

624/92

AFT REPORT

NEW IMAGE (CATCHING THE TIDE) WORKING GROUP

Background

1. The "Catching the Tide" Working Group was set up to identify the most effective way to implement a public relations (PR) effort to improve the image of Northern Ireland. The decision to establish the Group followed the issue of the Quadrangle Report which had proposed the establishment of an independent apolitical company with charitable status - "Beyond 2000" - to catalyse the PR effort, and to provide a cohesive framework within which existing groups - grass roots, community, sectoral or special interest - could help foster a new image of Northern Ireland. This recommendation did not receive official support: an alternative proposal put forward was the creation of a specifically designated unit within Government, not aligned to any one Department, but answering directly to a Minister, within the Civil Service. The task of the "Catching the Tide" Working Group, or "New Image" Working Group as it has been re-named, was to develop a clear remit which would guide such a unit in its creation of strategies and programmes.

Terms of Reference

2. Against this background the Group set out to:
 - a. log what was being done at present to enhance our image and self esteem;
 - b. consider the factors that influence Northern Ireland's image;

- 1 -

RC/13016

- c. give thought to the type of image which is desirable and realistic for Northern Ireland; and
- d. come up with initiatives that might be taken to improving Northern Ireland's image.

Audit of Image-Making Activities

3. The Group sought to audit all the various organisations which are involved in one way or another in image-making activities in Northern Ireland. These include:

- Industrial Development Board
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Information Service
- Foreign Office (British Information Service)
- British Council
- Belfast Development Office
- Positively Belfast
- Northern Ireland Bureau
- Northern Ireland Partnership
- Londonderry Development Office
- BATs Initiative
- Overseas visits by District Councils
- Overseas visits by Ministers, Politicians, Clergy, Community Leaders
- Overseas visits by officials and by other individuals (eg businessmen)
- Overseas visits by other "ambassadors" eg Western Youth Orchestra
- Overseas visits by North West International (Derry/Boston Ventures) and similar initiatives.

4. In addition there are a host of other activities which impact on Northern Ireland's image, including:

- Special events such as
 - a. the Strasbourg exhibition

- 2 -

RC/13016

②

b. the Westminster exhibition

- Sporting events held in Northern Ireland
- Other international events eg International Verdi Congress
- International conferences held in Northern Ireland
- Other events.

5. The general conclusion drawn by the Group was that while there is a myriad of such activities, each of which impacts in its own way, there is at present no mechanism by which such activities could be focussed, or directed, to ensure that a cohesive and effective message was being put across. In brief, the need to market Northern Ireland's image more positively abroad was accepted by the Group. It was thought, however, that such activity should be wider than simply image-building, and should harness some of the energies of the more talented key figures within the Northern Ireland community.

Factors Influencing Northern Ireland's Image

6. A list of the factors influencing Northern Ireland's image has been drawn up by the Group. These can be divided into two categories - external and internal. The external factors can themselves be divided into two subsets, viz images of those people who have never been to Northern Ireland and those who have visited here. The upside and downside aspects of our image have also been identified.

7. These factors may be summarised as follows:

External ie people who have never been to Northern Ireland

a. Downside

- Reports of riots, bombings and shootings
- Reports of urban dereliction and "peace" lines
- Reports of discrimination and lack of justice through Diplock Courts

- Anti-Northern Ireland groups abroad - mainly in USA
- Perspective and publicity of certain national, foreign and Irish politicians
- Attitude of certain Governments
- Peripherality (on the edge of Europe)
- Sectarianism and lack of common identity
- The call for "Troops Out";

b. Upside

- Friendliness and spirit of the people
- Industrial incentives
- Fishing, golf and sailing: sports facilities
- Scenery: Giants Causeway, Mountains of Mourne
- Personalities: Gloria Hunniford, Mary Peters, Dennis Taylor, James Galway, Barry McGuigan, Barry Douglas, Liam Neeson, Kenneth Brannagh
- Genealogy and mythology
- Irish linen, Old Bushmills.

External - people who have visited Northern Ireland

a. Downside

- Security force presence: soldiers "sighting"
- Security Gates
- Checkpoints
- Helicopters
- Urban dereliction
- Propaganda murals/graffiti
- Marking of territory on kerbstones
- Violence and death;

b. Upside

- New investments eg McDonalds
- Hospitality: warm friendly people



- Image of normality
- Lack of congestion
- Scenery
- Heritage
- Communities working together
- Localisation of problems
- Community spirit
- Quality of life: hospital, housing and education provision
- Low cost of living
- Irish Linen, Old Bushmills, Tyrone Crystal, Belleek Pottery.

Internal - people who live here

a. Downside

- Multiple deprivation in certain areas
- "Haves" and "Have nots"
- Calibre of local politicians
- Mixed perceptions on Government's attitude towards the two communities
- No end to the Troubles
- Attitude of security forces
- High unemployment: no economic future;

b. Upside

- Community spirit
- Self help
- Good housing
- Good quality of life
- Regeneration of Belfast and Londonderry.

8. In summary, the image of Northern Ireland, both externally and

internally, could be described as one of paradox

Friendliness and violence
Warmth and tension
Beauty and ugliness.

Can the paradox be branded? Is the diversity in reality a strength? These are issues which are discussed in the next section.

Type of Image which is desirable and realistic

9. The Group agreed that the way Northern Ireland is portrayed in the press and media has a major bearing on its image. It also agreed that we cannot hope to drown out or remove interest in the violence and strife whenever it arises. Rather, it was felt that we should seek to promote more actively a Province coming to terms with its well-known problems rather than seeking to ignore them. Northern Ireland has a wealth of attractions - skilled and innovative people; a progressive profitable place to locate or to do business; a beautiful countryside with superb golfing and fishing facilities; a place which is hospitable and welcoming to visitors; a place which has made, and continues to make notable contributions to the rest of the world (health, inventions etc). In short, behind the headlines there is another Northern Ireland - modern, progressive with a good quality of normal life and attractive to the business, tourist or other visitor. In essence, this was the theme of the Strasbourg and Westminster Best of Northern Ireland exhibitions. It was also the kind of message which the Prime Minister believed that we should be more assertive in hammering home. The suggestion here is that we could both underpin the momentum for peace by generating a more optimistic atmosphere within Northern Ireland, and do a great deal more to improve Northern Ireland's image in Britain and more widely.

10. The Group agreed, however, that the big problem was to enable

- 6 -

RC/13016

+ Prince Charles.



more bodies and individuals to do more to create reasons for the rest of the world to notice and to take interest in the positive side of Northern Ireland. The Quadrangle Report emphasised that it was not enough to do more of the same or to have better co-ordination and co-operation in the existing image-making effort (useful as this would be in itself), but that efforts should be directed at the development of things of "world standard" which would be noticed and which would build image accordingly. The Group has therefore explored the creation of an "enabling mechanism" or "animateur" which would not only stimulate and assist all those already in the promotional business, but also draw upon other existing skills and experience, and bind them to the same task. If a means can be found to improve cohesion, and to place a greater charge upon people to think and work together, the effect of the overall effort is bound to multiply.

11. In whatever way we seek to achieve this, the Group considered that it was important to harness the imagination and energies of the private sector: partnership with the private sector sits easily with better co-ordination of the overlapping and interlocking roles of public sector promotion agencies as the way forward. This is an approach which has been, and is being employed very successfully in Glasgow, Dublin, Cardiff, and of course in Belfast and Londonderry. It is also totally in accord with Government policy to involve and devolve to the private sector, wherever possible.

What initiatives might be taken to improve the image

12. The strategy outlined in the previous section might be summarised in the words of the old song "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative". How to put it into practice, is, however, more problematical.
13. In brief, there are two schools of thought on the way forward. One school would argue that we should not go for any high profile initiative since this will run the danger that those who

do not subscribe to "normality" will have a counter initiative. This approach suggests that the best way forward is through a gradual enhancement of existing programmes which already attempt to accentuate the positive. On this basis the existing work of IDB, NITB, Information Service, Positively Belfast, Foreign Office and others continues, and where possible, enhanced. The establishment of a co-ordinating committee involving the main players would feature in this approach.

14. The alternative approach is to go for the establishment of a designated unit within Government which would have an overall and over-arching responsibility for promoting the image of Northern Ireland. This would be a very small organisation (headed at either Grade 3 or Grade 5 level), staffed at junior level with secondments from the private sector, and would, inter alia, be involved in:

*why -
will this not
hamper
efforts*

- staging of events such as the Strasbourg and Westminster "Best of Northern Ireland" exhibitions;
- devising a corporate image of Northern Ireland from which other institutions, eg IDB and NITB, would benefit;
- preparing corporate publicity material, eg Corporate Northern Ireland, which would highlight endeavour and success in Northern Ireland, and present an alternative picture to that continually portrayed by the media;
- taking advantage of major international events in Northern Ireland to boost Northern Ireland's image;
- providing modest pump-priming financial assistance for Northern Ireland "mini-ambassadors" (eg Western Youth Orchestra);
- liaising with local groups - business, social, cultural (eg Atlantic Bridges etc) - to identify the contribution

which they can make towards achieving a better image of Northern Ireland;

- seeking in co-operation with the appropriate interests the staging of high profile public events capable of attracting positive media coverage, eg

- Professional sporting events eg European PGA, the Open;
- Eurovision Song Contest;
- Tall Ships;
- Major International Conferences, eg Commonwealth Study Conference;
- European Union Informal Council
- Pavarotti concert;
- United Nations event;
- BAFTA Awards;
- Film production (with NI backdrop);
- European Capital of Culture.

IDB
Newsbureau -
do they do
anything pro-actively
about events
like this?

The operation of the Unit would be overseen by a small Steering Group - comprising representatives of both the public and private sectors (but chaired by someone from the private sector) whose job would be to devise and oversee an operational plan for the new Unit. A management framework for the new Unit is attached at Annex A.

Costs/Funding

15. The costs of establishing a dedicated unit are difficult to estimate a priori. A lot will depend on, for example, the success of the Unit in attracting international events, Quality of publicity material, and the level of proactivity in searching out "mini-ambassadors", will also influence the level of annual budget. But, for illustrative purposes the table below shows

the scale of annual costs which might be involved

	£k (per annum)
Staffing costs (salaries, national insurance etc)*	120
Steering Group	30
Exhibitions (2)	100
Publicity	250
Grant-aid	150
International Events	300
Travel, subsistence etc	<u>100</u>
TOTAL	£1m

16. In terms of funding these costs there would appear to be four options:

- a. a bid on the Northern Ireland Block;
- b. savings from within existing PR budgets; and
- c. joint private/public sector funding;
- d. other sources of funding.

*NICE - does
it really
work?*

17. Looking at these options in turn:

- a. discussions with DFP suggest that it would be very difficult, given the range of other pressures on the Northern Ireland Block, to provide additional resources for such a project. A bid could be made on the Block, but its chances of being successful are slim;

* Based on 1 Grade 5, Personal Secretary, 1 secondment at about DP level, 1 Administrative Assistant/Typist.

- b. a more realistic approach, though possibly one that is not attractive to the organisations involved, is to carve out a budget from those organisations already in the image-making field ie Information Service, IDB, Northern Ireland Tourist Board etc. Current estimates suggest that "Corporate Northern Ireland" spends some £ m per year; ✓
- c. a joint public sector/private sector venture. It might be possible to attract private sector monies into some of the specific activities of the proposed designated Unit eg the production of Corporate Northern Ireland or the staging of some international events. However, it is likely that the private sector, while supportive of any new initiative, would look largely to the public sector to provide the major source of funding; and
- d. it would theoretically be possible to seek support from other institutions eg the European Commission, the International Fund for Ireland, or the Ireland/American Fund. An approach to Europe would probably not be productive, since matching PE provision would have to be found. The attitude of the other organisations to the Northern Ireland 2000 concept has still to be determined.

ANNEX A

DRAFT

NORTHERN IRELAND 2000 : MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

1. Mission Statement

Northern Ireland 2000 will promote activities which;

- enhance the international reputation of Northern Ireland;
- increase the external saliency of Northern Ireland;
- help the people of Northern Ireland to change the negative external perceptions of the country.

*engender a
sense of pride
in the people
of NI.*

2. Overall Aim

To improve Northern Ireland's negative external image.

3. Key Business Areas

a. Exhibitions

The Unit will be responsible for mounting image-making exhibitions along the lines of the Best of Northern Ireland Exhibitions mounted at Strasbourg and Westminster.

b. Publicity/Promotional Material

The Unit will be responsible for producing material which highlights endeavour and success in Northern Ireland, and which presents an alternative image of Northern Ireland to that traditionally portrayed in the media.

RC/13473

c. Grant Assistance

The Unit will have powers and a budget to grant-aid individuals, organisations and other bodies which are in a position to act as mini-ambassadors for Northern Ireland.

d. International Events

The Unit will seek to involve itself in high profile international events staged in Northern Ireland which are capable of attracting positive media coverage for Northern Ireland.

4. Key Activities**a. Exhibitions**

It would be the aim of the Unit to mount at least one, and possibly two, image-making exhibitions per year in selected locations. These would be organised along the lines of the Strasbourg and Westminster "Best of Northern Ireland" exhibitions.

b. Publicity Promotional Material

It would be the aim of the Unit to produce a "Corporate Northern Ireland" booklet to highlight endeavour and success in Northern Ireland, and present an alternative picture to that portrayed by the media. The Unit will also seek to prepare publicity material in the form of

- a Corporate Northern Ireland video
- other Corporate Northern Ireland publications
- Corporate Northern Ireland gifts
- Corporate Northern Ireland display material
- other Corporate Northern Ireland merchandise.

RC/13473

c. Grant Assistance

The Unit will seek to identify, and to provide grants to appropriate individuals and bodies which might assist in portraying a positive image of Northern Ireland overseas.

d. International Events

The Unit will seek in its first year to attract two high profile large international events (conferences, sporting events etc).

5. Target Groups

- i. Other Government agencies involved in image-making activities.
- ii. Organisers of international events.
- iii. Organisations and individuals with an interest and/or an opportunity to promote a better image of Northern Ireland externally.
- iv. World's leading industrialists, business influencers, financiers, business media, pressure groups and professional and other institutions.

6. Input Indicators

- Expenditure on mounting image-making exhibitions.
- Expenditure on producing publicity material.
- Expenditure on grant-aiding "mini-ambassadors".
- Expenditure on supporting the staging of international events in Northern Ireland.

RC/13473

7. Activity Indicators

- Number of exhibitions mounted.
- Number of items/publicity material produced
 - Corporate Northern Ireland
 - Videos
 - Publicity Booklets
 - Gifts
 - Display material
 - other merchandise.
- Number of "mini-ambassadors" assisted.
- Number of international events staged.

8. Outcome Indicators

- Evidence of an improvement in the perception of Northern Ireland externally.

RC/13473

END