and lower prices to consumers and industries in the areas served. As specific geographic areas would benefit from such extensions, it will be important that the relevant agencies assess the implications for equality of opportunity between the main religio-political communities arising from future decisions.

6.3 *Co-ordinated and Efficient Planning Process*

Improvements to the speed and efficiency of the planning process would benefit everyone and should have no differential impact in terms of the Section 75 categories. As the programme of the adoption of area development plans will be focused on specific localities, it is anticipated that areas with a largely Protestant population and those with a largely Catholic population will be equitably represented in the programme, though the primary criterion for programming area plans is development land need.

6.4 *Promoting Enterprise, Innovation and Creativity*

This aims to encourage growth in new areas of the economy, such as information technology and creative industries. Often the motors for growth in this sector are innovative small and medium enterprises. It will be important to ensure that the New Economy SME's do not replicate the traditional patterns of participation in the Northern Ireland small/medium business sector, where women and Catholics have tended to be under-represented. Members of ethnic

minorities have, however, played a role in small and medium enterprises and they should also be encouraged in the new sectors.

One of the actions envisages working with the community and voluntary sector to support projects contributing to the development of the social economy. This potentially could help in the economic integration of marginalised communities and individuals, including the long term unemployed. However, community organisation in working-class Protestant areas has traditionally been less developed than in Catholic areas. Active outreach will be necessary to ensure that both communities avail of the opportunities of the social economy.

6.5 *Making Northern Ireland More Attractive for Inward Investment*

Attracting international mobile industrial development remains a key element in creating employment opportunities. This section sets out a number of actions to create the conditions which would make Northern Ireland more attractive as an inward investment location. Incentives can be applied within the context of the New TSN Policy to increase the attractions of socially disadvantaged areas for such investors. There is, however, no power to direct investors to specific locations. There is scope for monitoring job creation patterns of inward investing companies to ensure that men and women, and the main religio-political communities, are achieving equality of opportunity in accessing new employment.

6.6 *Increasing Attractiveness to Visitors*

Tourism has the potential to create new employment opportunities. Though the private sector will inevitably create the bulk of these jobs, the devolved administration can contribute to maximising the regions tourist potential through promotional activities and developing Northern Ireland's natural and cultural assets. There is no evidence that the proposed actions are likely to have any differential impact in terms of the Section 75 categories.

6.7 *Business and Consumer Services*

Greater awareness of consumer services and rights should enhance equality of opportunity generally. The campaign to reduce the burden and cost of occupational accidents should impact on the incidence of preventable disability.

6.8 *Regenerating the Rural Economy*

This seeks to modernise and diversify local farming and fisheries.

Particular agricultural and fishery sectors in Northern Ireland may have a disproportionate representation from the Protestant or Catholic communities. This is explicable by geographic factors.

Women living in disadvantaged rural areas have lower rates of economic activity than the Northern Ireland average for women, reflecting more limited access to child care, fewer job opportunities and difficulties in accessing training courses.

It will be important to ensure that education and training needs are assessed, not solely on the basis of those currently working in agriculture, but also of women in rural localities.

6.9 *Protection and Enhancement of the Environment*

A high quality environment and a modern water and sewerage network will be of benefit to everyone, particularly children, old people and people with disabilities who are most likely to be medically vulnerable.

The location of actions will, to a large extent, be determined by geographic and biological factors.

7. DEVELOPING NORTH/SOUTH, EAST/WEST AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The proposals contained in the Developing North/South, East/West and International Relations section of the Programme for Government aim to develop effective links with Europe and North America as well as the development of the structures – North/South and East/West - established under the Belfast Agreement. Many of the actions contained in this section will be implemented under the four key priorities outlined in the Programme and will be covered by the relevant sections of this Assessment.

8. WORKING TOGETHER

- 8.1 The proposals contained in the Working Together section of the Programme for Government will ensure that government is more accessible to the public. There will be improved availability of information about government and wider consultation on the development of policies. The proposals aimed at improving the efficiency of public services put increased emphasis on policy review and on monitoring outcomes.
- 8.2 This increasing emphasis on openness, consultation, policy analysis and the monitoring of outcomes should facilitate the ongoing programme of equality impact assessments and the development of policies which promote equality of opportunity.

- 8.3 Care however will be needed, when developing policies aimed at modernising government, that particular groups in society are not disadvantaged. Policies on e-government will be required to ensure that the very real issue of the differential access to information technology is addressed and the potential social exclusion problems are avoided. Similarly new approaches to financing our public services, particularly those which involve direct charges on the public, will require careful consideration of the impact on different groups in society.
- 8.4 The administration will be conscious of its responsibilities, as an employer, in ensuring equality of opportunity in the Civil Service. Data will be published regularly on employment patterns within the Civil Service and under-representation will be addressed. The equality dimension will be taken fully into account in examining the scope for decentralisation of Civil Service jobs.

ANNEX C - GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Agenda for Government	An Agenda of actions to improve and modernise Northern Ireland being taken forward by the Executive over the nine months from July 2000 to March 2001.
British-Irish Council (BIC)	The Council promotes the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of relationships among the people of these islands.
BIIGC	British Irish Inter-Governmental Conference
The Capitation Formula Review Group	The Capitation Formula Review Group is a multi-disciplinary committee comprising Health and Social Services Board and Departmental officials. The Group has been taking forward a programme of work designed to improve the capitation formula, which is used by the Department in allocating resources to Health and Social Services Boards.
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
DE	Department of Education
DETI	Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment
DFP	Department of Finance and Personnel
DHFETE	Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DOE	Department of the Environment
DRD	Department for Regional Development
DSD	Department for Social Development
EPFs	Executive Programme Funds
EU	European Union

EQUAL	European Union funding programme to promote new approaches to combating all forms of discrimination and inequality in connection with access to the labour market.
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
INTERREG III	European Union funding programme to encourage co-operation either side of a national border.
JMC	Joint Ministerial Committee
LEADER +	European Union funding programme aimed at stimulating rural economies.
New TSN	The New Targeting Social Needs policy, through which the Executive is taking forward its commitment to tackling deprivation. The policy recognises and seeks to reduce inequalities in the life experiences of citizens in terms of poverty, health, housing, educational and economic opportunity and disability.
NITB	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
PEACE II	European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation.
Programme for Government	A programme incorporating the Executive's agreed budget linked to policies and programmes which, under the Agreement, is subject to approval by the Assembly, after scrutiny in Assembly Committees, on a cross-community basis.
Public Service Agreements	Agreements setting out for each Department its aims, objectives, programme budget allocation and key targets, designed to develop a linking of public funds to the achievement of agreed outcomes.
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Strategy 2010

The Report by the Northern Ireland Economic Development Strategy Review Steering Group in March 1999.

URBAN II

European Union funding programme to support revitalisation of inner cities.