



A Regional Strategy for Social Inclusion

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0. Preface

The Civic Forum's anti-poverty working group prepared this paper, with the assistance of the think tank Democratic Dialogue. It derived from the group's decision, as many in the field of social exclusion had mooted, that Northern Ireland needed a regional anti-poverty strategy.

It is a discussion paper: forum members have not been asked to endorse every dot and comma. But it does represent a robust set of proposals which deserve to be taken very seriously by government and society at large.

The paper is based on a review of the literature on social exclusion; on focus groups of individuals who have experienced socially exclusion; on semi-structured interviews with key players and practitioners; on a round table, including Civic Forum members, focused around an earlier draft; and, last but not least, on discussions within the anti-poverty working group.

The forum is very conscious that dedicated anti-poverty campaigners and researchers in Northern Ireland have accumulated much tacit knowledge over the years. All those who kindly contributed to the process by agreeing to take part in the focus groups or to be interviewed are named at the end.

To ensure frankness, these exchanges, and the round table, took place on a non-attributable basis. While thus not specifically acknowledged in the paper itself, all these participants greatly contributed to the richness of the material. They are, of course, not responsible for the conclusions drawn.

One of the strengths of the Civic Forum is that it cuts across sectoral lines in Northern Ireland and therefore can take a broad view. Another is that it engages important non-governmental interests in issues of good governance. This paper is playing to those strengths: an inclusive society can only develop if government is 'joined-up' and if a new relationship is established between rulers and ruled. Having a devolved Assembly and executive offers the citizens of Northern Ireland and their representatives, civic and political, the opportunity to pursue that goal.

The larger concern of the forum is that this document should stimulate a broader debate, focused on how an inclusive society can be concretely and urgently pursued. It is a debate that will advance partly through learning by doing by government and with the input of many practitioners and others on the ground. It is a debate which will never be over and in which the Civic Forum will seek to continue to be critically involved.

Lynn Carvill
Convenor
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1. Executive summary

- 1.1.1 More than 100,000 working-age households in Northern Ireland—one in five—have no one in work. One quarter of all adults in the region are at the lowest level of literacy and a similar proportion have no formal qualifications. These appalling statistics capture the challenge of social exclusion Northern Ireland faces. It is a challenge that, morally and politically, cannot be shirked.
- 1.1.2 ‘Social exclusion’ is not just a polite way of saying poverty. The Civic Forum accepts the following definition:
- By social exclusion we mean not just a static snapshot of inequality but a set of processes, including within the labour market and the welfare system, by which individuals, households, communities or even whole social groups are pushed towards or kept within the margins of society. It encompasses not only material deprivation but more broadly the denial of opportunities to participate fully in social life. It is associated with stigmatisation and stereotyping, though, at first sight paradoxically, some of those who experience exclusion develop survival strategies which are premised upon its continuance. And it highlights the primary responsibility of the wider society for the condition of its marginal members, of the need for all to share equally in the fruits of citizenship.*
- 1.1.3 That social exclusion appears so intractable in Northern Ireland is not just because of the limited powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the lack of experience that Northern Ireland politicians have in dealing with social and economic policy (important though these are). It is more profoundly because long-term unemployment, the lack of sharing or socialisation of domestic responsibilities, the way the benefits system works and sectarian rigidities in the labour market conspire in a mutually reinforcing way to ghettoise large swathes of the (non-)working class. An inclusive society is one not scarred by the ghettoisation of working-class ‘communities’ from the comfortable mainstream, with the associated paramilitary domination and sectarian division.
- 1.1.4 ‘Targeting Social Need’ was launched under the Conservative government in 1991 and ‘relaunched’, as ‘New TSN’, under the successor Labour administration in 1998. Relaunches usually betray underlying problems with the ‘product’ itself, and there are disabling problems of incoherence at the heart of TSN, which has been uncritically taken over from direct rule by the devolved administration. In particular, it was never made explicit from the outset whether the objective was to remove sectarian differentials in well-being or to advance equality more generally.
- 1.1.5 In Scotland, by contrast, a social-inclusion strategy was developed with real bite—before and after devolution. It is driven by the ideals of ‘joined-up’ government, of prevention being better than cure, of evidence-based understanding of ‘what works’, of inclusiveness and empowerment—the idea that social inclusion is about ensuring individuals can take control of their own situation. It focuses on specific barriers to exclusion and what may be done to remove them.

- 1.1.6 On the back of the United Nations Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995, the then ‘rainbow’ coalition in Ireland prepared a National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). Ministers recognised that given the deep-seated structural causes of poverty, a strategic approach was again required. They claimed that the input of those experiencing poverty and their representatives had been central to its preparation.
- 1.1.7 Northern Ireland’s devolved administration can learn lessons from these, and other, experiences, in developing a **regional strategy for social inclusion**. First and foremost, a clear strategy is needed, to which all departments and agencies buy in, and as a policy imperative—not a new auditing requirement. Secondly, political leadership must come from the highest level—the Northern Ireland Executive in general and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in particular.
- 1.1.8 Thirdly, there must be an appropriate administrative vehicle, within the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. And, fourthly, there needs to be pressure from outside government for momentum to be sustained.
- 1.1.9 A more comprehensive attack on social exclusion can only be a ‘joined-up’ one. A major weakness of the Executive Committee to date has been the absence of sub-committees to address cross-departmental issues at ministerial level. In Ireland the Taoiseach, chairs a NAPS committee. An executive sub-committee charged with rolling out a strategy for social inclusion, chaired by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, would combine these prerequisites of high-level commitment and joined-up working.
- 1.1.10 A number of flagship policies should be pursued. These should include:
- commitment to the establishment of a childcare centre in every disadvantaged area, to give children a better start in life and assist women wishing to enter the labour market;
 - a ‘no-failure’ culture in education, to include a revision of the transfer system at 11, a more diversified curriculum at 14+, and a wider range of final subjects at 16+;
 - new arrangements to lever up private-sector training and enhanced commitment to lifelong learning, to raise employment and productivity;
 - a programme to boost the social economy—especially intermediate-labour-market schemes and new forms of service delivery—and a more ‘social’ concept of the private sector and farming life;
 - reforms to social-security arrangements, to permit the social-economy schemes and weaken disincentives to labour-market and other participation;
 - a better work-life balance, to reduce the division between the ‘work-poor’ and the ‘time-poor’ and make it easier to marry domestic responsibilities and labour-market participation;
 - a refocusing of the health debate from maintaining hospitals to improving public health, in partnership with non-governmental organisations and engaging citizens themselves;

- a rebalancing of transport from the private car towards public provision in the widest sense, particularly addressing rural isolation; and
- utilising public procurement as a lever to ensure high standards of corporate responsibility.

1.1.11 These and the other measures proposed would begin the de-ghettoisation and normalisation of society in Northern Ireland. But tough choices would be required to finance them: congestion charges, for example, would be needed to fund a major improvement in public transport. The Assembly has to face the challenge of seeking tax-raising powers when the agreement is reviewed. One option would be for a 'solidarity tax'—reinstating the higher 60 per cent income-tax rate—to be hypothecated to the executive programme fund for social inclusion.

1.1.12 The paper recommends that a forum on social inclusion be established, to ensure the debate continues and that all those with expertise and commitment—within and without government—can be involved. This would ensure that a continuing dialogue takes place between government, experts, practitioners and representatives of the socially excluded, and that progress is properly monitored and evaluated—and corrective action taken where required.

1.1.13 The Civic Forum hopes that this paper can form the basis of a new chapter in the annual Programme for Government of the devolved administration, devoted specifically to enhancing social inclusion. This, in its view, would give a focus to the drive for a more inclusive society.

2. Introduction: what is social exclusion?

2.1 It's not just poverty

- 2.1.1 This paper will refer to 'social exclusion' rather than 'poverty'. This is not, as some cynics fear, because these 'warmer words' will be less challenging. On the contrary, discussion of 'poverty' can easily collapse into discussing 'poor people' and 'poor areas'. Such phrases allow the issue to be mentally or even physically marginalised, objectifying individuals who already endure indignity—our 'poor' focus-group participants resisted such labelling—and can further allow invidious distinctions to be drawn between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving'.
- 2.1.2 This is not just a semantic point. As one of our NGO interviewees put it, 'You can find you are wasting your energy if you don't have an agreed understanding of what it is in order to tackle it.'
- 2.1.3 If the 'problem' is 'poor people' in 'poor areas', then the answer lies simply in area-based initiatives. This emphasis goes back to the US 'War on Poverty' in the 60s. It was carried over to Britain later that decade through the inner-city community development projects and into Northern Ireland in the 70s through the Belfast Areas of Need. In the late 80s it informed Making Belfast Work (now subsumed into the Belfast Regeneration Organisation). And it has been returned to by the devolved administration in its work on a 'neighbourhood renewal strategy' (DSD, 2001).
- 2.1.4 Area-based initiatives have an important place, and their potential is developed below—including the role of area partnerships and neighbourhood-based projects. But it is useful to open any discussion of social exclusion by recognising their limitations.
- 2.1.5 As President Johnson's deputy chief of staff was warned back in the 60s (*Guardian*, September 30th 1998), 'The problems of poverty are only in limited instances localised in character. They are for the most part widely distributed, related to economic and social factors that operate nationwide, and would require more than local action for solution.'
- 2.1.6 There is a strongly localistic flavour to Northern Ireland's political culture, and this has been reflected in the last decade in the almost exclusive emphasis on gathering local data on deprivation (Social Disadvantage Research Group, 2001)—rather than taking a broader regional approach to social exclusion—and then using these data for 'targeting' what are perceived as 'areas of social need'.
- 2.1.7 Yet there is one very simple reason why such an approach is ineffective (apart from that it treats the socially excluded as passive objects). The Irish National Anti-Poverty Strategy (see below) has established global and subsequently more specific anti-poverty targets for the state as a whole. This has a very important corollary (Layte *et al*, 2000: 176-177): 'It means that policies targeting very specific groups or areas do not in themselves constitute a

credible anti-poverty strategy. The fact that most poor people do not in fact live in “black spots” of concentrated poverty ... means that policies focusing on those areas, however valuable in themselves, will not on their own have a major impact on the global poverty target. It becomes impossible to ignore the big, expensive issues—most importantly, redistribution through the tax and welfare systems.’ There is a particular risk that an area-based focus may inadvertently downplay rural exclusion, which is often more dispersed and hidden (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2000: 2).

- 2.1.8 Moreover, even if the socially excluded were more conveniently concentrated, there is a danger of addressing symptoms rather than cause. As Gaffikin and Morrissey (1995: 55) put it, ‘compensatory programmes, like Making Belfast Work, are not sufficient to address social exclusion: a comprehensive, integrated effort is required’.
- 2.1.9 Globalisation has in recent decades underscored this point. In particular, the rapid decline in the demand for unskilled manual labour in advanced capitalist countries and contemporary changes in family forms have created a huge twin challenge (Borooah, 1998). On the one hand is the detachment of whole swathes of citizens from the labour market altogether. This is in part an ‘hysteresis’ effect—a phenomenon which tends over time to exacerbation—of unemployment, as individuals lose confidence and labour-market contacts and work-discipline and skills atrophy. It is related to ‘breadwinner-based’ social security systems, where female partners of long-term unemployed males have no incentive to work, leading to ‘work-poor’ households. It is related also to increasing social *apartheid*, as the socially-mobile work-rich ‘escape’ areas of deprivation.
- 2.1.10 This is a much worse problem than official unemployment figures suggest, because (a) male long-term unemployed individuals may eventually be transferred to disability benefits (or otherwise drop out of the labour market) and (b) their partners’ economic inactivity will go unrecognised. UK-wide, among men with no qualifications, the rate of economic inactivity has shot up from 4 per cent in 1979 to 30 per cent in 2000 (*Economist*, September 8th 2001). In Northern Ireland, more than 100,000 adults of working age have been claiming benefits related to sickness or disability for two years or more (Department for Social Development, 2001: 16).
- 2.1.11 The hysteresis effect of unemployment is all too apparent from the Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey (NISRA press release, February 7th 2002). Thirty per cent of unemployed respondents showed signs of a mental health problem, compared with 16 per cent of those in employment. Relatedly, 45 per cent of respondents who felt they had little control over their lives showed such symptoms of distress, compared with 19 per cent of those who felt in control. Our focus groups highlighted the human dimension of this. The combination of material and mental stress is a particular threat to the well-being of lone parents on benefit (Evason *et al*, 1998: 129-130).
- 2.1.12 Whereas three quarters of non-disabled adults of working age are in work in Northern Ireland, this is true of only one third of the disabled population (DHSSPS, 2002: 41). While the bulk of those on sickness or disability benefits

will indeed be chronically incapacitated, others will have successfully sought to change benefit because jobseeker's allowance is frankly impossible to subsist on for a sustained period.

- 2.1.13 According to the Department for Social Development (2001: 61), in 2001 the average weekly payment to single claimants without dependants was under £49, for couples without dependants £81.77 and for couples with dependants £131.57—less than £7,000 per year. The same data show that the incidence of claims for incapacity benefit in Northern Ireland is 50 per cent higher than in Britain, while that for disability living allowance is more than double (DSD, 2001: 73, 103)—differentials that can not be accounted for by the genuinely worse levels of morbidity in the region.
- 2.1.14 The other aspect of Borooah's (1998) challenge is that the informal support against exclusion formerly provided by extended family networks is weakened by increased mobility and smaller, including single-person, households. And the (legitimate) refusal of women to sustain subordinate positions in domestic life has been reflected—among other causes—in a rise of lone parenthood.
- 2.1.15 It is argued by some that a reinstatement of 'traditional' family forms would resolve this problem. This attitude is apparent particularly among older generations in Northern Ireland (focus group, Derry): 'I do think, though, that in an ideal world a man should be getting a good enough wage to keep the woman at home to look after the children and the house. My two daughters' children are being reared by childminders and babysitters. I don't think that is right. Their husbands are not earning enough money.'
- 2.1.16 But apart from the question hanging over the feasibility of such a suggestion, it would in the process roll back unacceptably the partial social equality women have in recent decades secured. This is not to deny women's right to choose a caring lifestyle, nor to deny that labour the social validation it deserves.

2.2 Exclusion and inequality

- 2.2.1 Critical to understanding social exclusion from the standpoint of the socially excluded is to appreciate that it is relative: it is about the inequality between the excluded and the included. Sometimes 'poverty' is still discussed in 'absolute' terms—how well, or badly, off poor people are in cash terms. The danger of this is that governments can claim that poverty is falling while inequality is increasing. This perverse outcome indicates why it is essential that inequality should be at the heart of how the problem is conceived.
- 2.2.2 But what kind of inequality? It is widely accepted (and enshrined in legislation from the Equal Pay Act of 1970 to the Northern Ireland Act of 1998) that every individual is entitled to equality of *opportunity*: they should not be the victim of discrimination, direct or indirect, because of their religion, race or other ascribed characteristic.
- 2.2.3 But this view is perfectly compatible with huge social inequalities. The US has some of the most robust anti-discrimination arrangements in the world but is also one of the most unequal societies, and has become dramatically more so in recent decades. It is a *meritocratic*, rather than egalitarian, vision. It fails to

address the fact that the wealthy can exclude themselves from society, accumulating advantage which is passed on to successive generations. Thus the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who endorses a meritocratic vision, persistently refused to respond when challenged on *Newsnight* as to whether it was acceptable for the gap between rich and poor to widen (Thomson, 2001: 10-11).

- 2.2.4 Some therefore argue that government should provide equality of *outcome*. But this would imply a 'big-government' state and a passive citizenry incompatible with contemporary social realities. It would be a static society with no incentives for individuals to take responsibility for their lives and exhibiting the moral hazard characteristic of what used to be called 'actually existing socialism'.
- 2.2.5 In Northern Ireland's polarised political discourse, these alternatives all too readily translate into, respectively, unionist and republican positions. Given the sensitivities associated with the issue of equality in the region, a more sophisticated view is thus doubly necessary.

2.3 A positive definition

- 2.3.1 Teague and Wilson (1995: 79) have offered a broad definition of social exclusion:

By social exclusion we mean not just a static snapshot of inequality but a set of processes, including within the labour market and the welfare system, by which individuals, households, communities or even whole social groups are pushed towards or kept within the margins of society. It encompasses not only material deprivation but more broadly the denial of opportunities to participate fully in social life. It is associated with stigmatisation and stereotyping, though, at first sight paradoxically, some of those who experience exclusion develop survival strategies which are premised upon its continuance. And it highlights the primary responsibility of the wider society for the condition of its marginal members, of the need for all to share equally in the fruits of citizenship.

- 2.3.2 It is important to insist on this broad definition, with this emphasis on extra-economic as well as economic factors, on integration as well as insertion, on emancipation as well as responsibility (Mulgan, 1998: 260). This is partly because the concept has been mistranslated into 'Anglo-Saxon' discourse under New Labour to give it a much more narrow and selective definition, rather like the old 60s sociological notion of 'multiple social deprivation'. As the international expert Hilary Silver has warned (1995: 78), if the meaning of exclusion is allowed to 'narrow to those with multiple disadvantages', it may become 'a euphemism for stigmatized, isolated or scapegoated groups'.
- 2.3.3 This may have been attractive to a government which 'found it politically expedient to nibble at the problem of deprivation', as David Walker has described it. But it does not reflect the evidence that many people are excluded on one axis but not on others (*Guardian*, January 15th 2002).
- 2.3.4 The complexity of social exclusion bears emphasising. In a more individualised society, where individuals have to cope with more change over their life-cycle, the 'socially excluded' present not only a diverse but a volatile

picture: even the 'long-term unemployed' are by no means a homogeneous group (T&EA, 1997). 'One-size-fits-all' government programmes, such as the New Deal, are therefore likely to be perceived by those on the receiving end as insensitive, even frustrating.

- 2.3.5 It is thus all the more important that government efforts to address social exclusion involve a continuing dialogue with representatives of the socially excluded, and that they are delivered in partnership with—or even devolved to—non-governmental organisations with accumulated tacit knowledge. And, wherever possible, they should be individually tailored and offer excluded individuals the opportunity to help construct their own path to inclusion. This would chime with the experience, for example, of the Personal Advocacy and Liaison service run by Bryson House in Belfast—PAL works with individuals with learning disabilities or other mental or physical health problems.

2.4 A challenge across government

- 2.4.1 On an international scale, then, there has been a rising phenomenon of social exclusion, accompanied by an erosion of the informal social supports which might otherwise offset it. This complex phenomenon requires a sophisticated, and especially 'joined-up', response.
- 2.4.2 In early 2001, the Fabian Society (an affiliate of the Labour Party) and the New Policy Institute in London elaborated 'a national strategy for social inclusion' for the United Kingdom (Howarth *et al*, 2001). The UK is of course a multi-national state, a fact particularly evident after devolution, and the challenge logically follows to generate a *regional* strategy to address social inclusion in Northern Ireland. This is particularly so given the earlier comments on the limits of area-based strategies, though we refer below to the limits that a regional approach must also face.
- 2.4.3 As experience in other European countries amply demonstrates, there is nothing inevitable about poverty and social exclusion on the scale experienced in the UK. They are the results of particular structures and dynamics in society and economy, and particular kinds of government policies. They can be tackled.
- 2.4.4 But for this to happen, concentrated policy attention must be given to addressing social exclusion over an extended period. It is hard to overestimate just how big a cultural change that would mean for Northern Ireland. As one of our interviewees put it, 'I do think that we are not even at that stage in society where we even truly recognise that poverty exists in our society. People have been so obsessed with the political that they have failed to recognise the social and economic aspects of our society and to acknowledge that this is the real agenda which needs attention.'
- 2.4.5 Northern Ireland is both a *de jure* and *de facto* UK region. It can also be viewed as a *de facto* region within a wider Irish and European context, where along with southern border counties it has been granted special recognition *via* the renewed 'peace package'. These wider associations may be deployed

to advantage to achieve more in the fight against social exclusion than a purely devolved-UK perspective might allow.

2.5 A challenge for society

- 2.5.1 It is critically important to recognise that ‘social exclusion’ implies not just a responsibility on the part of the excluded to secure (in the French discourse from which all this comes) their ‘insertion’ but also—indeed, to a greater extent—a responsibility on the part of the wider society to ensure that a process of social *inclusion* is set in train (Oppenheim, 1998: 14-15). This is not to support the ‘assisted culture’ (as again the French would put it) of powerlessness, or the associated demands for ‘entitlements’ by clientelistic political entrepreneurs. But it is certainly not to collude either with what J K Galbraith called the ‘culture of contentment’, which all too conveniently concludes that the disadvantages of others are entirely of their own making.
- 2.5.2 This moral claim dovetails with an appreciation of the challenges of modern governance. As with many such contemporary challenges, social inclusion requires not only action across the ‘departmental silos’ into which government so readily falls but also the engagement of a range of actors outside government. As Howarth, Kenway and Palmer (2001: 3) argue for the UK as a whole, ‘rather than lying solely with *government*, responsibility for action has to be accepted much more widely, across all organisations and institutions whose decisions may have an impact on poverty and exclusion. These include the private, voluntary and community sectors ...’
- 2.5.3 This may mean government seeking to promote inclusion by supporting non-governmental organisations better placed—by way of specialist knowledge, small size and flexibility, and user engagement—to deliver services than government itself. Much work with people with disabilities, for instance, is best delivered in this way. This may well prove a better route to ensuring that socially excluded individuals and those who speak for them have a voice in the process of social inclusion itself, and indeed that their associational and organisational skills can be developed (Gore, 1995: 36).
- 2.5.4 In Northern Ireland hitherto, the excluded have been considered in isolation. ‘Targeting Social Need’ has involved the collection of much data on deprivation, but not on wealth. ‘Promoting Social Inclusion’ has focused on marginalised groups. But, as Lawless (1998: 239) argues, there is a ‘distributional context’ to social exclusion, which emerges out of the effects institutions, agencies and individuals have on others: ‘Social exclusion, therefore, needs to be seen within a wider interpretation of society which embraces not simply the excluded, but also the included.’
- 2.5.5 This point has again been made in the context of disability (Christie and Mensah-Coker, 1999: 24-26). What is needed is recognition of the relationship of ‘mutuality’ between disabled and non-disabled citizens. This is partly because the non-disabled may well become disabled at a later stage in life, particularly with an ageing population. It is also because the impairments disabled people suffer need not always themselves be disabling—if residential and working environments are designed with due sensitivity. Designing homes

and workplaces 'for life', therefore, may be more appropriate than incorporating expensive 'add-ons' for people with disabilities later—and who better to advise architects on design standards than disabled people themselves?

2.6 Anglo-American versus European social models

- 2.6.1 The leading UK expert on poverty, Peter Townsend of the London School of Economics, was co-author of a social survey called 'Breadline Europe' (which a consortium of researchers from the two universities and Democratic Dialogue is planning to replicate in Northern Ireland). Prof Townsend commented (*Guardian*, March 8th 2001): 'Some observers believe that, under successive governments, the country has been going so far down the road of residualising welfare that it has become detached from most of the other European states and is lamely following in the wake of the US.'
- 2.6.2 The insularity of UK politics from wider European trends—not to mention the insulation of politics in Northern Ireland from the outside world—has meant there has been little understanding of the limits of the Anglo-American welfare system it embraces. The classic text on the evolution of such systems since the second world war (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 26-28) identifies three.
- 2.6.3 The first, applying to Britain and the US is characterised by 'means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers, or modest social-insurance plans'. Taxes and social-insurance contributions, in sum, are low and as a result: 'Benefits cater mainly to a clientele of low-income, usually working-class, state dependents ... Entitlement rules are therefore strict and often associated with stigma; benefits are typically modest.'
- 2.6.4 The second system, applying to Scandinavian countries, is characterised by pursuit of 'an equality of the highest standards, not an equality of minimal needs'. Here, taxes and social-insurance contributions—especially the former—are high, funding benefits 'to levels commensurate with even the most discriminating tastes of the new middle classes'.
- 2.6.5 The third system, applying to much of continental Europe, is less egalitarian than the Scandinavian tradition. It also involves high tax and social contributions but the emphasis is on the latter. Means-testing is avoided and benefit levels for those with strong contribution records are high but those with poor social-insurance records—such as non-working wives—tend to lose out.
- 2.6.6 Much discussion of welfare has focused on whether, in a globalised economic environment, generous 'national' systems are still possible. Interestingly, the evidence is that employment in those branches of the economy exposed to international competition is 'relatively insensitive to the overall tax burden', as high pay is offset by high productivity (Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000: 77). The difficulty lies more in the low-productivity private-services sector, where social-security contributions can be a barrier to employment in a manner that is not true of tax-financed systems (given the low-paid pay little or no income tax) (Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000: 79-82). It is thus the Scandinavian model that emerges best (Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000: 89): 'The basic structures and

policy legacies of Scandinavian welfare states appear to be relatively robust against the pressures of economic internationalisation.'

- 2.6.7 The Danish case is quite remarkable, starting from UK (or indeed wider Irish) assumptions. A 1999 poll found that 70 per cent of Danes approved of paying high taxes, even though these (including social contributions) represented 52 per cent of gross domestic product, as against around 35 per cent in the UK (Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000: 89-91). This allowed public social expenditures in Denmark of 31 per cent of GDP, as against only 23 per cent in the UK (and 18 per cent in Ireland) (Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000: 364). Thus, though Denmark has a similar unemployment rate to the UK's, benefits can be much more generous.
- 2.6.8 For those in work wages are also much more equal. The same study showed that the fifth, or middling, decile of employees in Denmark earned 38 per cent more than the lowest tenth, whereas the middling group was paid 81 per cent more in the UK (Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000: 358). And, far from this being a disincentive to wealth creation, if US gross domestic product *per capita* were set at 100, Denmark's would be 83, while the UK's would be 69 (Scharpf and Schmidt, 2000: 338).
- 2.6.9 A comparative study of the UK, Sweden and Germany (Clasen *et al*, 1997: 6) found that in the latter two cases most unemployed, even long-term unemployed, claimants were on insurance-based benefits. In Sweden, these were set at 80 per cent of previous earnings and in Germany at 63-67 per cent. In the UK JSA averaged just 23 per cent of previous earnings—the lowest rate of benefit, compared with prior wages, in the EU.
- 2.6.10 This makes the UK unique in a way that severely constrains any anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland. As Clasen (1997: 11) argues—and New Labour's enthusiasm for means-testing has only borne out his claims—Britain 'stands out in a European context since it is not only a remarkably centralised and state controlled system of social insurance but also provides almost exclusively modest flat-rate rather than earnings related benefits.' About half of the increase in inequality under the Conservatives in the 1980s (see below) was indeed due to regressive changes in the tax and benefits system in the UK (Robinson, 1998: 117).
- 2.6.11 It is true to say that under New Labour the UK became less hostile to the European 'social model'—as reflected, notably, in an end to the UK opt-out from the Maastricht treaty's 'social chapter'. But the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has allied himself with centre-right leaders in Europe, such as José María Aznar of Spain and even Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, in urging labour-market deregulation and has been consistently hostile to directives restricting working hours or enhancing worker consultation.
- 2.6.12 The *Economist* (March 16th 2002) has provided cogent arguments against going down the American road. Recognising that the 'hire and fire' US model enhances inequalities, it points out that most EU members states have *lower* unemployment rates than America. The Netherlands, for example, has reduced unemployment to 2 per cent by a social-partnership arrangement

since the early 80s which has not involved widening pay differentials or abolishing the welfare state: wage moderation by the trade unions has been associated with more job creation by employers and reduced social-security contributions to fund the unemployed. Wage restraint and employment growth, if not extensive welfare provision, have also, of course, been features of the very successful social-partnership provisions in the Ireland since the late 80s.

3. Barriers to inclusion in Northern Ireland

3.1 The changing labour market

- 3.1.1 In Northern Ireland, the problem of long-term unemployment remains severe, despite the progress of recent years. Thus whereas in the UK as a whole, 27.5 per cent of unemployed claimants are long-term jobless (out of work for more than one year), this is true of 43.5 per cent in Northern Ireland (DEL, 2001a: 23). And whereas only 2.8 per cent of the former have been claiming for five years or more, this is true of fully 6.4 per cent in the region (DEL, 2001a: 17). The significance of a lack of skills is evidenced in Labour Force Survey data showing that twice as many, *pro rata*, of the unemployed as employed lack formal qualifications (DEL: 2001a: 19).
- 3.1.2 Worse still, while Northern Ireland is no longer the UK region with the highest proportion of jobless claimants, it continues to have the lowest *employment* rate, because official unemployment in the region is swamped by its high rate of economic inactivity—that is to say, those who are neither in work nor actively seeking it. Thus in March-May 2001, while 47,000 were unemployed in Northern Ireland by the International Labour Organisation definition, 510,000 people were economically inactive (DEL, 2001a: 10). So while 74.6 per cent of the UK working-age population are employed, this is only true of 67.1 per cent of those in Northern Ireland (DEL, 2001a: 40).
- 3.1.3 This means that more than 100,000 working-age households in the region contain no one in work—106,000 at March 2001, or 20.9 per cent of such households. Again this makes Northern Ireland the worst UK region, with across the UK as a whole 15.6 per cent of working-age households being workless (DEL, 2001a: 22).
- 3.1.4 Of course it is true that the vast majority of the economically inactive would not choose to work. But 60,000 report that they would—a higher number than the officially unemployed. Most of them (60 per cent) are women and most of the latter (52 per cent) are unable to work because of domestic commitments (DEL, 2001a: 20). Hence (apart from other reasons) the importance this paper attributes to sharing and socialising such caring responsibilities.
- 3.1.5 All these difficulties which Northern Ireland as a whole faces are exacerbated for those living in urban ghettos or in the west and north-west of the region. Thus, for example, a mapping of the concentration of long-term jobless claimants finds Belfast and Derry, Enniskillen, Omagh and Strabane clearly over-represented (DEL, 2001a: 17).
- 3.1.6 In rural Northern Ireland, these problems have been compounded by the steep decline in farm incomes in the latter half of the 90s. While this trend was reversed in 2001, total income from farming in the region remains at just over half its 1995 peak (DARD press release, March 28th 2002). Not only do rural areas tend to suffer higher unemployment and lower economic activity, particularly among women, but also population dispersal can add the insult of

isolation to economic injury. Thus, the Ulster Farmers' Union is concerned that suicide rates are twice as high in rural as in urban areas.

- 3.1.7 It is important to keep a balance between a focus on the 'supply side' of skills and labour-market engagement and the 'demand side' of jobs and their attractiveness. A weakness of the discussion document issued by the Taskforce on Employability and Long-term Unemployment (Department of Learning and Employment, 2001) was that it had a lot to say about the first and nothing about the second—a tendency evident in much of this discussion, which thus easily collapses into 'blaming the victim'. The experience of the Organisation of the Unemployed: Northern Ireland is that in areas like Enniskillen or Strabane the biggest problem is the absence of decently paid and sustainable employment—the alternative to no pay should not be low pay.
- 3.1.8 As Howarth, Kenway and Palmer (2001: 2) reflect on the UK government's approach in this regard, 'The existing programme focuses heavily on getting people into paid work, but a more critical view of the jobs that are available is now needed. The quality of jobs and experience of work for many people is still very poor, undermining the effectiveness of what is being attempted.'
- 3.1.9 Moreover, apart from the moral argument, an excessive focus on 'employability' will lead to ineffective policy. If it does not, in itself, lead to an increase in demand on the part of employers, it can only lead to greater 'churning' within the labour market. As Silver (1995a: 10) summarises the research, most studies find the symptoms of 'unemployability' to be the result of unemployment, rather than the other way around. Hence the need to intervene on the demand side, or even make the public sphere employer of last resort (Silver, 1995a: 16).
- 3.1.10 On the basis of such evidence, Webster (2000: 48) optimistically concludes that the Scottish Parliament—which has a broadly similar range of powers to those of the Northern Ireland Assembly—could have more influence in tackling social exclusion than might appear to be the case. Were 'employability' to be key, action would be restricted by the reserved nature of social security; but were employment to be the primary focus, devolved powers over economic and physical development could be deployed to the full. Social security (see below) is technically devolved in Northern Ireland, but in practice tinkering at the margins is the maximum that can be done; so Webster's argument largely applies on this side of the Irish Sea too.

3.2 Qualifications and skills

- 3.2.1 Northern Ireland has been badly served by the persistent official claim that it has a 'world-class' education system. While selection at 11 is touched on below, the true measure should be the reservoir of qualifications and skills of the workforce as a whole. Internationally, whereas 83 per cent of the German workforce has the equivalent of five GCSEs, as does 72 per cent of the French, this only applies to 55 per cent of UK workers (*Guardian*, March 26th 2002). And in Northern Ireland this poor UK standard is exacerbated by the 'drain' of talent to Britain and elsewhere not matched by in-migration of students and professionals. In these terms, the region prepares its children for

adulthood, trains its young people and re-trains its adult workers and returners poorly.

- 3.2.2 Part of the problem is the co-ordination failure which has always been at the heart of the UK's relatively voluntaristic training system. This has incentivised 'free-riding' behaviour by employers, poaching the skilled workers of other employers rather than investing in training their own—who might, in turn, be poached. Weak employment-protection legislation has compounded the problem, as short-term contracts and 'downsizing' have represented alternatives for employers to raising worker productivity. In turn, these trends disincentivise investment by individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds from taking education seriously and acquiring high skills. The New Deal programmes are of limited value in this context: they are too short-term to challenge fundamentally these larger trends, which would require much greater collective resources to defeat (Wood, 2001: 57-58).
- 3.2.3 Evidence to an inquiry by the Westminster Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (1997: xii) indicated in the region 'a lack of basic skills among many job seekers, in particular in relation to communication, numeracy and information technology'. While the information revolution and globalisation required 'well trained, intelligent and flexible' workers, such people were 'in short supply in Northern Ireland'. Part of the problem, as the committee recognised, is the conservative privileging of academic over vocational qualifications, unlike in say the Netherlands or Germany (NIAC, 1997: xvi).
- 3.2.4 A memorandum to the committee from the leading Northern Ireland educationalist Tony Gallagher (NIAC, 1997: 35-43) highlighted the gulf between increasing university participation and the 'significant minority of young people [who] emerge from 12 years of compulsory schooling unable to read a simple text or perform a simple qualification'. He warned: 'Excluded from the mainstream of society and with a limited opportunity to compete in the labour market, they are likely to become economically, socially and geographically immobile, concentrated in areas that are serviced by declining and under performing schools, and with every prospect of passing on their disadvantage to the next generation'.
- 3.2.5 One quarter of adults of working age in the region are at the lowest level of literacy (Northern Ireland Information Service, November 5th 1998). A similar proportion has no formal qualifications (Northern Ireland Skills Task Force, 2001: 11). This is not just morally unacceptable: like a long tail of poor batsmen at the end of the order in cricket, it pulls down the overall average—to the detriment of the performance of the economy and society as a whole.
- 3.2.6 The *Strategy 2010* economic-development strategy taken over from direct rule by the devolved administration set as a target an increase by 2010 in *per capita* GDP in Northern Ireland from 80 to 90 per cent of the UK average (Strategy Steering Group, 1999: 217). *Per capita* GDP is a function of the employment ratio and the productivity rate of those in work. Both are dragged back by a large reservoir of economically inactive and unqualified individuals—apart from the life-chances of the latter being blighted as a result.

- 3.2.7 Far from Northern Ireland improving its position *vis-à-vis* the rest of the UK, revised data have indicated that the region now only generates 77.5 per cent of the UK average for GDP per head. The Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre's economic model suggests that this ratio will be remarkably similar at the end of the decade (77.2 per cent). On this forecast, Northern Ireland would by then have closed the gap by just 0.5 percentage points over almost 20 years. (NIERC, 2001).
- 3.2.8 *Strategy 2010* was criticised by the Northern Ireland Economic Council, partly because it failed to demonstrate how the envisaged step-change in economic performance was to be achieved (NIEC, 1999: 32). Achieving it will require improvements in both the employment rate and in productivity. Far from being a brake on economic performance, therefore, an effective strategy for social inclusion should assist it. A study of four successful European regions for the NIEC (Dunford and Hudson, 1996: 187) concluded: 'Social cohesion is not simply a product of economic success but also a precondition for it.'

3.3 Domestic responsibilities

- 3.3.1 Northern Ireland has both a young population, due to its relatively high birth rate, and a high rate of disability. Large numbers of adults—by which we mean large numbers of adult women—are thus engaged daily in demanding caring responsibilities.
- 3.3.2 Sharing these responsibilities is partly a matter (see below) of pursuing policies to improve the work-life balance for all—including men—and in particular getting beyond the social convention that men work full-time while women fit in whatever part-time labour is consistent with their perceived domestic role. Lone parents or carers experience particular pressure. In Northern Ireland, 10.8 per cent of households are lone-parent, compared with a UK average of 9.4 per cent (DEL, 2001a: 21).
- 3.3.3 But there is also a task of socialisation here: the absence of good-quality, affordable childcare is clearly a significant barrier to many women realising their potential, in the labour market and society more generally. A report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies concluded that the gap between the demand for childcare and the supply was wider in the UK than in any other EU country. Poor public provision meant women were being forced to rely heavily on informal arrangements—or pay the highest childcare costs in Europe (*Guardian*, March 26th 2002).
- 3.3.4 Yet Northern Ireland is even worse—much worse—than the UK average. Unpublished research by Amanda Hayes has shown that in 1998 there were just 4,200 day-nursery places in the region. Thus, whereas the IFS study found that there were just eight such places for every 100 under-fives, in Northern Ireland, on those data, the comparable ratio would be a mere 3.5 per 100.
- 3.3.5 Hayes also reported that:

- while there were 310,000 children under 12 in Northern Ireland, there were fewer than 40,000 registered childcare places, of which nearly half were with childminders;
- the typical weekly cost of a full-time childminding place for a child under five was £50-75, while a full-time place at a private nursery cost £75-100 a week; and
- fewer than one in 20 employers offered assistance with childcare.

3.3.6 This problem is a very real one for low-income women (focus group, Derry): “Well, when I looked at childminding for my two kids, it was £83 per week. But that wasn’t even full time. That was with a registered person. She is quite entitled to charge that, because that is her livelihood. I have to torture my mother-in-law to look after them ... I mean, she is happy to do it, but if I didn’t have her I would have to pay that to go back to work. A woman has to go to work in the belief that her children will be safe in the care of whoever.”

3.3.7 And childcare costs will be compounded in the transition to work by reduction or loss of benefits associated with unemployment. The erosion of public subsidy for housing over the years has merely deepened this unemployment trap by (perversely) increasing the size of housing benefit claims on the public purse.

3.3.8 One woman gave this account (focus group, Derry): ‘I am on income support 12 years and I am a single parent, so I am on lone-parent benefits. I tried *everything* to get off benefits, every angle there was ... I got offered a job about six years ago at £250 a week. I couldn’t afford to take it ... I had a wee boy. I would have had needed to get him taken care of. By the time I was taxed on the £250 you are down to about £190. Out of that I would have had to pay £50 rent and £50 for someone to look after him. That was me down to £90 a week. You are left with nothing. They think that by giving people low benefits, they are enticing people out to work, but they are not.’

3.3.9 Apart from the benefits trap if only low-paid work is available, it is worth stressing that childcare is by no means the only barrier to the employment of lone parents in Northern Ireland. Many have genuine concerns for the welfare of their children outside their own care and, in this case, moving from ‘welfare to work’ is moving from one job to two (Evason *et al*, 1998: 127-128). The much higher rates of employment of lone parents in Scandinavian countries—six out of ten work full-time in Denmark—are due not only to public childcare arrangements but also to a more generally supportive welfare system (for example, in terms of benefits during parental leave) (Lewis and Hobson, 1997: 4, 10).

3.4 Operation of the social security system

3.4.1 Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, has seen the erosion of the latter’s social-insurance system over the years in favour of means-tested arrangements. Take a family, for example, where the male ‘head of household’ is long-term unemployed. His female partner is effectively rendered ‘dependent’ as she can only earn a very modest ‘earnings disregard’ of up to £10 before her wages

would be deducted, pound for pound, from his JSA. This represents a significant, and discriminatory, disincentive against women's employment.

- 3.4.2 The policy goal clearly has to be to minimise long-term unemployment and ensure as many people as possible—men and women—remain within the social-insurance system. But there are also issues that could be addressed to reduce the sharp disincentive effects the current system generates. Such 'benefit traps', as the quotations above indicate, were evident in our focus groups.
- 3.4.3 One specific problem is the deterrent effect of the system on volunteering. The requirement that claimants be available for employment at all times prevents them from taking up opportunities for volunteering (McAleavy *et al*, 2001: 82). Yet these can encourage social participation and may, indeed, lead to formal employment opportunities or, at least, engagement in networks where information about the latter becomes available.
- 3.4.4 Similar considerations apply to education. Eligibility rules for JSA allow only part-time attendance at courses. Yet the low level of benefit hardly makes participation in full-time education or training while on JSA an economically attractive indulgence, and few who have secured a qualification in this way are likely willingly to remain 'on the dole'. This restriction is not consistent with an active labour-market approach.
- 3.4.5 More generally, lack of understanding of the benefits system—hugely complex because of its selective character—is itself a major problem, as our focus groups indicated. According to the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, of some 11,000 social-security tribunals in Northern Ireland every year, 6,000 clients have no representation; the latter have a correspondingly poorer success rate.

3.5 Social exclusion and sectarianism

- 3.5.1 As so often in Northern Ireland, labour-market issues are often discussed in isolation from the overweening reality of communal division. Yet the restrictions on labour mobility brought about by physical and psychological commuting barriers make it much more difficult for the labour market to clear. A 'sump' of long-term unemployed and economically inactive in geographically bounded ghettos is the inevitable result.
- 3.5.2 A woman from outer west Belfast put it this way (focus group, Poleglass): 'I wanted to work in floristry. A few years ago I had to go take two buses to go and do a course ... It was in the morning and it was very difficult to get there to the college one day a week. I found it very stressful. Then you had to find a shop where you would go and work for experience and it was just too much to organise the kids and everything. It was more pressure that it was worth. I have lost a lot of my confidence now.'
- 3.5.3 Because more of these ghettos are Catholic than Protestant, the sectarian unemployment differential stubbornly resists the effects of the stringent anti-discrimination provisions in the 1989 Fair Employment Act and the 1998 Fair Employment and Treatment Order. Meanwhile, professional employees enjoy

near-full employment and live in areas where that is the norm, making it easy to ignore the plight of their less fortunate fellow citizens.

- 3.5.4 Adding all the above elements together, it is clear that social exclusion appears so intractable in Northern Ireland not just because of the limited powers of the Assembly and the lack of experience that Northern Ireland politicians have in dealing with social and economic policy (important though these are). It is more profoundly because long-term unemployment and its hysteresis effects, the lack of sharing or socialisation of domestic responsibilities, the way the benefits system works and sectarian rigidities in the labour market conspire in a mutually reinforcing way to ghettoise large swathes of the (non-) working class in Northern Ireland.
- 3.5.5 Removing these barriers, to allow every citizen in the region to feel an equal member of a 'normal' society, where they can live, move and work freely—to be able to do what the majority take for granted—is at one level a modest, yet at another a huge, aspiration.
- 3.5.6 Much discussion of 'community development' in Northern Ireland takes for granted the notion of 'community'—even though often the perceived boundary of the latter is (in whole or in part) sectarian and even though that often means colluding with monopolistic paramilitary claims to the 'representation' of the neighbourhood concerned. As the writer Glenn Patterson has acerbically put it in his 'ABC' of Northern Ireland, 'C: **Community**—another word for side.' It is a challenge to the voluntary sector, which formally takes a strong anti-sectarian stand, not to collude with sectarianism in practice in this way.
- 3.5.7 Recent work by Robert Putnam (2000: 22) on 'social capital' in America has provided important cautionary evidence. Social capital, unlike physical capital, is embodied in intangible but no less important phenomena—trust, norms and networks—that make the whole of society greater than the sum of its individual parts. Of particular value is 'bridging' capital, linking together heterogeneous individuals and groups, as against 'bonding' capital in homogeneous communities. The former builds relations of trust, agreement on norms and networks of connection among people who might otherwise be divided along ethnic or other lines. Bonding, by contrast, may actually be counter-productive, as it risks defining the solidarity of 'insiders' over and against those deemed to be 'outsiders', even enemies.
- 3.5.8 This harsh lesson has yet to be learned in Northern Ireland. Yet the failure to take on sectarianism goes some way to explaining why the large sums expended on community development in recent decades have secured only modest achievements in actually reducing exclusion. In some ways relationships of ghetto dependency and dissociation from the mainstream have been unintentionally reinforced, rather than challenged, by such expenditures. (Below, we discuss the positive virtues, including in conferring a sense of emancipation, of a more bottom-up conception of neighbourhood development.)
- 3.5.9 This highlights the importance, also discussed below, of the 'social economy' in Northern Ireland. Interestingly, as Stutt *et al* (2001: 13) point out, the social

economy has developed in the region largely on a cross-sectarian footing—that is to say ‘on the basis of bridging rather than bonding social capital’. Apart from this being ‘a remarkable achievement’, it suggests that support for the social economy may prove more productive than disappointing past programmes.

- 3.5.10 The point can be put more negatively in the light of the research at interfaces by Pete Shirlow (*Guardian*, January 4th 2002). More than two-thirds of Dr Shirlow’s young respondents had never had a meaningful conversation with anyone from the ‘other’ community—a *sine qua non* of bridging social capital. And more than seven out of ten of his overall sample refused to use health centres located in areas dominated by the ‘other’ religion. Such sectarian rigidities can only make for grossly inefficient over-provision of public services—at the expense of quality—or deny citizens the access to such services that in any civilised society they should reasonably expect.
- 3.5.11 This problem was also evident in our own researches. A focus group of unemployed mothers in west Belfast highlighted their geographical isolation—not only in terms of public transport to potential workplaces to which they would feel comfortable travelling, but also in access to such basic amenities as leisure centres or supermarkets.

4. Why a regional strategy?

4.1 The EU framework

- 4.1.1 The Amsterdam treaty, which was signed by the 15 member states on 17 June 1997 and came into force on 1 May 1999, was a significant step in establishing a Europe that addresses social needs. The new Treaty opened the way for dialogue between the EU and its citizens by safeguarding fundamental rights (for the first time Member States failing to respect such rights may face penalties), tackling discrimination of all kinds, providing for equal opportunities for men and women, focusing on social issues and assets such as voluntary work, sport, public-service television broadcasting, disability, churches and non-confessional organisations, public credit institutions operating in certain countries and a rejection of the death penalty. But the Treaty also deals with the major issues facing our society such as employment, the environment, public health and open government.
- 4.1.2 The Amsterdam Treaty means a greater emphasis on citizenship and the rights of individuals, more democracy in the shape of increased powers for the European Parliament, a new title on employment, a Community area of freedom, security and justice, the beginnings of a common foreign and security policy and the reform of the institutions in the run-up to enlargement of the EU.
- 4.1.3 According to commission estimates, 1 to 2 billion euro—12-20 per cent of the gross domestic product of EU member states—are wasted each year through ill health, crime and other side-effects of joblessness and poverty. The current president, Romano Prodi, has concluded (Guardian, March 21st 2000): ‘Social exclusion, quite apart from being morally unacceptable, is a waste of money.’
- 4.1.4 The European Council of Lisbon in March 2000 recognised that the extent of poverty and social exclusion was unacceptable. Building a more inclusive European Union was thus considered as an essential element in achieving the Union's ten-year strategic goal of sustained economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. The Lisbon European Council set a new strategic goal for the European Union for next decade - “The Union shall become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. The Council also agreed to a new working method at EU level known as “an open method of coordination”. The open method of coordination involved –
- Fixing common objectives/guidelines for all Member states combined with timetables and targets
 - Translating the common objectives/guidelines into national policies through national action plans
 - Establishing indicators and benchmarks as a means of comparing best practices
 - Periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review.

- 4.1.5 The “open method” was a new type of policy cooperation at EU level. It is a fully decentralised approach, which recognises the responsibility of Member States for these policy areas. It also encourages mutual learning and cooperation across the EU through systematic monitoring, evaluation and peer review of policies.
- 4.1.6 Much progress has been made since the launch of the European strategy in March 2000. Common objectives were agreed in December 2000 at the European Council of Nice –
- To facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services;
 - To prevent the risks of exclusion
 - To help the most vulnerable
 - To mobilise all relevant actors
- 4.1.7 National action plans against poverty and social exclusion were produced by June 2001 in response to the common objectives on poverty and social exclusion agreed by the EU at Nice. In these plans each Member State sets out the major challenges it faces, the strategic approach, main objectives and policy measures used to tackle the issues identified. The Plans provided indicators of poverty and social exclusion and gave examples of good practice deployed by the Member State. The Action Plans cover the period July 2001 to June 2003. The next round of Action Plans is planned for 2003.
- 4.1.8 The Commission presented its proposal for a Community Action programme in June 2000, which was an initiative, designed to encourage co-operation between Member States in this field. The programme was officially adopted by the Parliament on 15th November and by the Council on 22nd November 2001. Its budget amounts to 75 M euro over 5 years (2002-2006). The programme aims to support cooperation between Member States by: 1) improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty with the help in particular of comparable indicators; 2) organising exchanges on policies which are implemented and promoting mutual learning in the context of national action plans; 3) developing the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty effectively and to promote innovative approaches, in particular through promoting networking and dialogue with all the stakeholders.
- 4.1.9 The action programme complements EU social policy, and in particular the activities of the European Social Fund, the Community initiative EQUAL and other action programmes such as the programme to combat discrimination, the programme for gender equality and the actions and the EU disability strategy. Contrary to the European Social Fund, the programme is not meant to financially support activities carried out on the ground but rather is meant to support exchange activities. Hence its overall funds are limited in comparison to the structural funds.
- 4.1.10 The European Commission carried out an assessment of the National Action Plans. Its report constituted the basis for the Joint Inclusion Report (JIR), which was adopted by the Employment and Social Affairs Council and

submitted to the Laeken-Brussel Summit on 14 December 2001. This was the first time that the EU endorsed a policy document about poverty and social exclusion. The report confirms that tackling poverty and social exclusion continues to be an important challenge facing the Europe Union. 18%, or over 60 million of the EU's population, are at risk of poverty and about half of these are living in long-term poverty. Children and young people, the elderly, the unemployed and lone parent families have a particularly high risk of poverty. The relative poverty rate - those living below a threshold of 60% of median national income - varies considerably across Member States, from 8% in Denmark to 23% in Portugal.

4.1.11 The report identifies eight core challenges, which are being addressed to a greater or lesser extent by most Member States. These are:

- developing an inclusive labour market and promoting employment as a right and opportunity for all;
- guaranteeing adequate income and resources for a decent standard of living;
- tackling educational disadvantage;
- preserving family solidarity and protecting the rights of children;
- ensuring reasonable accommodation for all;
- guaranteeing equal access to and investing in high-quality public services (health, transport, social, care, cultural, recreational and legal);
- improving the delivery of services;
- regenerating areas of multiple deprivation.

4.1.12 Anna Diamantopoulou, European Commissioner for employment and social affairs said in presenting the report: "Social exclusion is a human question. How can it not be when there are 60 million people in the EU today who are poor or at risk of poverty? But it is also an economic question and one about governance. An economic question because only a cohesive Europe can tap rich resources of human capital and skills, which are presently under-utilised. A 'governance' question because the EU is still widely seen as being focused the interests of big business rather than the man or woman in the street. This report is an important step because it shows that the EU has the collective political will to act not only in the economic field but also against poverty and social exclusion."

4.1.13 The Joint Inclusion Report Indicates that the effort to develop a strategic and integrated approach to fighting poverty and social exclusion, including the setting of medium to long-term targets, varies a good deal across Member States. The report adopted by the Commission singles out as good examples of a strategic approach the national action plans of the Netherlands, Denmark and France.

4.1.14 The Netherlands government has a statutory obligation to organise annual events engendering dialogue between statutory agencies and NGOs (Heikkilä, nd: 18): 'These take the form of annual conferences or local meetings where

civil society representatives can make their own points of view and also advocate the interests of poor people and vulnerable groups.’

- 4.1.15 The Dutch approach is to focus on prevention, rather than cure. Rather than risk long-term exclusion, every unemployed person is offered a reintegration option within 12 months: education, work experience or employment.
- 4.1.16 The UK’s Action Plan noted that –
- “Following the constitutional reforms of 1999, many of the key areas of policy responsibility in the field of poverty and social exclusion rest with the devolved administrations. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have different devolution settlements, which have implications for the structures and strategies that have emerged to deliver solutions for their particular circumstances. Therefore, joint and complementary working between the different tiers of Government is key to the successful pursuit of policies across the UK.”
- 4.1.17 Annex C of the UK Action Plan set out the policy framework for Northern Ireland. This focused on the importance of the Programme for Government, New TSN and PSI (Promoting Social Inclusion) S75 Equality obligations and the Executive programme Funds. These areas are further discussed in the remainder of this Section.

4.2 The UK policy context and its limits

- 4.2.1 Much of the discussion of inequality in Northern Ireland takes place as if it were a quasi-independent state. Yet the macroeconomic and welfare context is set at a UK level. As Lawless and Smith (1998: 216) argue in a book on regional social exclusion, ‘For many of the socially excluded, real change will only come through the espousal of alternative political and economic parameters on the part of national [*sic*—in this case, of course, multinational] government.’
- 4.2.2 The First Minister, David Trimble, recognised this at the launch of the New TSN action plans report in March 2001 (Executive Information Service, March 21st 2001): ‘A regional administration such as ours can only do so much and we must work within the national [*sic*] context set by tax and benefit rates among other things. But within these constraints we are dedicated to the achievement of equal life chances for all.’
- 4.2.3 That UK backdrop is quite inhospitable. It is only when the seriousness of that context is recognised that the limits of existing policy in Northern Ireland become fully apparent. The UK has seen a tripling of the proportion of households with less than half average income since the end of the long wave of post-war social democracy in the mid-70s (Howarth, Kenway and Palmer, 2001: 8).
- 4.2.4 An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, based on 1991-96 data, showed that two decades of Conservative rule had left the UK with the highest proportion of people in poverty of any country in the developed world—significantly worse even than the United States, twice as bad as Germany and three times as bad as the Netherlands (*Guardian*,

January 12th 2000). A study by Unicef researchers, with data from 1993-96, found that, of EU member states, the UK came last on three out of seven indicators of child well-being (*Guardian*, March 17th 2000).

- 4.2.5 A survey for the Office of National Statistics found that the proportion of households lacking three or more necessities had risen from 14 per cent in 1983 to 21 per cent in 1990, and to 24 per cent in 1999 (*Guardian*, April 2nd 2001). And a Performance and Innovation Unit report last year (*Guardian*, April 27th 2001) noted that between 1979 and 1998-99, the real incomes of the bottom tenth of the income distribution had risen by 6 per cent, as compared with an 82 per cent increase for the top decile.
- 4.2.6 Before 1979, the 20th century had seen little change in wage inequality in the UK. The significance of developments in the last quarter, therefore, is that they have made wages more unequal than they were a century ago (Teague and Wilson, 1995: 80).
- 4.2.7 That widening inequality gap has, of course, been mirrored in Northern Ireland—except that a much higher proportion of the population falls below half average UK income. As McGregor and McKee (1995: 43) concluded from 1986-93 data, ‘Despite major differences in incomes, the extent of inequality in Northern Ireland is not radically different from Britain, though there is some evidence of a more entrenched class structure. Both have experienced widening inequality in the past decade, with the rich becoming richer more rapidly than the remainder of society.’
- 4.2.8 The ‘Gini coefficient’ is a measure of the distribution of a variable—in this case income. The higher the coefficient, the greater the spread—in this case, the greater the inequality. The UK and Ireland, particularly the latter, have tended historically to have much higher Gini coefficients than more social-democratic European counterparts. But while income inequality has tended to stand still in Ireland more recently, in the UK it rose markedly between the mid-70s and the mid-90s, placing both in an unenviable category alongside Greece, Portugal and Spain—the poorest of the EU15—in the most unequal league. In 1993, the Gini coefficients for the UK and Ireland were 35 and 34 respectively. The average was 31, while the Netherlands came in at 27 and Denmark at 22 (Nolan and Maître, 2000: 158-160).
- 4.2.9 Nor, contrary to New Labour ‘spin’, has inequality been reduced since they came to office. This is due to a further widening in wage inequalities for those in work (Levitas, 2001: 19-20). ONS figures show that the Gini coefficient for UK income has continued inexorably to rise—from 38 in 1997-98, to 39 in 1998-99 and 40 in 1999-2000. Extraordinarily, the data also show that the poorest fifth of households pay 41.4 per cent of their income in tax (including VAT etc), whereas the richest fifth contribute only 36.5 per cent. The poorest fifth receive just 6 per cent of post-tax income, whereas the richest quintile secures fully 45 per cent (*Guardian*, April 18th 2001).
- 4.2.10 As Walker puts it (*Guardian*, January 15th 2002), concisely connecting the economics to the politics, ‘The indices of inequality are only going to move, at least within our lifetimes, if the state redistributes income. And that means

taking more from the better off, who are the backbone of the marginal constituencies.’ Nolan *et al* (2000: 352) comment in similar vein about Ireland: ‘The political culture appears more comfortable focusing on disadvantage than tackling the deeper structural causes of inequality of opportunity.’

4.3 The work of the Scottish Parliament

- 4.3.1 The Scottish experience is bound to be of interest to Northern Ireland because of the similar position of Scotland as a devolved region (in this case small nation) in the UK, with a parliament enjoying similar powers to those of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The development of a Social Inclusion Strategy in Scotland predated the transfer of power to the devolved parliament in July 1999. The then Scottish secretary, Donald Dewar, launched the strategy (Scottish Office, 1999) in March that year.
- 4.3.2 In December 1997, Mr Dewar had established a ‘social exclusion network’ in government, a group of senior officials. So far, so like the ‘social steering group’ established under direct rule by the Northern Ireland Office. But a subsequent consultation process led (Scottish Office, 1999: 3) to official recognition of ‘the need for a more inclusive approach to policy development’. A new Scottish Social Inclusion Network was formed, ‘comprising representatives of organisations with key responsibilities for promoting social inclusion, individuals with direct, personal experience of tackling social exclusion, including community representatives’ and the officials.
- 4.3.3 It was the latter network that developed the strategy—not government alone. Northern Ireland enjoys much—many would say too much—‘consultation’. But most of it is *ex post facto* and therefore often valueless: the deliberative dialogue engaged in by the SSIN in generating the strategy is far rarer. And nor was this a one-off: the network has been sustained as a continuing sounding board.
- 4.3.4 Moreover, substantively the strategy has real bite. It is driven (Scottish Office, 1999: 12-13) by the ideals of ‘joined-up’ government, of prevention being better than cure, of evidence-based understanding of ‘what works’, of inclusiveness (as embodied in the network) and, last but not least, of empowerment—the idea that social inclusion is about ensuring individuals can ‘take control of their own situations’. It focuses on specific barriers to exclusion and what may be done to remove them.
- 4.3.5 Thus, for example, high levels of morbidity on working-class estates are being addressed through local ‘healthy living centres’ (Scottish Office, 1999: 28). Primary care only deals with the symptoms; these centres are geared towards preventing illness through improving life circumstances and addressing lifestyle factors (such as smoking) and specific health topics.
- 4.3.6 Similarly, ‘new community schools’ are enlarging the concept of the school to adopt a holistic approach to the needs of the individual child (Scottish Office, 1999: 35). They bring together in a single team professionals from school education, social work, family support and health education and promotion.

The aim is to improve educational attainment and subsequent social and economic opportunities.

- 4.3.7 A 'new housing partnerships' initiative is aimed at giving tenants in social housing greater control of the management of their houses (as well as injecting additional private finance). 'Community-based' housing associations are seen in Scotland as a vehicle for tenant empowerment (Scottish Office, 1999: 44).
- 4.3.8 A further flagship policy is 'social inclusion partnerships' for co-ordinating local action (Scottish Office, 1999: 48)—see the discussion of local strategic partnerships in Northern Ireland below. These do not fall into the trap identified earlier of excluding those outside concentrations of poverty: they have flexible boundaries to take in the rural excluded or to focus on particular social groups. They are expected to be long-term in their approach.
- 4.3.9 In addition, there is a focus on evaluation and elaborating appropriate indicators and this has been sustained under devolution, thereby maintaining momentum. Continuity was eased by two factors absent in Northern Ireland: the Scottish secretary became the first First Minister, as Labour dominated (albeit in coalition with the Liberal Democrats) the new administration; and, while this can be over-egged, there is a broad centre-left consensus in Scotland.
- 4.3.10 After the transfer of power, Mr Dewar published a report that set out the targets of the strategy (Scottish Executive, 1999). Interestingly, these were separated into long-term goals, like ensuring 'full employment', and benchmarks of progress, like reducing the proportion of unemployed adults of working age. This combination of clear beacons to aim at and indicators to measure the direction of movement is probably more appropriate than defining arbitrary numerical targets (like, for example, saying that the unemployment rate would be reduced to x per cent by year y).
- 4.3.11 The danger of the latter is that it can lead to the 'tyranny of the target', where everything is skewed to meet a target which may or may not be meaningful. This danger is compounded when ever-more-detailed and not-necessarily-consistent targets are piled on top of one another, leading to incoherence in government and incomprehensibility for the citizenry. The aim should be to set a relatively small number of goals—there are ten in the Scottish strategy—and ensure these are the driving force, so that the pursuit and achievement of targets does not become the be-all and end-all.
- 4.3.12 A long-term, patient and strategic approach, keeping all eyes firmly on the social-inclusion ball, is what is required. And the Scottish strategy—with the continuing watchdog of the Social Inclusion Network—favours this by annual reporting (see, for example, Scottish Executive 2001) on performance against the benchmarks and goals (or 'milestones' and 'targets' as the strategy rather confusingly describes them).
- 4.3.13 It should be stressed that these are *substantive*, not *procedural*, indicators. In other words, 'success' isn't defined by producing an equality impact assessment (valuable though these can be in highlighting problems) but rather

by whether, *in the real world*, things have got better. As one of our interviewees complained, 'At present, we are process- and not outcome-driven.'

- 4.3.14 It should also be stressed that these are 'national' (all-Scottish), not local indicators. The Noble area indicators that have been developed in such detail to assist the TSN mechanism in Northern Ireland are of no value in estimating the success or otherwise of policy at the regional level in arresting social exclusion—arguably, a far more important thing to know. Notably, the Scottish strategy only measures local indicators to determine inequalities *between* areas—in unemployment rates, for example—as an index of the spatial dimension of inequality that, at 'national' level, policy must address.

4.4 The Irish National Anti-poverty Strategy (NAPS)

- 4.4.1 On the back of the United Nations Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995, the then centre-left, 'rainbow' coalition in Ireland—with the particular commitment of the Minister For Social Welfare, Proinsias de Rossa—prepared a National Anti-Poverty Strategy for publication the following year. This was very much a high-level political initiative, as reflected in the foreword to the document by the three party leaders (Government of Ireland, 1996: i).
- 4.4.2 But ministers also claimed that 'the input of those experiencing poverty and their representatives' had been 'central to the preparation of the strategy'. They recognised that 'given the deep-seated structural causes of poverty, it will require considerable effort over a period of time. If this is to be sustained a strategic approach is required.' Against the backdrop of the onset of prodigious economic growth, they warned of the 'risk of increasing divergence of ... incomes and expectations between the better off and the most marginalised'.
- 4.4.3 The strategy is defined (Government of Ireland, 1996: 2) as 'a major cross-departmental policy initiative by the Government designed to place the needs of the poor and the socially excluded among the issues at the top of the national agenda in terms of government policy development and action'. Its principles (Government of Ireland, 1996: 7) are:
- equality of access and encouragement of participation;
 - minority rights;
 - reduction of inequalities, especially by gender;
 - the partnership approach (locally and nationally);
 - involvement of the voluntary sector;
 - encouraging self-reliance; and
 - consultation, especially with users.
- 4.4.4 A 'global target' was set at the outset, to reduce the proportion of the population who were 'consistently poor'. These were defined more and less stringently as having disposable incomes less than 50 per cent of the national average and less than 60 per cent, as well as (in both cases) being deprived

of certain basic resources. The goal was to reduce the proportions of those so defined from 9 per cent and 15 per cent respectively, to less than 5 per cent and less than 10 per cent respectively by 2007 (Government of Ireland, 1996: 9).

- 4.4.5 The disadvantage of this 'consistently poor' indicator is that it focuses on poverty but not wealth. Moreover, the absolute aspect of the measure—the 'deprivation indicators'—made it easier to see rapid progress during a period of intense economic growth and has required subsequent adjustment. For both these reasons, the Gini coefficient is a better measure.
- 4.4.6 Within this, the strategy sets out key areas where progress needs to be made: educational disadvantage, unemployment (particularly long-term unemployment), income adequacy, urban disadvantage and rural poverty. And it sets out an objective, a target and a series of policy actions in each case.
- 4.4.7 It is significant that the strategy is accorded a high political and administrative profile. The Minister For Social, Community And Family Affairs, Dermot Ahern, has day-to-day responsibility, but the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, chairs a cabinet sub-committee on poverty and social exclusion. An important factor behind the emergence of the strategy was undoubtedly the sterling advocacy for many years of the statutory Combat Poverty Agency (CPA), particularly its director, Hugh Frazer.
- 4.4.8 The background of social-partnership arrangements, operating in Ireland since 1987—through a series of three-year agreements with the unions, employers, farmers and, latterly, the voluntary sector—is also of significance. The strategy itself recognises that its success requires that the 'partnership between all the relevant key actors in the process continues and develops' (Government of Ireland, 1996: 21). It is therefore a matter of concern that there have been recent indications from the employers' side that they might not be willing to see the arrangements renewed.
- 4.4.9 The National Economic and Social Forum, organised principally around the social partners, is charged with reporting on progress on the strategy, while the CPA is allocated an evaluating role. These are important bases of sustaining momentum.
- 4.4.10 In 1997, the 'rainbow' government (Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left) was replaced by a centre-right coalition of Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats. Successive budgets by the Fianna Fáil Finance Minister, Charlie McCreevy, who is closely allied to the Progressive Democrat leader, Mary Harney, have been criticised by the CPA for widening inequality in Ireland (*Irish Times*, April 17th 2002). But continued rapid economic growth has meant that unemployment has sharply fallen and the fact that the coalition took over NAPS was itself testament to how government, of any hue, has become locked into the strategy.
- 4.4.11 An overall review of NAPS arose from the latest social-partnership agreement (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2002). It was able to point to a reduction in the proportion of the more broadly defined 'consistently poor' to 6.2 per cent in 2000—well below the 10 per cent originally mooted for

2007. A new target of 2 per cent maximum 'consistent poverty' was thus set. There was a commitment to continue to raise benefit levels in real terms. A number of new detailed targets were identified.

- 4.4.12 The review also promised that a Social Inclusion Consultative Group (social partners plus experts) would meet twice yearly, the National Economic and Social Forum would convene a Social Inclusion Forum annually and the latter would evaluate the strategy every two years. A National Office for Social Inclusion would be established, reporting to the Minister For Social, Community And Family Affairs and social-inclusion units would be created (if not already in existence) in the prime departments concerned. The office and the CPA would work together in developing research data.
- 4.4.13 All in all, this represents a substantial, if complex, institutional commitment.

4.5 New TSN and PSI: fragmented, piecemeal

- 4.5.1 'Targeting Social Need' was launched under the Conservative government in 1991 and 'relaunched', as 'New TSN', under the successor Labour administration in 1998. Relaunches usually betray underlying problems with the 'product' itself, and there are disabling problems of incoherence at the heart of TSN (Quirk and McLaughlin, 1996), which has been uncritically taken over from direct rule by the devolved administration. In particular, it was never made explicit from the outset whether the objective was to remove sectarian differentials in well-being or to advance equality more generally.
- 4.5.2 For example, the then newly installed Deputy First Minister, Séamus Mallon, told a consultation conference in Derry (Executive Information Service, January 13th 2000): 'New TSN's aim is to tackle social need and social exclusion and to ensure that the layers of deprivation that blight the lives of so many are removed including poor health, housing, education and employment prospects. By targeting need, New TSN should contribute to the progressive elimination of the persistent community differentials that have haunted our society for so long.' Yet these two comments do not sit together.
- 4.5.3 The disproportionate emphasis on religious inequalities in Northern Ireland ignores the reality that, as Borooah *et al* (1995: 49) have demonstrated, only 1.6 per cent of income inequality in the region can be accounted for by differences in mean income for Catholics and Protestants. The remainder can be related partly to differences in status within each religious 'community'—whether the individual is unemployed, employed or self-employed—and, to a greater extent, to the spread of income within those three labour-market categories. Social class is thus key and the researchers found educational attainment (which they took as a proxy for class) to be the central predictor of income inequality. Borooah *et al* (1995: 55) concluded that 'if one was serious about "doing something" for inequality in NI then one should start by attempting to narrow income differences between the "rich" and the "poor" (irrespective of religion) rather than attempting to narrow the Catholic-Protestant income divide while leaving income distribution, in every other respect, unchanged'.

- 4.5.4 To put this in perspective, a recent *Family Expenditure Survey* (NISRA, 1999) found that Catholic households' weekly expenditure was 98 per cent of that for Protestant households. It also indicated that the lowest quartile of households, in terms of gross weekly income, had a weekly expenditure just 23 per cent of that of the highest quartile.
- 4.5.5 It is often forgotten that not only does New TSN have no designated budget, but it also advances no specific new policies and does nothing to bring about 'joined-up' work across departments to tackle exclusion or to engage non-governmental actors. As the 2000 annual report on the separate departmental action plans baldly put it (New TSN Unit, 2001: 27), 'The success of New TSN will depend on the vigour with which it is implemented by Departments.'
- 4.5.6 What TSN seeks to do is to ensure that departments skew funding attached to existing programmes towards those who are disadvantaged. Under direct rule, that was all that could be sought. The programmes were decided by an administration unaccountable to the citizens of Northern Ireland *per se* and the Northern Ireland Office was almost entirely diverted by 'security' and narrowly sectarian political matters.
- 4.5.7 But TSN, 'old' or 'new', could not possibly realise the larger ambition the Deputy First Minister outlined in a devolved context. That would require an altogether more strategic approach, based on an understanding of the key barriers to inclusion in Northern Ireland, embodied in a policy portfolio to tackle them, led from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and translated into a concrete plan of implementation.
- 4.5.8 One of our NGO interviewees, supportive of the idea of TSN, nevertheless concluded: 'TSN really doesn't have enough teeth and that is the problem ... Anti-poverty work is harder than TSN, however, and it will need very good leadership in order to be steered clearly.' Another concurred: 'Rather than having TSN and PSI, which are piecemeal and nice in theory but useless, we need something comprehensive. Talk about toothless. It is great that they exist but it doesn't go anywhere near far enough. The fact that they don't do it on a "joined-up government" basis is highly frustrating, ironic and destructive. It is also a waste of resources.' And a third said: 'New TSN is difficult as there is no money attached to it and no central driver within the whole structure of government ... OFMDFM isn't delivering on TSN. We need to have a single unified leadership statement from both First Ministers on anti-poverty issues.'
- 4.5.9 This would also require reflection on government programmes across the board with a view to asking what, in the round, they contribute to addressing social exclusion. For example, as Mike Morrissey told a conference on inequality in Belfast last year, the Executive Committee has taken over the philosophy, embodied in *Strategy 2010*, that Northern Ireland should be rendered economically competitive in a taken-for-granted context of globalisation. This needed to be tempered by an emphasis on redistribution and reconciliation, he said.
- 4.5.10 The principal structural recommendation emerging from *Strategy 2010* was for a unified development agency for Northern Ireland, and this was pursued

enthusiastically by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sir Reg Empey. Clearly the body has the largest single responsibility for the development of good-quality employment in the region in the years ahead and so has potentially great significance for the fight against social exclusion.

- 4.5.11 The international norm is that while the board of such agencies usually includes businesspersons, 'environmental and equity objectives' require broad participation by trade unions and other NGOs (UNIDO, 1997: 14). Yet when Sir Reg appointed the shadow board in July last year (Executive Information Service, July 30th 2001), six of the seven appointees were from the private sector, with just one trade unionist and no voluntary-sector representative. A gender imbalance automatically followed, which the minister awkwardly addressed by appointing an additional seven board members (Executive Information Service, January 10th 2002).
- 4.5.12 The New Labour language of social inclusion, associated with the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit at Downing Street, was translated into Northern Ireland under the 'promoting social inclusion' initiative, which has again been uncritically carried over from direct rule. The restrictiveness of Labour's definition of social exclusion as multiple disadvantage was unfortunately (if unconsciously) preserved in the process.
- 4.5.13 'Social exclusion' was defined thus (New TSN Unit, 1998: 15, essentially replicated at New TSN Unit, 2001a: 4): 'Sometimes people's problems are so numerous and the effects are so severe that it is impossible for them to lead what most people in Northern Ireland would consider to be normal every-day lives. The Government is using the term "social exclusion" to describe what can happen to people who are subject to the most severe problems.'
- 4.5.14 PSI has thereby been reduced, as in Britain, to what one academic (Wood, 2001: 59) has witheringly described as 'a handful of reports on isolated subjects'. While the Northern Ireland versions have not been without value—the thematic approach of the teenage pregnancy report (DHSSPS, 2000), for example, worked well—they are no substitute for a comprehensive, holistic and sustained strategy against exclusion. The danger otherwise is of homogenising diverse actual individuals and their difficulties into groups with which they may or may not identify, who become 'flavour of the month' while the policy spotlight is upon them but enjoy no enduring commitment. Indeed, this is implicit in the official suggestion (OFMDFM, 2001: 9) that PSI will be 'concentrating on a small number at any one time'.
- 4.5.15 This is a particular concern in that because TSN has no assigned budget, nor does PSI. Fullerton and Hayes (2001) complain: 'Government Policy in NI promotes the philosophy of "joined-up" responses and support, but in practice the current structure of funding is fragmented, resulting in short term funding and inadequate delivery of services.'
- 4.5.16 The focus must be on developing a cohesive society in this broad sense, so that citizens of Northern Ireland genuinely feel 'members one of another'—with important benefits for intercommunal relations. The danger of the alternative approach of 'targeting need' and adopting a narrow definition of exclusion is

that it distinguishes the 'poor' and fails to ensure the whole society perceives both the costs of exclusion and the benefits of inclusion.

- 4.5.17 If the opportunity of devolution is really to be grasped, regional elected representatives must throw off the mindsets of direct rule. Rather than PSI being a subordinate aspect of TSN, a new approach should foreground a broader concept of inclusion, within which the more modest potential of TSN can be subsumed, as the Civic Forum (2001) has already recommended in its comment on the Programme for Government. Otherwise, it is not clear in what sense devolution is 'making a difference' at all.

5. A strategic framework

5.1 A vision for Northern Ireland

- 5.1.1 Northern Ireland has never had a public debate about what kind of society it should be. Should it be a social-democratic region, with a strong commitment to equality and inclusion? Should it be a liberal (in the European sense) region, prioritising choice and ‘free’ markets? Or should it be a conservative region, which emphasises tradition and individual responsibilities? Instead, ‘debate’ has been dominated by the state of which the region should be a member. This is not just an abrogation of responsibility: it is simply not sustainable.
- 5.1.2 Ironically, while recent New Labour policy innovations and the NAPS are interesting, both the UK and Ireland stand out in Europe as markedly unequal. Both have set taxes and social contributions at levels much too low to fund the civilised welfare arrangements that would be taken for granted in much of continental Europe.
- 5.1.3 As the *Irish Times* European editor has put it (*Irish Times*, May 30th 2000), ‘Ireland is ranked 16th in the UN human poverty index for developed countries, behind all its fellow EU members except Portugal and Greece. The US is 17th and UK 15th, while Sweden is the best performer, with the Netherlands second and Germany third. While our fellow member-states can make serious inroads on poverty through social transfers, Ireland and Britain lag well behind.’
- 5.1.4 It is the view of the Civic Forum that the vision in the Programme for Government of an ‘inclusive ... society’ is the right one (Northern Ireland Executive, 2001: 3). The challenge is to fill out that vision in policy terms and to ensure it enjoys the social and political commitment it requires.

5.2 Equality of life-chances

- 5.2.1 One of the effects of the ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland has been the hyper-politicisation of what has become known as the ‘equality agenda’, focusing principally on securing ‘parity of esteem’ between ‘nationalists’ and ‘unionists’. This has had two unfortunate outcomes.
- 5.2.2 First, in the name of *equality*, a progressive aspiration which only means anything if we recognise our common humanity, *difference*—a more conservative notion that legitimises racial, gender, religious or linguistic distinction—has perversely been pursued. Secondly, just as apples and mandarins can not be compared because they are different, nor can the competitive battle between green and orange ever be resolved by an agreement that ‘parity’ has been achieved. The risk here is thus of endless unionist-nationalist antagonism, which is not in the broader public interest and deters most citizens and civic groups from engaging with the political arena.
- 5.2.3 The Civic Forum clearly wants to encourage such engagement and to see a more ‘normal’ society emerge in Northern Ireland, whatever its long-term

constitutional location (or locations). Its concern, like that of Martin Luther King, is that the colour of one's skin, one's gender (or sexual orientation), the religion into which one was born or one's mother tongue should be a matter of *indifference* in a diverse society of equal citizens.

- 5.2.4 In such a society, there can be no 'hierarchy of inequalities': sectarian disadvantages must be tackled, but they are no more and no less important than those deriving from social class, gender, ethnicity or disability. All exclusivist talk of 'the two communities' should thus be avoided. This is not to refuse to recognise sectarian division—indeed, this paper has stressed how social inclusion cannot be secured *without* facing sectarian division. It is to ensure that Northern Ireland does not close its eyes, even partially, to those of its citizens whose disadvantages may not have a lightning-rod connection to the political arena.
- 5.2.5 The alternative, then, which can depolarise the argument between 'equality of opportunity' and 'equality of outcome' is a focus on *equality of life-chances*. This recognises the individual's ultimate responsibility to make of life what they will but places the onus on society to ensure that s/he has an equal chance of doing so. In this view, government has a key enabling (rather than 'delivery') role and society consists of active citizens all included within its ambit.

5.3 Challenging social *apartheid*

- 5.3.1 In recent times Northern Ireland has witnessed a growing class division, as well as a widening of the gap between rich and poor. It has also seen increased sectarian tensions and communal violence, replace armed conflict. This has sustained and perpetuated societal divisions in the region.
- 5.3.2 As Teague and Wilson (1995: 95-96) have argued, 'challenging these inward-looking communities of meaning is a key aspect of the struggle against social exclusion, for they give rise to a dialogue on poverty and deprivation which is ultimately sectarian'. Social-inclusion strategies, they stress, 'must promote a politics of common understanding'. Hence, given their cross-community character, the critical role the trade unions can play.
- 5.3.3 Supported by the other social partners, the trade unions gave a valuable lead in organising the peace demonstrations earlier this year. These demonstrations, premised on the trade-union principle of worker solidarity, sent an important signal of broader public hostility to sectarian protagonism. Paramilitary violence diminished in their wake.
- 5.3.4 The voluntary sector, too, can do much to challenge social division, with its ethos of participation and inclusiveness. The voluntary sector is inevitably at the heart of efforts to accrue bridging social capital. By bringing together associations from across sectarian and other divides, it can develop networks and build relationships of trust crucial to healing a scarred society. It can sponsor a politics of 'civic principles', rather than one based on 'blood' and 'belonging' (Leadbeater and Mulgan, 1994: 24).
- 5.3.5 The voluntary sector also contains a huge reservoir of tacit knowledge born of practical experience. Much of what is being suggested in this paper is already

being done in a small way, for example through projects funded by the ‘peace package’. There is there, also, a record of innovation, flexibility and user involvement which the voluntary sector can bring to project management—attributes particularly appropriate to dealing with those who are socially excluded.

- 5.3.6 The conventional public sector has a major role to play too, often in partnership. For example, the Creating Common Ground consortium is an innovative project, bringing together the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Community Relations Council, Groundwork and other statutory and voluntary partners, to address environmental and sectarian issues in disadvantaged estates.
- 5.3.7 One way of discouraging ghettoisation into stigmatised public-housing schemes is to require private developers to set aside a proportion of new sites for homes to be sold to the Housing Executive or housing associations for rent as social housing. Such planning rules, in line with recent regulations in Ireland, would mean developers would still compete on a level playing-field but would ensure a social mix in new developments.
- 5.3.8 Conversely, housing associations can be the spearhead of a new form of social housing, with smaller settlements rather than sprawling estates, on brownfield rather than greenfield sites. And they can contribute specialist expertise in addressing particular needs—for example, those of lone parents—more effectively than a state-monopoly provider.

5.4 Need for co-ordinated attack

- 5.4.1 Everything that has been said in this paper points to the need for co-ordination of the fight against social exclusion. If agencies and departments pursue separate agendas, if society remains fragmented, and if there is not a proper relationship between government and non-governmental organisations, failure is assured.
- 5.4.2 Conversely, however, progress in addressing each of these concerns assists progress on the others. For example, developing partnerships between NGOs and government often facilitates bringing statutory agencies together too. The north-west School Age Mothers project and foyers for the young homeless (see below) are good instances. Similarly, the engagement of NGOs can help develop a positive social consensus: think, for example, of the work of Women’s Aid not only in developing refuges for women who have suffered domestic violence but also in making such violence, previously quietly condoned, morally unacceptable.
- 5.4.3 The biggest challenge is to get government to act in a ‘joined-up’ way. Here there are important lessons to be drawn from the experiences in Scotland and Ireland.
- 5.4.4 First and foremost, a clear strategy is needed, to which all departments and agencies buy in, and as a policy imperative—not a new auditing requirement. Secondly, political leadership must come from the highest level—the Northern Ireland Executive in general and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in

particular. Thirdly, there must be an appropriate administrative vehicle—not, as currently, where within OFMDFM the various egalitarian initiatives of the 90s (section 75, TSN, PSI) have not been cohered within the equality, human rights and community-relations division. And, fourthly, there needs to be pressure from outside government for momentum to be sustained—a forum for wider debate, able critically to evaluate progress.

5.5 Evidence-based approach

- 5.5.1 Northern Ireland has operated with ideologically driven, rather than evidence-based, policy in the past. That is no longer appropriate if society is to move towards a civic normality. While values play a crucial role in politics—equality, after all, is a critical value in itself, and one that not everyone shares—ideology must give way to evidence if those values are to be translated into effective and efficient policy-making.
- 5.5.2 An evidence-based approach is not only of value in generating policies more likely than others to work. It is also a means to set meaningful performance indicators against which that success can, *ex post facto*, be measured.
- 5.5.3 Northern Ireland has a small coterie of social-policy researchers, whose commitment to equality over recent decades has meant that they have accumulated a vast quantity of expertise. It would be vital that that expertise be drawn on by elected representatives and officials, in designing and evaluating their policy tools.

5.6 Role of civil society

- 5.6.1 But politics is a democratic, not a technocratic, business. It requires political actors to engage not just with experts but also, more broadly, with civic society. That is the very *raison d'être* of the Civic Forum. Developing a more inclusive society is a never-ending challenge where mistakes will be made as well as victories won. Practitioners on the ground will have a lot to say about both.
- 5.6.2 Hence the need for an iterative dialogue with civic society if a strategy for social inclusion is to work. And that requires a formal structure and timetabled commitments to ensure that that dialogue does not dissipate.
- 5.6.3 There is, moreover, as this paper has indicated, only so much the state can do. Many programmes to tackle exclusion are, as discussed, better delivered through non-governmental organisations, or at least in partnership with them.
- 5.6.4 Finally, there is an important moral point here. Social inclusion is not a one-way street. It is a trade-off of rights and responsibilities in the name of a broader mutuality. Those who rightly clamour for inclusion need to recognise the reciprocal obligations that entails. If the larger society is required to listen to the voices of those who are excluded, the latter are also obliged to address that society in a manner it can understand (Jay, 1995: 69-70).

6. Outcomes

6.1 Focus on outcomes, not outputs

- 6.1.1 In the past, government tended to focus on the services it delivered. In as far as it monitored what it did, it was by measuring this output—the ‘throughput’ of patients through hospitals, for example. But this may not have had any beneficial effect on social well-being, which government ought to seek to improve: a healthier society, for example, would place less demand on its hospitals.
- 6.1.2 Thus, Northern Ireland has the longest waiting-lists in the UK—even, it has been argued, in the European Union. Many initiatives have been taken to reduce the lists, but they keep inexorably rising. Only by tackling the underlying, long-term problem of the region’s high rates of morbidity can the pressure be eased.
- 6.1.3 This implies a shift of focus to the *outcome* of what government does—in this case, better (or worse) public health. It similarly implies a shift from trying to cure the symptoms to preventing the syndrome in the first place.
- 6.1.4 Placing the emphasis on outcomes rather than outputs, and adopting a preventative approach, will tend to make government generally more effective and efficient. And it is of particular application to social exclusion.
- 6.1.5 As indicated earlier, one of the paradoxes of Northern Ireland is that we enjoy one third more public expenditure per head than the UK average, yet have only UK-level services (sometimes even worse). One part of the explanation is the inefficiencies arising from sectarian duplication. Another is that social exclusion itself is a huge drain on resources.
- 6.1.6 TSN, as discussed above, is essentially about tweaking existing government programmes—outputs—to ensure areas of need are ‘targeted’. But it may achieve no particular outcome: what it monitors is the programme, not real-world developments.
- 6.1.7 As the Scottish and Dutch experiences indicate, addressing social exclusion leads to a much clearer focus on real improvements to citizens’ lives and, where possible, preventing them getting into difficulties in the first place. For both reasons, it stimulates thinking on *fresh* policies and it encourages government to find ways to engage excluded citizens (and their representatives) in the process of inclusion. And it demands that data be collected that can show whether change is, or is not, taking place.

6.2 Importance of *regional* data

- 6.2.1 One of the difficulties in addressing exclusion at a regional level has in the past been poor data for an evidence-based approach. This has partly been due to the emphasis on collecting area-based data.

- 6.2.2 It has also been a product of Northern Ireland's non-participation in some UK-wide data gathering, notably the Family Resources Survey launched in 1992 (NIEC, 1998: 9). This is, however, to be rectified this year, though data will not become available as a result until 2004.
- 6.2.3 Ensuring we have specific region-wide data will be critical to ensuring that a strategy for social inclusion is well-founded. Otherwise, the devolved administration will in effect be flying by the seat of its collective pants.

6.3 Principal measure: reducing inequality

- 6.3.1 The thrust of this paper has been that addressing social exclusion is profoundly about reducing the gap between the included and the excluded. The principal measure of success or failure, therefore, must be whether that gap is narrowing or widening in income terms. The Gini coefficient is the accepted means to measure the spread of a variable in this way. In particular, it is the only measure which can ensure the rich, as well as the poor, are under scrutiny.
- 6.3.2 When the Family Resources Survey comes on stream, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency should interpret the data to calculate a Gini coefficient for the region. While the mathematics is complicated for the layperson, the translation of inequality into a simple number is readily accessible, and the trend over time could be annually monitored.
- 6.3.3 This is a potentially powerful vehicle for holding to account the capacity of the devolved administration to 'make a difference' in this key arena. Of course, it will be argued, as indeed does this paper, that trends in inequality are not by any means entirely within the gift of the devolved institutions. But then comparison of the movement of the Gini coefficient regionally with the pattern UK-wide would eliminate those effects which can be laid at the door of Westminster (or indeed are the product of wider global trends).
- 6.3.4 The Scottish strategy sets out a useful series of quantitative benchmarks of movement, and these should be treated as the basis for the compilation of a similar series for Northern Ireland. Excessive proliferation of numerical indicators, however, should be avoided. This is, first, because the potential of selective highlighting of favourable indices becomes greater and, secondly, because it comes at the expense of public understanding.

6.4 Subsidiary measure: participation for all

- 6.4.1 New Labour programmes for social inclusion have focused heavily on getting individuals into the labour market (the minimum wage, the Working Families Tax Credit and so on). Yet paid work is not of inherent social value—for example, in the arms industry—whereas other forms of participation, including volunteering, may be. Moreover, sometimes these programmes have a coercive flavour and sometimes individuals, for a variety of reasons (including age, disability or caring commitments) prefer not to work. Around the umbra of offering work for the workless, therefore, there is a need for a penumbra of opportunities for participation—indeed, including for those who find little

fulfilment in their job—to allow individuals to enjoy a more genuinely social existence.

- 6.4.2 This can often mean the difference between poor and good mental health. The most demoralised citizens in Northern Ireland are those described by one government official as the inactive poor. Democracy can not be healthy if large swathes of citizens feel detached from society, as in the United States.
- 6.4.3 There are many ways in which government, specifically, can engage the disengaged in the process of governing. For example, it can use random consultation methods, such as focus groups or (more expensively) citizens' juries, which are not skewed towards the articulate or the noisy. Creative use of the internet can establish a direct relationship between rulers and ruled. An interesting electronic consultation was carried out in Britain, for example, by a Commons committee, which sought the views of victims of domestic violence via refuge-based computers (Coleman and Normann, 2000).
- 6.4.4 Any social-inclusion strategy needs objective, quantitative measures of progress—or otherwise. And labour-market human resources are critical for individual life-chances. But the contribution we all make, and fulfilment we all derive—however intangible—from being social as well as economic beings is just as significant. As a result, more subjective, qualitative measures are also needed.
- 6.4.5 A social survey, with a standard set of questions asked every year, testing degrees of social participation would provide a useful complement to 'harder' numbers. It might, for instance, ask questions about volunteering, access of elderly people to relatives, the availability of respite for carers and so on.

7. Flagship policies

7.1 Childcare

- 7.1.1 Inequality—like charity, it is said—begins at home. Treasury figures indicate that at 22 months children in households in social classes one and two already have a 14 per cent educational advantage over their counterparts in social classes four and five (*Guardian*, March 29th 1999). A report for the British Medical Association found that low-weight births in the UK were on a par with Albania. The paediatrician who wrote it commented (*Guardian*, July 1st 1999): ‘The first five years of life are absolutely crucial to the development of children’s bodies, minds and personalities. Deprivation in early life causes lifelong damage, delinquency and despair. We need a radical agenda to tackle inequality.’
- 7.1.2 At least as importantly, childcare is a prerequisite for many women to be (re)integrated into the labour market (Clasen *et al*, 1997: 37). This is particularly so for those women who are not registered as unemployed precisely because of childrearing responsibilities (Armstrong and Gibson, 1998)—even though, in an ideal world, they might prefer to combine work and domestic responsibilities (see below on work-life balance).
- 7.1.3 The Daycare Trust has campaigned for some years for the establishment of a network of children’s centres in neighbourhoods across the UK, providing affordable childcare for every child up to 14. Such a childcare programme could have direct employment and training benefits in the local neighbourhood. It could draw upon the social-economy programme described below with a view to providing training for those who wanted to become qualified childcare workers.
- 7.1.4 A major problem for many women is squaring employment with caring for school-age children. Not just afternoons but closure days and, of course, holidays can present big challenges. Homework clubs and summer schemes are not just of value for disadvantaged children but also may assist their mothers to pursue employment opportunities more effectively. More flexible working arrangements for men and women generally would greatly assist—childcare is a *parental* rather than a ‘woman’s’ issue, in that sense—and these are explored below.
- 7.1.5 Part of the difficulty in Northern Ireland has been the inability of government to capture in a ‘joined-up’ way the intertwined benefits of a major expansion of childcare. One department will focus on the employment benefits; another will see it in terms of early-years intervention; but the overall value of publicly-supported childcare is not appreciated in the manner of, say, Scandinavian countries. In Sweden, where childcare is accepted as a ‘public responsibility’, not only do lone parents face no childcare problems in joining the labour market (Clasen *et al*, 1997: 6) but also just 7 per cent of adults are illiterate (DHSSPS, 2002: 43).

- 7.1.6 The only reference to childcare in the first Programme for Government of the Executive Committee was to the UK-wide Surestart programme. It is understood that the issue was subjected to only cursory consideration when the programme was being prepared. The second PfG makes no reference to childcare at all.
- 7.1.7 A childcare centre in every disadvantaged area would have many benefits. It would allow many more women to enter the labour market. It would provide many disadvantaged children with the opportunity of a start in life that was not down the path of worsening social exclusion. It would help build social capital locally and provide employment and training opportunities itself—these must be linked, via qualification, to status so that childcare workers are not forced to carry the under-valuation of caring from home to workplace.
- 7.1.8 Unemployed mothers participating in our focus groups raised this last issue more than once. High rates of insurance for providing childcare in the home have proved a huge disincentive to women to obtain childcare qualifications. The two problems could simultaneously be tackled by developing neighbourhood childcare centres.
- 7.1.9 Childcare has traditionally been thought of in Northern Ireland as a second-best to ‘natural’ parenting. Yet, apart from outmoded assumptions about gender roles contained in such conventional thinking, good-quality childcare can be a positive basis for child development: what matters is the quality of the relationship the child has with caring adults and its peers, not whether the relationship is biologically or socially derived.
- 7.1.10 Within the compartmentalised thinking of New TSN, the Department of Education’s focus with regard to childcare has been on getting four-year-olds into nursery *classes* (New TSN Unit, 2002: 22). But rethinking childcare in a more positive way allows of a child-centred focus which does not separate ‘care’ from ‘education’ and which can be perceived as part of a seamless process, carrying through into the initial primary years, of foundational development for all children. The innovative approach to early-years development adopted in Reggio Emilia in Italy should be looked at in this regard (Valentine, 1999).
- 7.1.11 The evidence that enduring inequalities are laid down in these formative years is so strong that there are powerful public-policy grounds for making this a focus of the social-inclusion effort—paying for ineffective remedial action later is a poor substitute. This would chime with the Executive Committee’s commitment to an emphasis on children, as evidenced by the support for the children’s commissioner. But it needs to be backed by a stronger social-policy thrust.

7.2 Education

- 7.2.1 It is remarkable how much talk there was in the last decade in Northern Ireland about ‘equality’ and how little that addressed the most obvious mechanism for the reproduction of inequality by social class—the maintenance of selection at age 11. By contrast, Lindsay Paterson (2000: 70)

was able to remark *vis-à-vis* the Scottish Parliament's inheritance in addressing social exclusion: 'Comprehensive secondary schools have reduced social-class inequalities in progress and attainment, and have helped to bring about large relative changes in the position of female students.'

- 7.2.2 Education has a critical role to play in the de-ghettoisation of Northern Ireland and the promotion of self-confidence and self worth among generations to come. It also has a role to play in raising awareness and enhancing the appreciation of one's own culture and the culture of others. To do so requires the system to operate with a 'no-failure' culture. This flies in the face of conventional, Anglo-American educational thinking, which (Reynolds, 1995: 35) 'reflects a belief in the inherent existence of the normal distribution, or "bell curve", with a proportion of children always seen as lying away from the average in the long, differentiated trailing edge that characterises the normal distribution'.
- 7.2.3 In educationally successful Pacific rim societies like Taiwan, no such belief exists: 'Education is seen as a hurdle, which all children can jump in their early years and over which it is the job of the school to push all children, although it is accepted that paths later in life may diverge.' This culture is associated with mixed-ability teaching in the first few years of primary school, with an emphasis on whole-class teaching and a willingness to wait for the last person to understand—and, indeed, for the child to stay behind to do so.
- 7.2.4 There are also a lot more hours in the school year (which would have beneficial effects on women's employment, as indicated above, were it to be effected in Northern Ireland). Interestingly, in Taiwan, just 1 per cent of the variation between pupils' performance is accounted for by variation between schools—eliminating the social division associated in the UK with the demand for the exercise of 'parental choice'.
- 7.2.5 The goal should be to refocus the education system in Northern Ireland around a 'no-failure' objective: 'a concern with the range of educational achievements as much as with the average, to bring the "trailing edge" of educational and school failure to the forefront of attention' (Reynolds, 1995: 36). This would turn on its head the prevailing educational discourse, which focuses on the average attainment as compared with Britain. The latter approach is also flawed because it sets ambition too low: 80 per cent of Japanese youngsters leave school with the equivalent of two A-levels—twice the rate in Northern Ireland.
- 7.2.6 There remains, of course, the challenge of including children with special needs. The objective should be to minimise the group who are deemed to be incapable of achieving within the mainstream system, by schemes such as 'Reading Recovery' that focus on their needs and prevent them falling hopelessly behind. But there will always need to be special provision for those with a serious learning disability. This must be properly resourced and any associated social stigma removed.
- 7.2.7 The Council on the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (2000) has been a strong advocate of a less narrowly academic curriculum in Northern

Ireland, *inter alia* geared more effectively to preparing school students for adult life and wider civic responsibilities. In particular, this would be reflected in a focus on employability, personal development and citizenship in the reformed curriculum.

- 7.2.8 The CCEA's concern in the second of these areas has stemmed partly from the high rate of teenage pregnancy in Northern Ireland. As the PSI Working Group on Teenage Pregnancy and Motherhood (2000: 10) reported, 'We continue to have a percentage of live births to mothers aged under 20 which is higher than almost all countries in Europe and almost 5 times as high as in the Netherlands.'
- 7.2.9 The Dutch experience, far from being terrifyingly 'permissive', works much better (*Guardian*, November 30th 2001). There, relationship—not just sex—education starts early and 55 per cent of young men say the reason they first had sex was out of 'love and commitment', compared with less than 15 per cent in the UK. Correspondingly, most Dutch men use condoms on first experience. Raising girls' aspirations is also critical: 'Ambition seems to be the best birth control.'
- 7.2.10 Guidelines on relationships and sex education in Northern Ireland are not mandatory. It is very important that all children in the region are enabled to address this critical aspect of their socialisation in a supportive way. As the PSI working group commented (WGTPM, 2000: 43), for this to happen teachers must be trained to be comfortable with the associated issues.
- 7.2.11 The CCEA (2000: 35-36) has also argued for more flexibility for children at 14+, to allow of greater individual diversity and choice by students, than the core curriculum currently allows. The advantage of this over selection at 11 is not only that it would avoid putting children through the stress, perhaps trauma, of an unreliable test—around which, of course, has grown the artificial and inegalitarian apparatus of private tutoring. It would also allow young people themselves to make decisions, with guidance, rather than being the mere objects of parental choice. And it should thereby reduce the problem of mental or even physical disengagement by (in academic terms) 'under-achieving' teenagers.
- 7.2.12 The Burns review (Post-primary Review Body, 2001) has led to an unfortunate stand-off, pitting advocates of equality against advocates of differentiated post-primary provision. The CCEA approach appears to offer a *via media*—abolishing the '11+' while recognising the limits of 'one-size-fits-all' comprehensive schooling—which the Assembly should seriously consider.
- 7.2.13 One major factor militating against change in education towards greater diversity and recognition of non-academic and non-traditional subjects is the idea that A-levels offer a 'gold standard' post-16. Even for the more academically orientated student, this may favour a narrow education. A more modern approach is a broadly based *baccalauréat* as in France, where students take a wider range of final subjects. The Leaving Certificate in Ireland (on average seven subjects are taken) is similar.

- 7.2.14 The Institute of Welsh Affairs has developed a proposal for a 'Welsh Bac'. Interestingly, an IWA survey of higher-education institutions in the UK found a readiness to accept this as a basis for university entrance (Black and David, 2000). With Scotland already having a different system (of 'standard', 'higher' and 'higher still' qualifications), Northern Ireland should have the courage to innovate in this regard, to ensure that all students leave school with a rounded education.
- 7.2.15 A broader conception of the curriculum should also apply to the school itself. Given evenings, weekends and holidays, most school buildings are closed most of the time. The idea of the 'community school', as developed in Scotland (Innes, 1999), allows of a more civic-minded concept of the potential of the school as a hub of neighbourhood life: the benefits of after-school clubs have already been mentioned. This is not to add further burdens to already-stretched teachers, but rather to point to the inefficiency of such limited use of important public assets, as well as the scope for indirect educational spin-offs from greater parental engagement and a reduction in vandalism from more positive local identification.
- 7.2.16 As regards post-school education, the new departmental structure brigades further and higher education and employment. This can be exploited to improve integration between third-level education and the world of work.
- 7.2.17 Paterson (2000: 71) notes how further education in Scotland has, proportionately, captured a much larger share of the tertiary education budget than the UK average. The importance of this is borne out by the role played by the regional technical colleges and institutes of technology in Ireland in spurring the Celtic Tiger.

7.3 Lifelong learning

- 7.3.1 Funding for education in the UK follows an inverse principle: the better-educated one is through staying longer in the system, the more one is publicly subsidised (Gallagher, 1995). Lifelong learning should aim to redress that trend, and in particular benefit those who have been least advantaged by their school experience. The Minister for Employment and Learning, Carmel Hanna, has described the evidence that one in four adults in the region are functionally illiterate as 'clearly unacceptable' and has insisted that lifelong learning will be a 'key theme' of her ministry (*Irish News*, January 4th 2002).
- 7.3.2 Apprenticeships and in-work training have been seriously devalued in recent years. A major problem was the decision by the Conservative administration in the early 80s to abolish the compulsory training levy. The levy weakened the 'free-riding' incentive with regard to employer-supported training referred to above.
- 7.3.3 In Germany, by law, firms are required to join and finance the sectoral committees and local chambers which examine and certify apprentices and validate employer eligibility to train, thereby resolving the collective-action dilemma. These intermediate committees include the trade unions and vocational teachers, alongside the employers (Ryan and Unwin, 2001). Similar

arrangements could be established in Northern Ireland. Alternatively, the levy system could be reinstated. Either way, this would discourage 'free-riding' and raise overall private investment in training.

7.3.4 Lifelong learning has become critical in a world where skills quickly become obsolete and knowledge out of date. But many adults are unsure about returning to study, given negative experiences of school and the complexities of possible choices. For many, too, there are real challenges, such as finance and childcare, to be addressed. Releasing women in particular for new educational opportunities is a key reason for supporting a major expansion of childcare.

7.3.5 Worryingly, even though workers in Northern Ireland are even less likely to have formal qualifications than in Great Britain, fewer adults take part in organised learning than elsewhere in the UK. There are various reasons for this at-first-sight self-defeating situation (Field, 1998). These include:

- the predominant focus of further education on school-leavers and its inaccessibility for reasons of rural peripherality or sectarian division;
- the poor preparation for lifetime vocational education offered by an academically-oriented school system;
- the 'brain drain' of adults who might otherwise pursue learning opportunities;
- the 'branch-plant' and small-firm basis of private-sector employment, where highly-skilled workers are not perceived to be at a premium;
- the mutually-reinforcing relationship between low skills, long-term unemployment and ghettoised life;
- the assumption by firms and individuals in Northern Ireland's state-dominated society that the state is responsible;
- the determination of successive governments, anxious to attract inward investment, to advertise the 'well-educated labour force'; and
- as with so much else, the fact that the debate about lifelong learning of recent years has largely passed Northern Ireland by.

7.3.6 Learn Direct is a useful, UK-wide development, but a specific Northern Ireland initiative is needed to combat these deep-seated difficulties by stimulating the demand for lifelong learning and solving some of the supply problems. An institute for lifelong learning should be established, possibly based on the existing institute of that name at Queen's University, as a 'market-maker'. It would operate a network of one-stop shops across the region, where adults could walk in and explore all options, using new technology, for educational opportunities, with the assistance of counselling by expert staff.

7.3.7 This service would register on databases all institutions and courses available in the region, and as far as possible elsewhere in the UK and Ireland. It would allow online enrolling, explore the potential of distance learning—particularly important in rural areas—and personally-tailored modular provision, and promote lifelong learning as an aspect of 'active ageing'. It would make

recommendations to government on how access could be enhanced, whether *via* the formal further-education sector, initiatives by business associations or trade unions, or the work of NGOs like the Workers' Educational Association or women's centres.

- 7.3.8 A positive innovation in the second Programme for Government (Northern Ireland Executive, 2001: 39) was support for a trade-union learning fund. This was followed up by a consultation paper (DEL, 2002), recognising the role of union learning representatives in the workplace in stimulating workers with literacy problems to seek to address them. It is important that employers co-operate with such initiatives, from which they can only benefit.
- 7.3.9 One of the difficulties with the New Deal programmes is the requirement that participants be registered as unemployed. This has a discriminatory impact on women who are 'hidden unemployed' (Armstrong and Gibson, 1998). Courses for potential women returners organised by Belfast Women's Training Services have proved an effective demonstration of the value of confidence-building programmes for women who have been out of the labour market for a long time, such as through childrearing. High rates of subsequent employment or educational placement have been achieved. Such courses should indeed be delivered by sensitive women's organisations, but with the security of public funding.
- 7.3.10 One participant on a BWTS programme highlighted the value of training courses not only in providing women with new skills to bring into the workplace, but also as this vital step in regaining confidence, interacting with those in similar circumstances and escaping the isolation of the home (focus group, Poleglass): 'It is so frustrating because you want an education and you want a job and your kids are growing up and you feel like you are going to be left on the scrapheap and you don't know anything because everything is getting more modernised and everything is moving on ... and I feel like I am being left behind. Only for coming here and feeling like I am getting a bit of an education, I feel like I would go out of my mind.'
- 7.3.11 Lifelong learning can usefully be 'recycled' between generations. Many senior citizens value the opportunity to act as mentors for younger people. Recognising the individualised needs of the socially excluded, matching mentors to individuals who, for example, have little labour-market experience may not only be of value to the latter but also offer fulfilment to the former. And it can engender respect among young people while reducing the fears of the elderly about them—more social capital.
- 7.3.12 Conversely, imaginative measures to avoid under-achievement among children can have spin-off benefits for their parents. The 'read to succeed' programme encourages adults to address their own literacy problems under the guise and with the incentive of assisting their children (Civic Forum, 2001a).

7.4 Social economy

- 7.4.1 Like childcare, the social economy was mentioned modestly in the first Programme for Government—and dropped from the second. Yet extensive research by Colin Stutt has demonstrated that the social economy can play a big part in fighting social exclusion in Northern Ireland.
- 7.4.2 What do we mean by the ‘social economy’? Stutt *et al* (2001: 8) define it thus (emphasis theirs): ‘Social economy organisations have a distinctive and clear **purpose**. They exist as a means of serving a social, community or ethical end, not for the sake of private profit. They also have a distinct **activity**, the provision of goods and services in a market place using an explicit **business model** based around the principle of exchange. Finally, social economy organisations have distinctive legal **form**, stakeholder ownership or a legal form which protects the organisation’s not-for-personal-profit status.’
- 7.4.3 This draws out the potential of the social economy to offer more dignity to the socially excluded and to help individuals realise their aspirations (usually pretty similar to those of the ‘mainstream’ society). To participants in the social economy, it offers the dignity of useful labour and the hope of a ‘hand-up’ rather than ‘hand-out’. It is in line with a Europe-wide trend towards active labour-market policies, rather than simply operating a passive and inert system of social-security transfers.
- 7.4.4 There has been substantial experience in urban Scotland with intermediate labour-market schemes. As McCormick and Leicester (1998: 19) explain, ‘Organisations like The Wise [Workers into Social Employment] Group and Glasgow Works are well-known to government as pioneers of more flexible and practical packages of benefit top-ups, wages and work than government agencies have been able to deliver alone. The intermediate labour market that they have built offers one set of bridging methods to raise employment levels where they are lowest.’ An evaluation of The Wise Group found that 46 per cent of former participants were employed or self-employed six months later (*Guardian*, January 1st 1998).
- 7.4.5 As a report by the Training and Employment Agency (1997: 36) asserted, ‘There is a widely held view that it is unrealistic to expect a long-term unemployed person to be able to adapt immediately to a work or training regime of 30-35 hours per week. It is felt that the reintegration of an individual into the labour market will be more successful and enduring if an incremental approach is adopted.’
- 7.4.6 The social economy has other potential benefits than providing a bridge into the mainstream labour market. It may engage individuals with disabilities (Christie and Mensah-Coker, 1999: 36) who might not be able to make such a transition (though in general ghettoisation of the disabled is to be avoided), it may generate socially-useful products which are not commercially viable, or both. Its benefits may largely remain within disadvantaged areas—not only tangible gains such as local wage expenditures but also intangibles like training and childcare.

- 7.4.7 But why shouldn't government do this directly, becoming in effect employer of last resort? The answer is that the social, rather than state, approach can offer advantages. As Stutt *et al* (2001: 10-11) explain, social-economy projects offer what economists call 'positive externalities' beyond their intrinsic activity, such as more participative forms of service delivery than the conventional 'public sector' can often achieve. They can also be more flexible and innovative, they can draw on volunteers and attract additional charitable support, and they can engender high commitment among directors and participants (though, of course, if badly run they will do none of these things). In that sense, the social economy also offers an interesting challenge to the conventional, instrumentalist ethos of the private sector.
- 7.4.8 The social economy can be seen as providing a 'sponge' to soak up long-term unemployment. It can therefore mitigate against the onset of the hysteresis effects referred to above, which over time render it less and less likely that an unemployed person will return to the labour market.
- 7.4.9 Paul McGill has carried out an unpublished feasibility study on a pilot social-economy programme for west Belfast. Given the points made about non-sectarianism, it would be vital, however, that any such programme did not have an implicit 'Catholic' in parenthesis as a prefix. It would be preferable—and also to avoid Belfast dominance—that such a pilot should embrace the inner cities of Belfast and Derry (Stutt, 2001: 43) and perhaps a disadvantaged small town like Strabane or Carrickfergus.
- 7.4.10 If successful, the pilots should be translated into a programme, beginning with the very long-term unemployed but extended to all those who have been out of work for a year. Eligibility should not, however, be dependent on individuals having claimed benefits for that period, to avoid discriminating against non-claimant women from workless households.
- 7.4.11 The social-economy programme should be built up through expansion of the social inclusion / community regeneration executive programme fund (see below). The output from the programme could usefully be linked to public-works schemes, such as the Warm Homes reconversion scheme to reduce fuel poverty, by the latter recruiting from programme participants. Participants in the schemes should be deemed, for this purpose, 'unemployed' during their participation. Public employers could then utilise the provision in the Equality and Fair Treatment Order allowing employers to recruit directly from the long-term unemployed.
- 7.4.12 Outside of the social economy strictly speaking, private employers also have social responsibilities, however. Under the FETO, they too can recruit preferentially from the long-term unemployed. While this may mean recruiting individuals who are not entirely 'job-ready' and need special initial attention, conventional marginal-utility calculations on recruitment should be placed in the context of these wider social considerations. More progressive firms are these days recognising that while goodwill does not appear on the balance sheet it is a significant asset nonetheless; making a social contribution is one valuable way such goodwill can be enhanced.

- 7.4.13 It would be wrong, moreover, to reduce the social economy to intermediate labour-market schemes, though these are very important. It embraces (Stutt *et al*, 2001: 17) a wide range of activities, including credit unions, housing associations, co-operatives and 'community businesses'. Stutt *et al* (2001: 2) complain that though it accounts for at least 5 per cent of employment in Northern Ireland and is largely cross-sectarian, 'there are no public policies for the social economy, no coherent support mechanisms and no forum ... for discussing the development of the sector and the challenges it faces'.
- 7.4.14 Stutt *et al* (2001: 13) argue that the devolved administration should commit itself to a preference for government programmes or projects to be delivered via the social economy where feasible, as compared with directly from the 'public sector' or via a private contractor. This provides an interesting gloss on the broader argument about public-private partnerships.
- 7.4.15 The Institute for Public Policy Research (2001) commission on PPPs argued that it was imperative that the latter were not presented as 'the only show in town' and that 'value-for-money' considerations, in an environment of 'contestability', should apply. Such a 'best value' approach would, of course mean that the cheapest bid would not necessarily succeed (as it did under the old 'compulsory competitive tendering' *régime*).
- 7.4.16 This would legitimise a policy preference for the social economy on the basis of the 'trumping' capacity of its social objectives and externalities. Such a preference would, however, be just that: it could not be at the expense of any consideration of economy or effectiveness. Stutt *et al* (2001: 42) see particular opportunities in personal care and the environment.
- 7.4.17 In terms of caring for the elderly and disabled, similar considerations apply as were earlier rehearsed on childcare. Here, too, women are involved in undervalued, usually unpaid, caring, often coping with great stress in isolation and with little respite. Their quality of life is severely attenuated to better that of a relative. Such sacrifice, however laudable and, for some, fulfilling, is rarely voluntary and rarely shared with male household members.
- 7.4.18 Personal-care services, properly regulated and socially oriented, can offer real alternatives to the stresses of unsupported care and the impersonality of state provision, as well as freeing carers for employment or social pursuits. These might be operated on a co-operative basis (McAleavy *et al*, 2001: 87). The advent of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council establishes the necessary public framework for expansion of the social economy in this area. As with childcare, it may offer carers the opportunity to build on a role assumed by obligation subsequently to develop professionally-accredited recognition and employment.
- 7.4.19 It would also be unfair if the concept of the 'social economy' were to be understood as only having an urban application. The dramatic collapse in farm incomes in recent years has already been mentioned. The way forward lies not in a Canute-like defence of the farm subsidies contained in the Common Agricultural Policy. It lies instead in a broader, more social, conception of the rural economy. Conventionally, in Northern Ireland, 'rural' has been identified

with 'agriculture'—with farms simply understood as non-urban firms. A new concept of rural life, organised around the notion of rural development, is needed.

- 7.4.20 In this context, which goes with the grain of EU trends, the farmer is reinvented as the steward of sustainable rural life, seen as of inherent value for environmental and social reasons. This can connect to new markets, such as the very rapidly growing demand for organic produce, and to consumer concerns about food safety. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development—the tension is there in its title—needs to assist farmers to make these changes and pursue these new opportunities for social and economic well-being.
- 7.4.21 Four out of five farms in Northern Ireland are classified as 'small' or 'very small'. DARD should also assist mutualist efforts, such as the establishment of local farmers' markets, through which farmers can come together for their common good.
- 7.4.22 Stutt *et al* (2001: 19, 31, 33) identify several barriers to the development of the social economy. Social-economy projects usually lack the equity start-up on which capitalist firms can draw, depending instead on loans, which means they lack the security offered by assets against business fluctuations. Projects tend to be involved in dependent, vertical relationships with government, rather than networked in horizontal relationships with each other. The concept of the social economy is poorly understood—and so seen pejoratively as another demand for public subsidy—and there is no structured debate about its future. There is no public programme addressing the social economy as such, and there is no clear *locus* of responsibility for it. Departmental boundaries militate, as so often, against 'joined-up' approaches by government.
- 7.4.23 In response, Stutt *et al* (2001: 37-38) call for political commitment to the social economy, a shared vision, independent financial support, integration between social-economy organisations, education and training for the social economy and the encouragement of social entrepreneurship. In the absence of these, among other deficiencies, the social economy is over-reliant on the goodwill and commitment of volunteers.
- 7.4.24 They also specifically propose (Stutt *et al*, 2001: 43) that the Department of Employment and Learning should be responsible for the pilot intermediate labour-market programme, while the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment would establish a new social-economy support scheme and develop statistical data. Qualitative empirical material is also needed: good practice could be highlighted more effectively.
- 7.4.25 A specific area for further development of the social economy is housing associations. These could be major players in the proposed social-economy programme, through elaborating training schemes in skills related to construction and repair for local participants, which could be the basis of subsequent employment.

- 7.4.26 Developing the local social economy can be an important focus for the new local strategy partnerships. It can also be a key task of neighbourhood-based development trusts.

7.5 Social security

- 7.5.1 It is impossible for Northern Ireland alone to buck the UK trend from a welfare model based on social insurance for all to residual social assistance for ‘the poor’. But it can seek to maximise good-quality employment, with the associated potential of maximising access to occupational insurance arrangements (though these are under threat with regard to pensions). It can also seek wider inclusion and the lifting of the social assistance ‘floor’—such as by the social-economy proposals above.
- 7.5.2 Social-security benefits in Northern Ireland do not fall neatly into either the ‘reserved’ or ‘devolved’ categories. They are the subject of a financial memorandum between the Treasury and the Assembly, which does significantly constrain what the Assembly can do. On the one hand, if the Assembly were to save money (for instance, by cutting benefits), such savings would be clawed back by the Treasury, whereas if it were to expend more (such as by increasing benefits) it would have to bear all the additional costs. The Scottish Parliament has faced similar difficulties over its plan to introduce free ‘personal’ (as well as ‘nursing’) care for the elderly long-term sick: the Treasury has refused to offset savings in attendance allowance against the additional costs incurred.
- 7.5.3 Where this could be a serious problem would be if the devolved administration were to take up the idea of developing intermediate labour-market schemes. If these were to be ‘benefits-plus’ projects, yet participants were not to be distracted by being simultaneously ‘available for work’, this might well be perceived by the Treasury as problematic. But given the ‘welfare-to-work’ focus of the Treasury under Labour, were the Assembly nevertheless to agree to find the net ‘top-up’ cost from its own resources, it could make a strong case for benefits savings to accrue to the regional administration to fund that portion of the cost. (Whether the Treasury would accept the strength of that case would, of course, be another matter.)
- 7.5.4 The Assembly should also give consideration to seeking to alter social-security regulations at the margin (Gorecki and Keating, 1995). Already, these differ from Great Britain (for instance, Northern Ireland doesn’t have council tax). The goal should be to reduce the risk in claimants accepting employment—for example, that the job will be casual and prove insecure, leaving them with a period without benefit when they lose it.
- 7.5.5 This risk can be reduced by ensuring benefit levels are tapered, rather than immediately withdrawn, as work begins—this is already the case with the ‘back to work’ scheme in Ireland for those wishing to establish micro-businesses—and that ‘passport’ benefits, such as free school meals, are also not immediately withdrawn. The Social Security Agency should extend its service to claimants in this way, easing their transition by offering a dedicated client advisor as with the ‘Gateway’ arrangements for New Deal. For a

disabled person, arrangements for a trial period of work, without a requirement for a fresh incapacity benefit claim if it does not work, should be possible.

- 7.5.6 An annualised, rather than weekly, earnings disregard would also help individuals to take the employment plunge. For women whose 'head of household' male partners are on JSA or similar, a higher earnings disregard would also offer them more of an incentive to seek part-time employment.
- 7.5.7 Some of these ideas have already been explored in principle (T&EA, 1997: 38). Further research should be commissioned on the likely costs and benefits. Additional costs would clearly have to be borne out of the regional budget, but acceptance of that principle would allow negotiations with the Treasury to focus on the practical aspects.
- 7.5.8 A further social-security reform should be to address the passivity among claimants which employability requirements paradoxically encourage. Of course, claimants should not be employed while claiming, but participation in voluntary activity should be encouraged, not discouraged, to maintain morale and a sense of dignity, and to minimise the detachment of the individual from the social mainstream.
- 7.5.9 The regulations should make clear that volunteering for organisations enjoying charitable status, as long as the claimant remains immediately available for paid work, is a legitimate way for the latter to fill the day. Such activity will, of course, enhance the claimant's cv and may well lead on to training and/or job opportunities.
- 7.5.10 Similar considerations apply to the pursuit of education and training. There should be no benefits withdrawal disincentive for participation in courses.
- 7.5.11 A particular problem for claimants in Northern Ireland is the high cost of fuel, particularly high electricity prices. In addition to the reforms suggested above, therefore, further measures are needed to tackle fuel poverty.
- 7.5.12 The General Consumer Council (2002) has recommended extension of the Department of Social Development's Warm Homes scheme, delivered in partnership with the EAGA Partnership. It has also suggested speeding up the all-Ireland energy market to reduce prices and special consideration of fuel poverty in rural areas where cost may be higher and choice more restricted.

7.6 Work-life balance

- 7.6.1 At the often neglected top end of the labour market, too many employees feel obliged to work long hours, even though they are in 'work-rich' households—at the expense of their domestic lives in general and a heavy caring burden on women in particular. A Northern Ireland survey has found that nearly one in five employees work more than 40 hours a week and one third work regularly at night or weekends—work-rich but 'time-poor'.
- 7.6.2 Far from this being primarily to eke out low wages through overtime, these respondents were concentrated in the higher socio-economic groups and salary bands (DEL, 2001a: 170). Yet in the absence of regulation or collective

support, individuals concerned about promotion and status within a company may find it hard to resist managerial pressures to work longer.

- 7.6.3 This is not assisted by the UK opt-out from the EU 48-hour maximum working week, where workers can ‘voluntarily’ work for longer. In fact, according to research by the Trade Union Congress (*Guardian*, February 4th 2002), one in six UK employees are now working over the limit.
- 7.6.4 The perverse result, the TUC research indicates (*Guardian*, February 6th 2002), is that nearly half of all employees would prefer to work fewer hours and one in ten would be prepared to see their pay cut to do so. This is not the way to address the poor productivity record of the UK economy—or, within that, the even poorer productivity record of Northern Ireland.
- 7.6.5 In that sense, maximum-hours arrangements can be as beneficial as minimum wages. They give management an incentive to plan and organise work more effectively—so that staff work smarter, rather than longer. They remove the beggar-my-neighbour effect of competition in a long-hours culture.
- 7.6.6 Trade unions everywhere, used to representing relatively stable collective entities, are struggling to continue to make themselves relevant in a globalising economy where workers are more individualised. But they can reach out to new professional constituencies by supporting employees who are money-rich but time-poor by bargaining for shorter hours and more flexible (for example, job-share) working arrangements. Not only can this offer benefits in terms of reduction of stress and improved work-life balance but it can also enhance job creation. And it can help erode the stereotypes of full-time breadwinner male versus part-time dependent (and full-time unpaid carer) female.
- 7.6.7 The Department of Employment and Learning should support trade unions in challenging the culture of long hours. In the first two Programmes for Government the unions have effectively been airbrushed from the region’s civic life.
- 7.6.8 One has to be wary of falling into the ‘lump of labour’ fallacy. Work disposed of by an overstressed executive can not be transferred to an entry-level youth. But, despite such rigidities, hours reductions can aid employment. The introduction of the 35-hour week in France—without loss of pay—has had significant employment benefits, though there are difficulties about its extension to small firms.
- 7.6.9 These considerations once more indicate why a broad concept of social inclusion is essential. Identifying a wide political coalition in favour of social inclusion also must mean reaching out socially beyond the ranks of the unemployed and poorly employed, into professional strata—whose outward comforts do not always denote inner contentment.

7.7 Public health

- 7.7.1 Discussion of the health budget in Northern Ireland focuses almost entirely on its adequacy—or otherwise—as a global sum. Yet at least as much attention

should be devoted to the distribution of that budget, and in particular the fact that the vast bulk is devoted to the treatment of illness and a minuscule amount to the promotion of health.

- 7.7.2 Further additions to the health budget would of course be highly desirable. But the evidence so far is that, in and of themselves, such increases are always overwhelmed by growing demands on the service, as evidenced by the ever-rising hospital waiting lists discussed earlier. Moreover, even if the resources were found to eliminate waiting lists—which would probably require a shift to a social-insurance system, under which they are generally unknown, as in France—this would still not deal with the huge underlying pressures and the inequalities in life-chances evident in health statistics.
- 7.7.3 In particular, Northern Ireland (alongside Scotland) ‘leads the western world’, as Kilbane (1995: 65) has wryly put it, in chest and heart disease. Deaths and debilitation due to traffic accidents are another huge problem (see transport below). Not only do mortality and morbidity rates differ dramatically by social class, but the gap is widening as the more affluent not only get richer but enjoy healthier lifestyles.
- 7.7.4 This is a classic instance of where public expenditure is misallocated to short-term ‘rescue’ rather than long-term ‘renewal’ and where the demands of powerful vested interests—particularly medical consultants—dwarf the needs of disadvantaged citizens. Yet addressing the latter directly would often be far cheaper as well as offering the prospect of more satisfactory lives.
- 7.7.5 As Kilbane (1995: 67) argues, this means a shift from deference to dialogue in the relationship between individual citizens and health professionals and the establishment of partnerships between service providers and associations of the disadvantaged, teasing out health needs and how these can be individually and collectively addressed.
- 7.7.6 In concrete terms, a good instance of what this entails is the Ballybeen Women’s Centre Health Promotion Project described in the report of the Community Development Working Group (1999: B136-B150). The project provided individual women in this working-class estate with the opportunity to become more knowledgeable about, and more confident about addressing, their health needs *via* a women’s health programme. Moreover, it enabled them to go on to a peer education project, so that they could disseminate these skills and self-esteem more widely in the area.
- 7.7.7 This approach is of particular value in addressing the specific needs of Travellers and members of ethnic minorities. In both cases, the need for a sensitive dialogue between informed professionals and association representatives is critical to ensuring that particular needs are addressed.
- 7.7.8 The morbidity and mortality rates among Travellers are a blight on the whole of society: Traveller children are 10 times as likely to die before age 10 and only one in 10 Travellers is over 40 (DHSSPS, 2002: 34). With the decline of the Traveller economy and increased social aspirations, a wider menu of options—from sites with access to the full range of public and social services to settled accommodation—may well be required.

- 7.7.9 In terms of ethnic minorities, a fraction of the expenditure by government departments on routine translation of documents into Irish and ‘Ulster-Scots’—as against a more efficient, demand-led process—would accommodate all the translation and interpretation needs in the health domain of Northern Ireland’s proliferating nationalities for whom English is not the mother tongue. The Chinese Welfare Association estimates that up to 80 per cent of first-generation Chinese migrants cannot speak English well and are thus missing out on welfare rights and service uptake. Yet there is still no centralised, independent, multi-agency interpreting service in Northern Ireland (Equality Commission, 2002: 45).
- 7.7.10 Care in both cases—as more generally in Northern Ireland—is necessary to ensure that ‘groupism’ does not take over. Travellers and ethnic minorities, like everyone else, comprise diverse individuals whose specific needs must be addressed. Across all ethnic groups, the concerns of women and of children must never be subordinated.
- 7.7.11 Another peril of groupism is that the needs of isolated individuals and households are neglected. This can affect rural dwellers in particular in two ways. First, they are more likely to be living in unhealthy housing than the beneficiaries of urban redevelopment and rehabilitation schemes: 12 per cent of rural homes are unfit for human habitation, according to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that, according to the Rural Community Network, rural areas contain a higher proportion of the dependent age cohorts (under-18s and over-65s).
- 7.7.12 Secondly, isolation itself—especially for elderly or single-person households—can be a source of poor mental health as well as making coping with physical impairments that much more difficult. Ensuring a genuine shift in the health service towards primary care, with an associated expansion of health visitors, is important in this regard. Befriending and other social services, including those provided by the voluntary sector, can also be of value. Indeed, the integrated nature of health and social services in Northern Ireland could be deployed to favour more ‘joined-up’ action on the ground via the new local health and social-care groups.
- 7.7.13 The *Investing for Health* strategy is a worthy initiative. In it, the Minister, Bairbre de Brún, rightly recognises (DHSSPS, 2002: 3) that ‘health policy has tended to concentrate on the treatment of ill health rather than on its prevention’. The document grimly rehearses the region’s public-health statistics and the associated class inequalities, drawing upon successive annual reports by the chief medical officer (Campbell, 2002). Moreover, the two goals identified (DHSSPS, 2002: 59)—reducing morbidity levels and reducing the inequalities in morbidity rates—are the right ones.
- 7.7.14 But by and large the strategy does not unveil any new policies. Rather, it collates the many existing and intended programmes of departments that have a bearing on health, much of it inherited from direct rule. The programmes are useful to have in one place, but the links between the actions to be taken, the targets to be thus achieved, the objectives to be thus fulfilled and the two overall goals to be thus secured are often loose.

- 7.7.15 Overall, the strategy is insufficient to realise the vaulting ambition set out by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (DHSSPS, 2002: 2), of eventually raising health standards ‘to those of the best regions in Europe’—which will not, of course, stand still waiting for Northern Ireland to catch up. This highlights the need for an integrated, policy-driven effort to tackle social exclusion, attached to hypothecated budgets and linked to clear outcomes and indicators—though tempered all the while by a realistic recognition of the limits of what the devolved administration can achieve.
- 7.7.16 If little in the substance of *Investing for Health* is new, the methodology proposed is well-grounded. There is a strong stress (DHSSPS, 2002: 128) on partnerships between statutory agencies and NGOs, particularly *vis-à-vis* disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and recognition of the role that individuals, suitably supported, can play in taking greater control over their own health. There is recognition, too, of the importance of ‘joined-up’ initiatives on the ground, like healthy living centres (DHSSPS, 2002: 131).
- 7.7.17 A weakness, though, is in the reliance at executive level on the existing Ministerial Group on Public Health (DHSSPS, 2002: 143): the only minister on this group is the health minister and so other key ministers are not ‘bought in’. Since the prior consultative paper was issued in November 2000 (DHSSPS, 2000a), other ministers have said little about it. And the launch of *Investing for Health* in March 2002 was an unfortunate affair. It was ill-judged of the minister to stage it in west Belfast and regrettable that no Protestant executive members attended. Greater civic mindedness all round is needed if ‘joined-up’ government is to be realised.
- 7.7.18 Probably the most positive proposal in the document is for a regional ‘investing for health’ forum (DHSSPS, 2002: 143). This could generate a powerful dialogue with health professionals and others in the field. In many ways, creating a new relationship between rulers and ruled in Northern Ireland, key to tackling social exclusion, may be the best thing devolution can hope to achieve.

7.8 Transport

- 7.8.1 The Executive Committee has, significantly, introduced free fares for the elderly on public transport, in line with practice in Ireland. But otherwise it has done little to challenge the prioritisation of the private car in Northern Ireland.
- 7.8.2 Indeed, in the second Programme for Government, the prior and reasonable commitment to ensuring the roads infrastructure is maintained satisfactorily is followed by a pledge to ‘make significant capital investment in key strategic routes’ (Northern Ireland Executive, 2001: 45). Despite environmental objections, and the fact that in congestion terms the proposal will be ultimately self-defeating—and so a waste of public money—the Department for Regional Development has gone along with the Westlink flyover in Belfast, while failing to pursue earlier interest in congestion charges for the city.
- 7.8.3 In a March 2002 briefing paper, Friends of the Earth (Northern Ireland) has calculated that in 1998-99 16 per cent of transport expenditure in the region

was on public transport, compared with 65 per cent in Great Britain. It also points out that Northern Ireland has a road network twice as long, proportionate to its area, as that across the water, whereas its rail network is one fifth as long *pro rata*. And traffic is growing at twice the British rate.

- 7.8.4 A policy choice is unavoidable in urban areas between the dominance of the car and a modern system of public transport: the latter cannot coexist with the former. In Zürich, Europe's public-transport leader, trams are prioritised electronically at traffic lights and the average citizen makes 800 public-transport trips per year (Richards, 2001: 13-14). In Barcelona, electronic access gates prevent through traffic in sensitive central areas; in Milan, cars need a permit. Integrated ticketing arrangements for different transport modes are commonplace.
- 7.8.5 In Northern Ireland, the (valuable) emergence of bus and cycle lanes at the side of a small number of thoroughfares is an all-too-graphic demonstration of the marginalisation of public-transport concerns which has seen Translink starved of investment. And the fact that Translink is a holding company for all transport modes has not been exploited to engender the seamless journey arrangements—through-ticketing and information—that, with a little assistance from modern technology, it should.
- 7.8.6 Transport is a particular problem in rural areas. Transport 2000 estimates that outside of the Belfast conurbation and Derry at least 40 per cent of households lack a car or experience hardship to run one. Community transport schemes are as yet inadequate to offer a viable alternative to those for whom public transport is inconvenient. One interviewee representing elderly people thus went so far as to describe the introduction of free travel as a 'non-event' in rural areas: for many rural dwellers, access rather than cost is the principal public-transport barrier.
- 7.8.7 A focus on social exclusion casts all these issues in a much more urgent light. Isolated rural households without a car, particularly where occupied by the elderly or frail, could have their lives greatly improved by access to community transport, to visit relatives or friends or just go shopping. The policy goal should be to ensure that no one will be disadvantaged by not possessing a car or being unable, by dint of disability, to drive. Investment in adequate rural community transport, including dial-a-ride schemes, would cost a fraction of the proposed roads budget in the draft transport strategy and in an integrated approach could connect travellers to the larger transport modes.
- 7.8.8 This would not address the problem of individuals in rural areas for whom access to a car would be essential if they were to avail themselves of employment opportunities. One option (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2000: 4) would be to offer grants to unemployed people, upon the offer of work, to help with the purchase of a car in such circumstances. Local associations may also be able to broker car-sharing travel-to-work arrangements.
- 7.8.9 This is compatible with investment in the quality—as against quantity—of the road network, especially in rural areas where this is uneven (in more senses than one). There are particular considerations here. On the one hand, there is

population growth in the west of the region set against high unemployment (especially among Catholic males). On the other hand, there is the potential growth of tourism in particular, as well as the need for decentralisation of public employment and a shift in the pattern of travel (particularly long-distance, single commuting to greater Belfast).

- 7.8.10 A more general problem for rural dwellers is the apparently inexorable centralisation of public services, making access more difficult. Sometimes, this may be the lesser of two evils: in health, for example, there is a trade-off between proximity to an acute hospital and the safety of patients in the hands of surgeons not regularly performing complex procedures. But there can be an unintended downward spiral as more than one service withdraws from a depopulating area—a bus, a post office and so on—and accumulated social capital is depleted through desuetude.
- 7.8.11 There is thus a need for an alternative magnetism away from greater Belfast. The proposals in the Regional Development Strategy (DRD, 2001: 48) for ‘clusters’ in rural Northern Ireland, attracting public and private investment, would assist in this regard. The proposal below for a power of general competence for local authorities, linked to the associated potential for enhanced cross-border development, would also help. Such clusters would also be the prime locations for new services mentioned elsewhere in this paper—such as childcare or healthy living centres—which might otherwise be imagined only in terms of urban neighbourhoods.
- 7.8.12 Routine references in job advertisements—before protesting all sorts of equal-opportunity commitments—that access to a car is necessary should become a thing of the past: think of how many women don’t have that access. Northern Ireland’s enthusiasm for out-of-town retail centres should be tempered by recognition of their costs (among other things) in exclusion of the carless.
- 7.8.13 The carnage on our roads—which has in every recent year greatly exceeded the death toll from paramilitary attacks—is treated as an unavoidable fact of life. Yet road deaths in the region are roughly two-thirds higher than the rates (each very similar) for England, Scotland and Wales (DRD, 2002: 17).
- 7.8.14 Ensuring cycle-riding was not only efficient but safe and pleasant for short journeys would not only be a cheap but a healthy option for many. Copenhagen has 300 kilometres of cycle lanes and 30 per cent of employees cycle to work (Richards, 2001: 6).
- 7.8.15 Turning residential streets into car-free zones (with off-street parking for residents), as in the Dutch *woonerven* (town yards) landscaped with play areas, is an important way of making children more secure, while encouraging physical exercise and social development (Richards, 2001: 31). ‘Walking buses’ are a useful way schools can assuage parents’ worries about how their children get to school without the car, simultaneously removing a huge source of congestion (Richards, 2001: 33). Car clubs, common in other European countries—vehicles are hired by the hour—provide another way to ensure those who cannot afford a car (or don’t routinely need one) can secure access to one when required.

- 7.8.16 Above all, there has to be a willingness to find the money to invest in fast, efficient, comfortable public transport and place much greater restraint on the car. Munich, for instance, invests £150 per head per year in public transport and 60 per cent of journeys there are by public transport, cycle or foot (*Observer*, December 2nd 2001). In Northern Ireland, comparable figures are only available for travel to work: 81 per cent take the car (DRD, 2002: 24). That implies a far more rapid replacement rate for rolling stock and buses than currently envisaged—with the spin-off benefit that kneeling buses would come on stream so much quicker.
- 7.8.17 The obvious way to combine these goals is by introducing congestion charges on arterial routes into Belfast. This would have most effect on car-owning suburbanites in the greater Belfast region and so would itself have a redistributive effect towards the socially excluded in the city and rural dwellers. While technically complex, the real difficulty would be political: electronic road pricing operates in Singapore and Rome is piloting the idea in Europe (Richards, 2001: 43).
- 7.8.18 Hitherto, the parties to the Executive Committee have generally shied away from pursuing the leadership such hard choices require. If the rhetoric of equality and inclusion is not to ring hollow, however, that is exactly what they have to do—and civic organisations would be obligated to support them if they did.
- 7.8.19 But the private, and the voluntary, sector can do more as employers. A property developer based in London and Birmingham has been able to encourage more than 60 per cent of its employees to cycle to work—unsurprisingly, it believes them to be more punctual, more alert and less likely to be sick as a result—by providing a range of facilities such as showers and personal lockers (*New Statesman*, February 14th 2000).

7.9 Public procurement

- 7.9.1 There has been much discussion in Northern Ireland, as indicated above, of ‘targeting social need’ in terms of public expenditure. Yet the one area where public expenditure *in itself* could make a big difference has ironically been largely ignored—public procurement from the private sector. With public expenditure contributing some 60 per cent of gross domestic product in Northern Ireland, there is huge potential for public contracts to specify minimum terms and conditions (Howarth, Kenway and Palmer, 2001: 8), so that competition for tenders is based on quality and efficiency, rather than poor employee terms and conditions.
- 7.9.2 The leverage offered by public procurement, which has been recently reviewed in Northern Ireland, should also be used to improve standards. For instance, where services are being commissioned, ‘design for all’ requirements can be legitimately included in the tender to ensure the needs of people with disabilities are addressed (Christie and Mensah-Coker, 1999: 85).

7.10 Innovative projects

- 7.10.1 Evidence-based policy-making must include a right to fail. That is to say, innovative, even risky, projects should be supported if they might offer valuable lessons of wider application or provide the basis for new mainstream programmes.
- 7.10.2 Foyers provide a good example of an innovative way to address social exclusion. The first in Northern Ireland was opened in 1998 in Belfast, run by the Simon Community with a range of statutory partners. By catering not only for the accommodation needs of young homeless people, but also offering counselling and training on site, they address the problem in a manner more sensitive and holistic than government departments can usually do.
- 7.10.3 Similar comments apply to the School Age Mothers (SAM) project piloted by Barnardos and various statutory partners in the north-west (DHSSPS, 2000). Three-quarters of participants in the pilot, supported in terms of personal development as well as health and ante-natal care (including through peer support) while they continued their formal education, managed to sit examinations. An evaluation (Fullerton and Hayes, 2001) found that participants reported that the project had helped them make the transition from pregnancy to parenthood, and it endorsed the partnership basis of delivery.
- 7.10.4 For the maximum benefit to be gleaned from such innovative projects, it is critical that they are properly evaluated and that at least seed money is available. This underscores the need for a dedicated revenue stream to address social exclusion.
- 7.10.5 It seems that, paradoxically, the best way to secure co-operation between departments and statutory agencies is if a non-governmental organisation can broker the relationship. In other words, 'joined-up' government may best be achieved via projects on the ground. This also has the benefit of challenging monopolistic conceptions of delivery in departments, *vis-à-vis* the voluntary sector. As one provider complained in our interviews, 'If I go to the civil servant in the Department for Employment and Learning and say "how about funding for community-based education?", they say they only deal with the statutory agencies.'
- 7.10.6 This offers a guide as to how to handle the vexed issue of accommodation for Travellers. Local authorities, despite having access to 100 per cent grants from central government for constructing serviced sites, have often proved reluctant to do so. It would be preferable if such initiatives were, like the foyers, progressed and managed by organisations representing Travellers in conjunction with the statutory agencies. Having a range of agencies involved in this way could ensure that all the necessary services were adequately catered for and that some of the inherent difficulties of a nomadic lifestyle—in particular, sustaining education and relationships with health and social services—were addressed.

8. Implementation

8.1 Joined-up responses: the PfG

8.1.1 Social exclusion cuts across the ‘departmental silos’ of government but the ‘joined-up government’ required is notoriously difficult to achieve in practice. Before he became head of the Downing Street Social Exclusion Unit, Geoff Mulgan (1998: 263) identified nine barriers within government—barriers which he stressed were particularly germane to tackling social exclusion. It is a formidable list:

- mismatches between government structures and real people’s problems (for example, there is no department for ‘the elderly’);
- inflexible budget allocations, which make it difficult to ‘vire’ money (for example, from passive social-security benefits to active-labour-market measures);
- a focus on symptoms rather than causes (for instance, crime rather than criminality), because the benefits of addressing the latter would be long-term and might accrue to another department;
- for similar reasons, ‘dumping’ of difficult problems or clients on to other departments;
- managing and measuring inputs and activities or, at best, outputs (eg operations performed), rather than outcomes (eg health levels), associated with tight control of spending but little strategic oversight;
- inappropriate accountability—upwards to the source of money or horizontally to peer professionals, rather than downwards to the citizen;
- inappropriate centralisation, at the expense of efficiency and local knowledge;
- insufficient incentives for public-service ‘entrepreneurialism’, as the gains may again go elsewhere; and
- confused integration, where supposedly ‘joined-up’ programmes are merely added on to what already exists.

8.1.2 In the face of this, critical to success is high-level political commitment. The NAPS, for example, ‘gives a prominent place to the need for strong institutional structures to underpin its development and delivery’ (Layte *et al*, 2000: 177) Social inclusion should stand beside improving intercommunal relations as equal-highest priorities in addressing Northern Ireland cultural-political and socio-economic divisions.

8.1.3 Breaking up the former six departments into 11 (including OFMDFM) has created more *disjointed* government than before (and has led to departments struggling to spend their allocations). The challenges of holistic government are thus all the greater.

- 8.1.4 A major weakness of the operation of the Executive Committee to date has been the absence of sub-committees to address cross-departmental issues at ministerial level. In Ireland, as indicated earlier, the Taoiseach chairs a NAPS committee. An executive sub-committee charged with preparing a strategy for social inclusion, chaired by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, would combine these prerequisites of high-level commitment and joined-up working.
- 8.1.5 The focus of the sub-committee's work would be to give officials a political steer in preparing the relevant section of the Programme for Government. The Civic Forum has previously advised (Civic Forum, 2001) that the first programme priority, 'Growing as a Community', should be split into two and more frankly described as seeking to tackle (a) sectarianism and (b) social exclusion.
- 8.1.6 A regrettable feature of the programme process to date has been the limited ministerial input—a new kind of 'democratic deficit', even under devolution. Moving towards effective sub-committees would be one way for the executive to remedy this.
- 8.1.7 One thing that has bedevilled progress has been the conflicting partisan views within the executive as to what 'equality' means. As indicated above, one benefit of defining equality in terms of social inclusion, as equality of life-chances, is that it can take us beyond otherwise sterile, polarised positions. Co-operation in the executive in thrashing out a social-inclusion strategy—for which hopefully this document supplies a template—would thus also help cement trust between ministers.
- 8.1.8 Stutt *et al* (2001: 40) recommend the establishment of an interdepartmental social economy steering group. The difficulty with such a structure, as suggested *vis-à-vis* health, is that unless ministers from other departments are engaged directly they may not fully commit themselves. Cynics would say that the way to bury a subject is to toss it to an interdepartmental group.
- 8.1.9 It might therefore be preferable that a specific task of the social inclusion executive sub-committee being advanced here be to address the development of the social economy, with the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment tasked with bringing forward proposals to his (in this case) executive colleagues.

8.2 Equality unit

- 8.2.1 Currently a range of issues to do with equality, human rights and community relations come under one division of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Their logic is purely dictated by an accretion of programmes, rather than by a focus on what the division is meant to achieve. What is needed is a much more powerful focus at the heart of government on what we have described as the two biggest challenges Northern Ireland faces: social exclusion and sectarianism. The structures in OFMDFM should be based on answering the question 'How do we lead in meeting these challenges?' rather than 'What have we always done so far?'

- 8.2.2 A dedicated and discrete social-inclusion unit in OFMDFM is the obvious way forward. This would liaise closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel in terms of the social inclusion / community regeneration executive programme fund (see below). It would periodically second external expert talent, particularly from the voluntary sector, to 'bring in fresh blood' as one of our interviewees put it. It need be no larger than the current unwieldy equality unit.
- 8.2.3 Such a redefined unit would need political clout behind it and would need to enjoy the commitment of departments. One of our interviewees declared: 'This strategy needs to be driven by government at the highest levels. It will require key decisions and policy priorities.' Despite the fanfare surrounding the establishment of the Downing Street unit after Labour's 1997 election victory, a Cabinet Office report two years on found that its work was being undermined by sceptical cabinet ministers and unwieldy Whitehall bureaucracy (*Guardian*, December 9th 1999).
- 8.2.4 The last thing departments need is another demand for 'proofing' what they do. This is based on an old management approach, premised on hierarchy and mistrust. It tends to engender dumb compliance. More progressive organisations work through networks and the cultivation of trust-based relationships.
- 8.2.5 The goal should be to establish a network of policy-makers across departments with a primary focus on addressing social inclusion, committed to 'joined-up' working and, indirectly thereby, plugged into wider policy networks in Ireland, Scotland, Whitehall and beyond. Such a network could be led by a Junior Minister in OFMDFM with day-to-day responsibility. But it would be important that such a minister did not have to refer every decision to colleagues in the office, a source of current inertia.
- 8.2.6 An emphasis on a cross-departmental network is important because while our interviewees, in the main, strongly supported the idea that primary responsibility should remain with OFMDFM, there was a recognition that the office already has a huge number (26) of responsibilities vying for the attention of its four ministers. Thus a social-inclusion strategy would need to have ministerial champions in other departments, too: DEL and DSD are only two where such champions could play a key role.
- 8.2.7 One of our interviewees put it concisely: 'OFMDFM need to be the driving force as they are at the centre. However, I do not believe that the thinking in terms of joined-up government exists yet. It will be very important not only that the executive signs up to an anti-poverty strategy but that the Assembly also does. I would not like to see it all being top-down, however, as they really need to hear from grass roots what the real difficulties are. TSN so far has been a paper exercise and I am concerned that equality issues are going down the same route.'

8.3 Local partnerships

- 8.3.1 A review of experience in Ireland of local partnerships addressing social exclusion concluded in balanced vein (Walsh *et al*, 1998: 249-250): ‘There is considerable evidence that local partnerships can make an important contribution to the fight against unemployment and social exclusion. At the same time, the application of local partnership as a policy instrument is still at an evolutionary stage of development, despite the popular usage of this model in mainstream government programmes. Local partnerships should still be treated as a problematic concept, whose potential is still to be refined and developed, rather than be treated as a definitive model for replication in diverse policy contexts.’
- 8.3.2 A review of 86 local partnerships across the EU came to similar conclusions (Geddes and Benington, 2001: 6-7): ‘The evidence ... is that the impact and outcomes of this new model of local governance are extremely variable in terms of the “success” claimed and achieved by the local initiatives that are discussed ... We conclude, therefore, that the new model of local social governance *reformulates* rather than resolves the problem of a socially just path to European integration.’
- 8.3.3 Yet the logic behind local partnership arrangements remains a compelling one. First, government, even local government, can never be omniscient in today’s complex, heterogeneous society, and so needs to broker partnerships with other actors who, in combination, may be able at least to address problems that are beyond the scope of government—particularly with its functional divisions—to resolve themselves. This is particularly true of problems like social exclusion.
- 8.3.4 Secondly, not only do individuals have more volatile life-cycles and diverse lifestyles than in the past, but they are also much less inclined to defer to authority. They expect, with this democratic temper, to be engaged in dialogue and to have a real sense of control over their lives—we have already indicated how important a feeling of self-determination is for individuals to be socially included—which often is only practical in combination with one another via non-governmental organisations. Again, social exclusion is a particular case where NGOs need to be involved in delivery of what are often sensitive projects and individuals need to be able to enjoy some responsibility for their inclusion for success.
- 8.3.5 These two arguments, in tandem, explain why—despite the uneven and uncertain evidence as to their effectiveness—partnership arrangements addressing social exclusion have proliferated across the EU. This is particularly true in Ireland and the UK (though partly because neither state provides the strong universal welfare floor of some other European countries where they are more rare). Partnerships, usually taking the form of a specially established limited company, allow a range of statutory agencies to be brought together in the same moment as they engage with civic actors and representatives of excluded citizens themselves.
- 8.3.6 The way forward, then, is to ‘go with the flow’ of the partnership process, while ensuring monitoring and evaluation is effective and best practice and

innovation are quickly disseminated. It is also to ensure that the problems of partnerships—such as their instability and questionable accountability—are minimised by having a clear common purpose for all actors, a long-term perspective and the engagement of elected representatives. Local strategy partnerships in Northern Ireland have a potential to fill that bill.

- 8.3.7 Under Peace II a key role for local authorities and civic organisations is offered by the LSPs, which build on the largely-positive experience of the district partnerships under Peace I. They are responsible for measure 3 of Peace II, covering 'locally based regeneration and development strategies'. This gives them a more integrated and strategic role than the district partnerships enjoyed.
- 8.3.8 Allied to the prior structure with councillors in partnership with the voluntary sector, business, the trade unions and agriculture, this time statutory agencies are also engaged, which will assist the sustainability of the arrangements. While they are associated with Peace II, it is nevertheless envisaged that the LSPs should have a longer lifespan.
- 8.3.9 One criticism of Peace I was that 'reconciliation' was not given sufficient priority in the 'programme for peace and reconciliation' (Harvey, 1997). The lesson has been learned for Peace II and all applicants under the programme are required to address the legacy of the conflict and/or opportunities arising from the peace. This should ensure that the relationships between social inclusion and sectarianism are addressed at local level, as this paper advocates region-wide.
- 8.3.10 It is important to set this development against the backdrop, first, of the Executive Committee's commitment to 'working together' with local government and the social partners (Northern Ireland Executive, 2001: 70-71); secondly, the review of sub-regional administration, still at an embryonic stage; and, thirdly the Department for Social Development's work on a neighbourhood renewal strategy (DSD, 2002).
- 8.3.11 It is also important to recognise that, these days, local government—like any level of government—finds itself delivering less and directing more, focusing on its primary strategic and problem-solving functions. In line with this, local government in England and Wales, from which many services have been gradually removed, now enjoys an effective power of general competence, courtesy of the Local Government Act 2000: councils are empowered to act to promote the general 'well-being' of their area. Thus, rather than being confined to a specific range of functions, outwith which they would be acting *ultra vires*, councils can basically do anything that is not illegal or unaffordable.
- 8.3.12 In Northern Ireland, since 1973, councils have enjoyed very limited powers—delivery of refuse, leisure services, control of parks and cemeteries—though these have latterly been augmented by the power to raise 5p in the pound for economic development. The 26 district councils will come under the spotlight when the review of public administration gets under way. Unpublished research by Paul Carmichael shows that councillors do not want to see the decentralisation to them of major powers. But the conferral of a power of

general competence by Northern Ireland legislation would allow them, potentially, to become the effective orchestrators of local development—social and cultural, as well as economic—though some would have to raise their game substantially to fulfil this role.

- 8.3.13 In this context, the LSPs could come into their own. Their structure offers councils ready-made civic and agency networks, which they would otherwise have to broker to effect such a general enabling role. Some councillors have been leery of civic engagement ‘on their patch’. But they will inevitably depend on civic partners if their role is enlarged—particularly if the scale of their particular council is also enlarged by the review.
- 8.3.14 Building on their work under Peace II, the review of public administration could propose that developing renewable local social-inclusion strategies be a major continuing task of LSPs. A feature of Northern Ireland, going back to partition and sustained through subsequent disadvantage, has been an historic sense of grievance in the (mainly Catholic) rural west and Derry—a general sense of being deprived of power, seen as concentrated in Belfast and at Stormont.
- 8.3.15 Allying the conferral of a power of general competence on local authorities with the wider mobilising capacity of LSPs could offer a robust manner in which Derry City Council or, say, Fermanagh District Council could exercise genuine local autonomy to good effect. The representation of statutory agencies on the new partnerships is a valuable way to ensure they ‘buy in’ to local plans, which may not always follow central directions.
- 8.3.16 It would also allow such authorities to utilise more effectively cross-border networks, where the current mismatch of competencies with county councils on the other side of the border—not to mention differential *currencies*—is an obstacle to co-operation. And co-operating to address the specific effects of the border on social exclusion has obvious capacity for mutual advantage.
- 8.3.17 On an even more ‘local’ scale than the local partnerships—the neighbourhood level—there is potential to set in train processes reversing the vicious circle of decline in ghettoised areas and estates and build social capital. Middle-class exit, social dumping, private-sector disinvestment, increased crime and social *anomie* act together to reinforce and deepen social exclusion and engender fatalism and despair.
- 8.3.18 For example, earlier we have discussed the idea that planning rules for new housing developments could be changed to require private developers to integrate some social housing into their schemes. Conversely, more can be done to encourage professionals to live in inner-city areas.
- 8.3.19 ‘Gentrification’ can have damaging effects in raising the price of housing for poor people but an improved social mix is vital to ensuring inner-urban residents enjoy the associated mix of services and the additional social capital such migration can bring. Planners, developers and residents’ representatives should work together to this end. Otherwise there is a serious danger in post-ceasefires Belfast, in particular, of the emergence, unplanned, of a riverside apartment *élite*—fully availing itself of the amenity of the Lagan, the Waterfront and Odyssey, yet untouched by adjacent inner-city terraced neighbourhoods

and even more remote from outer-city estates. A perverse ‘peace dividend’ that would be.

- 8.3.20 A preference for brownfield over greenfield development—for which the Belfast Metropolitan Residents’ Group successfully pressed in the revision of the Regional Development Strategy (DRD, 2001)—can help. Enhanced pedestrianisation and traffic calming can make the inner city a more attractive place for all to live, particularly families with children. Financial incentives can be offered for skilled teachers (particularly in mathematics) and dynamic principals to work in challenging inner-city schools. And so on.
- 8.3.21 Our earlier comments on the social economy focused on the potential of intermediate labour-market schemes to address unemployment and economic inactivity. But the social economy also has great potential to improve the quality of life in disadvantaged areas. Local Exchange Trading Systems, or LETS schemes, are a good example of how social capital can be built by individuals in disadvantaged areas indirectly exchanging labour rather than cash—for instance, by offering childcare and getting plumbing in return.
- 8.3.22 One interesting potential vehicle for local action is the ‘development trust’. As discussed earlier, focusing local aspirations around demands for ‘funding’ can paradoxically reinforce dependency. At best it may achieve little better than sustaining a steady-state level of exclusion and at worst it may see public monies dissipated to no purpose. This is because of the contrast between physical and social capital: cash depletes the more it is used; trust, norms and networks, on the other hand, *strengthen* with use.
- 8.3.23 The development trust is a bottom-up approach focused on the neighbourhood itself. It is about residents coming together to develop their area—in the real sense of substantive improvement—by acquiring assets and engendering their own income stream. This is an inherently empowering process, because it places at the disposal of disadvantaged citizens real resources held in common and a sense of collective control over their future.
- 8.3.24 The activities of development trusts include, among others, building and managing workspace, running childcare centres, refurbishing local buildings and organising training programmes—and there are, of course, elements of these in various neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland. As such they can provide genuine local interlocutors for statutory agencies, so that the latter are not seen as a bureaucratic imposition, and they can offer an accountable association to which some of the publicly-funded functions advocated in this paper—such as expansion of childcare and development of the social economy—can be transferred.
- 8.3.25 Development trusts can also, of course, lever charitable and even private finance and can provide the organisational outlet for ‘social entrepreneurs’ to shine. They thus not only do not dissipate public funds but in fact treat them as a basis for accumulation—and for public, rather than private, purposes. They therefore offer a way to ensure neighbourhood development is sustainable. Moreover, it is in the nature of development-trust activities that very little support leaches out of the disadvantaged area.

- 8.3.26 The Department for Social Development could usefully open a competition for bids for pilot projects to establish a small number of local development trusts on an experimental basis. They offer one way to promote ‘joined-up’ working by government at neighbourhood level. It would, however, be important that such departmental assistance was used as a lever to ensure that a cross-communal—‘bridging’ capital—element be built into the pilot. The two existing trusts in Derry follow communal lines and this is a big risk at this very local level.
- 8.3.27 Enterprises rightly expects government to provide a ‘one-stop shop’ to which they can go for assistance—and, indeed, Invest Northern Ireland has been established for this, and other, reasons. But disadvantaged citizens have no such recourse and often find government structures a complete mystery. Yet modern technology should make it possible for the devolved administration to establish lightly-staffed offices in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with internet links to all the relevant agencies. Rather in the manner that an individual goes to a GP for advice on referral, such a service could be of great value to those alienated from government and mistrustful of all its works. The ONE initiative is recognition by government of the need to ‘join up’ its advice services.
- 8.3.28 Again, pilot projects could be established in a small number of neighbourhoods, to determine what kind of advice people would require and what kind of changes to departmental information systems would be necessary to ensure such a service functioned smoothly. These could usefully be developed in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, who already provide such a service without adequate support.
- 8.3.29 A key aspect of such advice would be likely to be on debt. NIACAB recently discovered in monitoring its bureaux over one month that £5 million worth of debt problems were recorded. Given the difficulty of surviving on means-tested benefit for any protracted period, many households dependent on benefit for a long time go into debt, and are at the mercy of loan sharks charging prohibitive rates of interest. Short of more realistic benefit rates, part of the answer is to ensure low-interest competition from credit unions—a major part of the social economy discussed above. Part, too, is to ensure good-quality financial advice is available. In Ireland, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service is funded by government to offer independent and confidential advice through a network of centres across the country.
- 8.3.30 Finally, it is worth reiterating that local, including *very* local, activity can only do so much. Government cannot ‘dump’ the challenge of social inclusion on to the socially excluded themselves. As an analysis of a number of UK partnerships (including Brownlow Community Trust in Northern Ireland) concluded (Geddes, 1997: 128), these must be co-ordinated with a more strategic economic and social policy framework. Hence the importance of the supportive *regional* context this strategy seeks to offer.

8.4 Legislative requirements

- 8.4.1 The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (2001: 84-92) has proposed that a Northern Ireland bill of rights, arising from the Belfast agreement and to be passed at Westminster, should include provision for social and economic rights, such as to an 'adequate' standard of living, health care, environment and so on. Such provisions would have a certain declaratory power but legal entitlements—especially in the social and economic arena, where governments can plead resource scarcity—can only be a floor, not a ceiling.
- 8.4.2 This paper has argued throughout for a more substantive approach—based on social policy rather than law, if you like—to addressing social inclusion more ambitiously in the devolved arena. So would specific legislation by the Assembly be required?
- 8.4.3 In particular areas, the answer is yes. For example, a decision to abolish selection at 11, to amend social-security regulations or to give local authorities a power of general competence could only take place through legislation. In other areas, it is no. For instance, childcare could be greatly expanded merely by allocating a greater budget to it.

8.5 The executive programme fund

- 8.5.1 The executive programme funds were an important innovation spinning off from the Programme for Government. The programme is meant to drive budget allocations, and the timetables for both are congruent, and a wise decision by the Executive Committee when the first programme was being devised in 2000 was to link the two by defining a number of cross-departmental programme themes with designated budgets.
- 8.5.2 There are five such funds, including that for social inclusion / community regeneration. The allocation to the latter was £7.4 million in 2001-02, rising to £21.9 million in 2002-03 and £31.9 million in 2003-04 (Northern Ireland Executive, 2001: 82). The aim should be to ensure that this allocation continues to rise significantly, year on year, to assist with the implementation of the social-inclusion strategy, though other EPFs—notably the children's fund—are also potential vehicles, as well of course as mainstream departmental budgets.
- 8.5.3 The EPFs have been undermined to date by the absence of executive sub-committees (Wilford and Wilson, 2001: 66). As a result, almost all the bids for allocations have come from individual departments, vitiating the object of the exercise—to promote 'joined-up' government. A powerful executive sub-committee on social inclusion could drive a raft of cross-departmental bids and ensure that this fund, at least, was properly utilised.
- 8.5.4 Even better would be for such bids to look to support interesting projects which are not only multi-departmental but in partnership with NGOs, as discussed above. Ensuring that such initiatives are supported would be of value in itself, given that they otherwise tend to fall down between the departmental cracks or have to rely on non-governmental sources. But it

would also be an effective way of sponsoring innovation and risk-taking, with the potential of positive lesson-learning for mainstream programmes.

- 8.5.5 Yet why spend money on social inclusion at all, when there are such pressing claims for expenditure to remedy Northern Ireland's 'infrastructure deficit'? The answer to this question is contained in the paradox already mentioned, that physical capital depletes with use (for instance, roads get worn out by traffic and need replaced), whereas social capital accumulates (for example, the more people trust using public transport at night the more people will use it).
- 8.5.6 It would be wrong to say that Northern Ireland was entirely deprived of investment under 'direct rule'. By comparison with Great Britain, expenditure on state housing, industrial development, leisure provision and roads was sustained significantly, even under the Conservatives. But such relative public-expenditure largesse as Northern Ireland enjoyed—and still enjoys—did not in itself establish a healthy and comfortable society.
- 8.5.7 Part of the problem is that bricks and mortar do not weave a social fabric. Indeed, in its absence they are vulnerable to under-use, neglect and even destruction. The rising incidence of attacks on public-service vehicles and equipment—with corresponding injury and stress for public-service workers—is an instance of this problem. The last thing the devolved administration should do is continue the short-sighted 'throwing money at the problem' characteristic of its direct-rule predecessors. By comparison, long-term investment in the accumulation of social capital will pay big dividends and engender real change in the years to come.

8.6 A 'solidarity tax'?

- 8.6.1 If Northern Ireland is to have any real freedom of fiscal manoeuvre, it has to be prepared to grasp the nettle of raising revenue internally. Relatively small amounts accruing in this fashion can have a disproportionate impact if ring-fenced, as so much of the mainstream budget is always already committed, with huge inertia built in over time. There is also a democratic argument that the region ought to be more accountable for its expenditures, by having to raise a proportion, however small, at its own initiative. And there is the wider political argument that brownie points can be scored against Treasury attempts to tighten the purse-strings if the region can demonstrate on a wider canvas that it is showing willing in this regard.
- 8.6.2 For all these reasons, the case for the Assembly to pursue tax-varying powers (Barnett and Hutchinson, 1998; Heald, 1998) is a compelling one. But there was no debate (unlike in Scotland) in the run-up to the Belfast agreement on this issue and there has similarly been none in the run-up to the review of the agreement (theoretically) due in May 2002. By default, such regionally-based revenue-raising as has taken place since has been *via* the regional rate, which—unlike income tax—is regressive in character.
- 8.6.3 Yet, in the absence of a tax-varying power, protests of 'underfunding' abound to no good purpose, alongside claims as to the 'unfairness' of the Barnett formula—of which Northern Ireland is by far the UK's largest beneficiary.

There can be no doubt that a cross-party call for UK legislation to give the region tax-varying powers would be accepted. By contrast, as Teague and Wilson (1995: 82) have argued, ‘the scale of the [Westminster] subvention makes it neither credible nor realistic to argue for extra public cash to solve the region’s unemployment and poverty’.

- 8.6.4 Moreover, if the region is to attempt to contribute internally to reducing the yawning inequality described above, it must be prepared to utter the dread word ‘redistribution’. As Wood (2001: 60) pithily puts it, ‘Social inclusion is not an alternative to redistribution but requires redistribution in order to be more than an electoral sound-byte.’
- 8.6.5 If Northern Ireland is ever to become a cohesive society, given its manifest tensions and chronic mistrust, there must be a real sense of solidarity between what Shirlow has described as the ‘have-nots’ and the ‘have-yachts’. One concrete expression of such solidarity would be for the Assembly, having acquired tax-varying powers, to restore top-level income tax to 50 or 60 per cent (from the current 40 per cent). It will be recalled that even the higher rate remains a long way short of the 83 per cent maximum which operated until the Conservatives took power. Set against significantly higher rates of tax and social-insurance payments elsewhere in Europe, as indicated above, the disincentive effects of such an increase would be small.
- 8.6.6 An increase UK-wide in the top income-tax rate to 50 per cent for those earning over £100,000 *per annum* would raise an additional £3.1 billion a year. On a *pro rata* basis (though Northern Ireland would have fewer very high earners), this would raise £86 million a year. This is a small amount by comparison with overall public spending but it would represent a much larger proportion of expenditure realistically available for reallocation.
- 8.6.7 More money could be raised, though less equitably, by a general rise in income tax of up to 3p in the pound, in line with the (so far unused) power of the Scottish Parliament. The Commission on Taxation and Citizenship (2000) proposed just such a tax-varying power for the Assembly, in the context of a more progressive reconfiguration of the UK tax system. The commission’s researches showed that citizens were not tax-averse *per se* but felt disconnected from the system; it thus recommended more transparent demonstration of where tax revenue went.
- 8.6.8 The proceeds from extra revenue in Northern Ireland, however precisely raised, could be ‘hypothecated’ to the social inclusion / community regeneration EPF—which might more snappily be described as the ‘solidarity fund’—so that taxpayers knew they were not simply subsidising general government expenditure. This would be important in helping to finance the expensive elements of this strategy—notably, the social-economy and childcare components. The visibility of these on the ground might assist in minimising tax aversion among donors, while among beneficiaries a ‘solidarity fund’ sign on projects would show how others were committed to the more marginalised. Again, building social capital all round.

- 8.6.9 Other potential sources of revenue should also be closely scrutinised, now that the region is much more responsible for its own public-expenditure decisions. A notable revenue foregone is the derating of manufacturing firms, which according to the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance costs £60 million per annum (out of a total of £100 million a year for derating in total). Such a general subsidy is questionable in principle, because of what economists call its 'deadweight' effect—that it may not affect decision-making by the recipient. The opportunity of the forthcoming rates review should be taken to research the degree to which this hidden subsidy has been critical to manufacturing employment in the region or has simply been taken for granted as a credit in firms' accounts.
- 8.6.10 This is not the place for hard-and-fast recommendations as to how the devolved administration should fund its effort against social exclusion. The issues are rehearsed here to indicate that there are a range of options—none of them a free lunch—which can be pursued in this regard.

8.7 NGOs and practitioners

- 8.7.1 A key to success will be mobilising a common effort and enthusiasm, going well beyond government and establishing a clear sense of an overall shared objective. The alphabet soup of official programmes—TSN, PSI and section 75—is unintelligible to the average Northern Ireland citizen (under direct rule, presumably, no one in government saw this as a problem).
- 8.7.2 The aim must be to take the whole issue of inclusion outside of government and small lobbies, into the pulpits and on to the TV. There must be an excitement that, contrary to the strong current of fatalism in Northern Ireland, things can and are being done. Hopefully, this will also engender a recognition outside government that this is indeed a common responsibility and that therefore a culture of complaint is of no greater value than a culture of contentment.
- 8.7.3 A recurrent feature of successful social-inclusion projects is the engagement of non-governmental organisations that have accumulated specialist expertise and have a sensitive relationship with users, as the earlier examples illustrate. Practitioners need also to be brought into the policy-making 'loop': their feedback from experience can be invaluable.

8.8 Relationships with other jurisdictions

- 8.8.1 Many of the problems of social exclusion experienced in Northern Ireland are similar to those in the rest of the UK, in Ireland and, indeed, the rest of the EU. Reinventing the wheel is definitely to be avoided. And the sheer complexity and difficulty of the issues means there should be no ideological holds barred in terms of what are deemed to be sources of effective policy or good practice.
- 8.8.2 As one corrective, however, it should be borne in mind that both the governments in London and Dublin (though not in Edinburgh or Cardiff) are suspicious of the European social model—in the words of the Tánaiste, Mary Harney, feeling ideologically closer to Boston than Berlin. Given its burden of

social exclusion, Northern Ireland's regional interest lies in supporting the project to renew—rather than reject—that European model.

- 8.8.3 An obvious area for north-south synergies, as recommended by Sheehan and Tomlinson (1995: 60), is in addressing long-term unemployment within the broader process of economic and social co-operation. To ensure the former is not subsumed in the latter, this could be a useful focus for co-operation between the Civic Forum and the National Economic and Social Forum and for any new north-south consultative forum. The NESF has addressed long-term unemployment in the past (NESF, 1996).
- 8.8.4 More generally, the aim should be to integrate as far as possible the content of this regional strategy with the NAPS. There would be important advantages for border areas, in particular, in doing so.
- 8.8.5 If and when the review of the agreement takes place, social inclusion should be introduced as a cross-departmental area of policy co-operation to be advanced by the North/South Ministerial Council. This would be an important statement of the kind of region both jurisdictions, jointly, sought to develop. The proposed high-level political and official commitment to the strategy in Northern Ireland would dovetail well with the arrangements in the Irish government described earlier.
- 8.8.6 The agreement allows of the possibility that the NSMC will be a vehicle for the representation of a joint, north-south opinion to the EU institutions. While this is limited in practice by the reality that the EU is organised around member states, there is nevertheless the potential to articulate a north-south perspective which chimes with the focus of the European Commission in particular on social exclusion.
- 8.8.7 As suggested above, Scotland should also be an important port of call for Northern Ireland policy-makers, given the similarity of the parliament's powers, the similar background problems of declining traditional industries and the existing experience of the parliament in developing the social-inclusion strategy there. Devolution across the UK must not mean *involution*: we all have a lot to learn from the ways we may exercise our increasing autonomy differently.
- 8.8.8 Of supreme importance is that the devolved administration takes a more collegiate view of Westminster developments: as one of our interviewees claimed, 'saying that things are "reserved" can be just an excuse for not doing things'. The breakdown of the Keynesian/Beveridgean employment/ welfare consensus in Britain during the Thatcher years had huge impact in rendering Northern Ireland, like the rest of the UK, a much more unequal place, as already indicated. Yet the associated impassioned debate found little echo in the region. Equally, there has been little public discussion about New Labour measures—the minimum wage, the Working Families Tax Credit and the New Deal—which have had much more egalitarian impact in Northern Ireland than its own 'equality agenda' to date.
- 8.8.9 Conversely, a recurrent theme in our interviews was the need to improve pensions to tackle the exclusion experienced by many senior citizens. The UK

does not face the same 'pensions timebomb' as other EU states due to the ageing population and the associated increase in dependency ratios. But this is partly because its public pension provision is so meagre, with better off pensioners dependent on funded private schemes; the bulk of pensioners in advanced European countries would be participants in generous arrangements funded by taxation or social contributions. New Labour's answer to these problems has been to enhance means-testing, via the pensioners' minimum income guarantee, allied to the introduction of 'stakeholder' pensions, which have not taken off.

- 8.8.10 The Executive Committee needs to be intervening in these debates. It could anticipate support from the other devolved administrations and the northern English regions for a more ambitious social-inclusion agenda than the relatively modest moves New Labour has made since 1997. In particular, it could seek alliances with the other administrations behind greater fiscal autonomy from Treasury control.
- 8.8.11 As with local government, the Treasury instinct is to cap the spending of subsidiary tiers, to keep overall public expenditure within its desired limits. But there has to be a willingness to 'let go' (Barnett and Hutchinson, 1999: 67) on the premiss that subsidiarity should apply—that, in particular, the devolved administrations should have the capacity to borrow in their own right for investment. Otherwise, they are being driven down the private-finance route (IPPR, 2001: 75), even though this may be more expensive in the long run and may curtail their social goals.
- 8.8.12 Last, but not least, in this context, the devolved administration needs to keep itself apprised of the process of elaboration and renewal of the UK's 'national' action plan on social exclusion—the next round is due in 2003—and contribute fully to it. At the moment, TSN represents the Northern Ireland contribution (New TSN Unit, 2002: 12). The commission has always looked favourably on Northern Ireland and this process provides the region with an important potential external ally. Northern Ireland should also look to build alliances with other disadvantaged EU regions, such as through the Committee of the Regions.

9. Review and renewal

9.1 Reporting arrangements

- 9.1.1 Strategies are all very well, but without the means to implement them and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation they may simply gather dust on the shelf. We have already discussed some of the hard choices that the allocation of the necessary resources requires. Reporting arrangements are critical too, because they ensure not only that the issue remains live but also that the strategy evolves with experience and evidence, and inertia is avoided.
- 9.1.2 Key roles would be played by the social-inclusion forum and the research community, discussed below. They could keep government on its collective toes. An official annual report, compiled by the unit within government—with measurements against performance indicators as in Scotland—should be presented to the forum for discussion. This would also be a useful basis for Assembly debate.

9.2 Lesson-learning from elsewhere

- 9.2.1 The reshaped unit in OFMDFM could also provide the vehicle for something that is very difficult for governments to lift their heads sufficiently from the day-to-day to do—keeping an eye on leading-edge developments across the globe. We have already stressed the value of cross-jurisdictional co-operation in these islands, but social exclusion is a concern, sadly, the world over.
- 9.2.2 In particular, the unit could keep abreast of European developments. But it could also learn from initiatives in the developing world: in India, for example, micro-banks have provided a valuable route out of exclusion *via* self-employment.
- 9.2.3 Northern Ireland has been given a great deal, in goodwill and financial assistance, by the international community. There is more that the region could do, as part of the developed west, to show solidarity with those who suffer exclusion on a global scale that puts its problems into considerable perspective.

9.3 Continuing research

- 9.3.1 Research is the raw material of evidence-based policy-making. This is particularly true of research that engages with practitioners. There has been much social research on poverty in Northern Ireland over recent decades. But much of that has been a quantitative statement of the problem. No one should any longer need convincing that we live in a society characterised by great and unacceptable inequality.
- 9.3.2 What has been less in evidence has been research that has addressed the qualitative aspects of social exclusion, the policy portfolio required to achieve a more inclusive society or the success or failure of particular projects. It is these kinds of research which should be prioritised by government. The

establishment by the Equality Commission of a policy and research team should offer an important resource in this regard.

- 9.3.3 In particular, this paper has recommended that one quantitative (the Gini income coefficient) and one qualitative (social participation) indicator be treated as the primary indices of performance over time, against which the social-inclusion strategy can be assessed. Others—adapting the Scottish benchmarks—should be considered. Robust, annually updated data on the indices chosen would be critical. There is a significant budget within OFMDFM for such research.
- 9.3.4 Also important is to recognise that even in such a small region as Northern Ireland there is an information deficit. Best practice is not always recognised, never mind disseminated. Research with projects and practitioners on the ground can be invaluable in such a practice-focused and experimental arena as social inclusion. With its research unit and its magazine, *Scope*, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action is a natural location for the accumulated findings of such research.

9.4 Dialogue and development

- 9.4.1 The diversity and volatility of the experience of the socially excluded is not easily accommodated by government. It requires that government engage in dialogue with the representatives of the socially excluded—and, indeed, with socially excluded individuals themselves. It also requires that that dialogue be an iterative process—not a one-off ‘consultation’ around a government paper but a more exploratory series of conversations.
- 9.4.2 This is not just important in terms of evaluating the success or otherwise of government initiatives. There is an underlying moral point here about the ‘right of voice’ of those who experience social exclusion, individually and severally. Much of what will be said will be raw, much of it angry—though also articulate and authentic. But it is part and parcel of social inclusion, conceived as a process, that every individual can enjoy an equal right to have a say over their lives. In Britain, Church Action on Poverty has demonstrated how socially excluded individuals can be brought into dialogue with ministers—‘capacity-building’ is clearly important in this regard.
- 9.4.3 This is part of a wider debate about how far devolution ‘makes a difference’ to Northern Ireland, not only in terms of material improvement to people’s lives but also in how far it really *devo/ves*. As Mike Morrissey has put it, unless the conventional process of top-down governance—allied to copious ‘consultation’—is rethought, direct rule will only have been replaced by a devolved ‘oligarchy’.

9.5 A social-inclusion forum

- 9.5.1 The Dutch experience has shown the virtue of a formal commitment to a forum on social inclusion, where government and NGOs can come together. Such a forum would offer a valuable means to bring together all those whose expertise, experience or interest in social exclusion would collectively

comprise a sounding-board against which the progress of the strategy could be assessed. By presenting to such a forum evaluations of the policy as a whole, and particular programmes and projects, an opportunity would be created for evidence-based policy development.

- 9.5.2 Such a forum would also be able to co-ordinate and learn from more specific fora—such as the inter-agency forum on Travellers recommended by the PSI working group or the Co-operative Forum formed in 1999—helping thereby to avoid the fragmentation that bedevils policy in this area. Similarly, the proposed social-economy forum advocated by Stutt *et al* (2001: 40) could usefully come under its wing.
- 9.5.3 The forum should be chaired by a ‘neutral’—perhaps an academic expert—good at brokering relationships between non-governmental organisations and government agencies. It would be important that the forum and its chair were sufficiently attentive to quieter voices. The concerns of the rural excluded, for instance, may otherwise tend to go unheard; the Rural Community Network would expect to give voice to such concerns in a social-inclusion forum.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

10.1 Next step: a CF/OFMDFM working group?

- 10.1.1 The Civic Forum is anxious that this proposed strategy should indeed be implemented after due democratic debate by the devolved administration—and all the other relevant actors. It is conscious that much would need to be fleshed out with the assistance of officials—detailed costings, for instance.
- 10.1.2 The forum therefore proposes that the next step should be to establish a joint working group between the forum and the OFMDFM. The working group would be charged with translating this strategy into a series of proposed actions by ministers, which the Assembly—and the broader public—could then debate.
- 10.1.3 Such a working group would be a time-bound initiative linked to the revision of the Programme for Government (see below). It would also benefit from the inclusion of practitioners and experts, outside of the Civic Forum's membership, who as this paper has repeatedly insisted have a critical contribution to make.

10.2 PFGIII

- 10.2.1 An obvious focus for this effort is the third Programme for Government, which officials will be drafting over the summer. This would be in line with the forum's aspiration for a new programme chapter on social inclusion and would ensure the strategy became integrated into government in its most 'joined-up' expression.
- 10.2.2 As the draft programme goes before the Executive Committee and then the Assembly, in the autumn and winter, for debate this would also provide a mechanism for ensuring ministers and MLAs were able to make a genuine input into a strategy for social inclusion, which would then acquire their imprint and commitment.
- 10.2.3 Integrating the strategy into the Programme for Government would also build in a requirement of annual iteration, dovetailing with the other recommendations here on the social-inclusion forum, annually updated indicators and so on.

10.3 Looking to the longer term

- 10.3.1 There is no quick fix to the challenge of an unequal society. Powerful international trends favour even greater inequality. Resistance is met to progress not only from members of the contented majority but sometimes, perversely, from some of those who are socially excluded. In a free democratic society such resistance can not simply be overridden.
- 10.3.2 There is understandable anxiety among ministers in the devolved administration that they can 'make a difference' within electoral cycles.

Progress on social inclusion, however, is crab-like—slow and reversible. If ministers show the political will, public patience should be offered in reciprocation.

- 10.3.3 As this is a long haul, the importance of wider social commitment to the goal of an inclusive society is all the more critical. We cannot pass the collective civic buck to government—only to blame it when it fails. The Civic Forum is clear that this issue is just as high a priority for itself as it suggests should be the case for the devolved administration.

10.4 Social inclusion and reconciliation

- 10.4.1 This paper is premised on the idea that the ‘growing as a community’ priority of the devolved administration needs breaking down into its twin challenges, frankly described, of social exclusion and sectarianism—twin challenges which the Civic Forum has already said scar this society and represent the main hurdles on its path to normality.
- 10.4.2 But it is worth restating in conclusion the forum’s view that these challenges are profoundly interconnected. Social inclusion on its own will not lead to reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants.
- 10.4.3 The struggle to make Northern Ireland a genuinely pluralist society—in which another forum working group is fully embroiled—is just as critical. The religion of each of us as citizens should be of as little consequence to the dignity we enjoy as the social background from which we come.

10.5 Key recommendations

- 10.5.1 The Northern Ireland Assembly should endorse the elaboration of a regional strategy for social inclusion.
- 10.5.2 The goal of the strategy should be defined as securing equality of life-chances for all the citizens of the region.
- 10.5.3 The strategy should have equal-top priority in government with tackling sectarianism.
- 10.5.4 The strategy should be embodied in a specific section of the Programme for Government.
- 10.5.5 The strategy should enjoy high-level political commitment, with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister chairing an Executive sub-committee.
- 10.5.6 Responsibility for day-to-day implementation should rest with a Junior Minister, at the heart of a cross-departmental policy network.
- 10.5.7 A reshaped equality unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister would commission research, including on performance indicators, and keep abreast of wider developments.
- 10.5.8 Experience from other jurisdictions should be drawn upon, notably engaging with Ireland and Scotland, as well as with wider UK and EU policy debates.

- 10.5.9 Other ministers, notably in the Department of Employment and Learning and the Department for Social Development, should act as champions for the strategy outside of OFMDFM.
- 10.5.10 A number of flagship policies should be pursued. These should include:
- commitment to the establishment of a childcare centre in every disadvantaged area, to give children a better start in life and assist women wishing to enter the labour market;
 - a ‘no-failure’ culture in education, to include a revision of the transfer system at 11, a more diversified curriculum at 14+, and a wider range of final subjects at 16+;
 - new arrangements to lever up private-sector training and enhanced commitment to lifelong learning, to raise employment and productivity;
 - a programme to boost the social economy—especially intermediate-labour-market schemes and new forms of service delivery—and a more ‘social’ concept of the private sector and farming life;
 - reforms to social-security arrangements, to permit the social-economy schemes and weaken disincentives to labour-market and other participation;
 - a better work-life balance, to reduce the division between the ‘work-poor’ and the ‘time-poor’ and make it easier to marry domestic responsibilities and labour-market participation;
 - a refocusing of the health debate from maintaining hospitals to improving public health, in partnership with non-governmental organisations and engaging citizens themselves;
 - a rebalancing of transport from the private car towards public provision in the widest sense, particularly addressing rural isolation; and
 - utilising public procurement as a lever to ensure high standards of corporate responsibility.
- 10.5.11 The strategy should be delivered in a ‘joined up’ manner and in conjunction with non-governmental organisations, including the business community.
- 10.5.12 There should be a local tier to the strategy, via the local strategy partnerships at district-council level established under ‘Peace II’, as well as neighbourhood initiatives.
- 10.5.13 The success of the strategy should be assessed using key indicators, notably the Gini coefficient of income inequality and a qualitative ‘participation’ index.
- 10.5.14 The strategy should be monitored and reviewed through dialogue with a social-inclusion forum, bringing together practitioners, experts and representatives of the socially excluded.
- 10.5.15 The strategy should be funded through expansion of the social-inclusion executive programme fund, which should also support innovative projects.

10.5.16 The review of the Belfast agreement should be used to pursue Scottish-style tax-varying powers for the Assembly, with the view to 'hypothecated' revenue-raising for social inclusion.

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12. Interviewees

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