



Submission to the Northern Ireland Executive's Consultation on the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021

This document has been prepared by the Centre for Cross Border Studies as a contribution to Northern Ireland Executive's Consultation on the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021.¹

About The Centre for Cross Border Studies

The Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS), based in Armagh, Northern Ireland, has a strong reputation as an authoritative advocate for cross-border cooperation and as a valued source of research, information and support for collaboration across borders on the island of Ireland, Europe and beyond.

The Centre empowers citizens and builds capacity and capability for cooperation across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries on the island of Ireland and further afield. This mission is achieved through research, expertise, partnership and experience in a wide range of cross-border practices and concerns (for more details visit www.crossborder.ie).

The response that follows, therefore, is closely informed by the Centre's particular knowledge of and experience in cross-border socio-economic development involving a range of sectors from both Northern Ireland and Ireland, including public bodies, business and civil society.

Although we have chosen not to make an online submission, our response nevertheless clearly indicates in brackets (Qn) at the start of the relevant paragraphs where it is answering a specific question contained in the online questionnaire.

¹ This response was authored by Dr Anthony Soares, Deputy Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies.

The Programme for Government Framework

CCBS commends the adoption of a new approach to the Programme for Government, particularly one that includes the active participation of society in all of its stages – design, implementation and evaluation. We also welcome its key elements, especially the focus on outcomes and the recognition that such outcomes “are designed to stay in place for a generation rather than a single Assembly term” (Draft PfG Framework, p.7). However, although certain strategic issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure the Framework’s success going forward will be identified later in this response, the quality of stakeholder engagement, the need for a coordinated approach and explicit recognition of the value of working across *jurisdictional* boundaries should be highlighted from the outset.

The introduction to the Draft PfG Framework states that the next period will see the Executive “engage with stakeholders about the actions needed to help deliver on the indicators”, and “agree the Programme for Government, the Budget, a refreshed Economic Strategy, a new Investment Strategy and a Social Strategy by the end of 2016” (p.8). In light of this, CCBS makes the following recommendations:

- **That the engagement process on the actions needed to deliver on the indicators proactively seeks the widest stakeholder constituency possible.**
- **That the budgetary process includes the active involvement of society stakeholders.**
- **That the Economic Strategy, Investment Strategy and Social Strategy are entirely reflective of, informed by, and contributory to the PfG, which is the overarching strategy.**
- **That a wide stakeholder engagement is undertaken in the design of these strategies, and that society stakeholders are involved in all of them. If each strategy is developed with its own group of stakeholders, then the silo mentality that the new approach to the PfG is seeking to avoid will instead be maintained.**

In their Foreword to the Draft PfG Framework, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister refer to “previous Executive commitments” (p.5), including “to work through the North South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council to build and maintain relationships within and across these islands” (p.6). Meanwhile, in its Introduction the Draft PfG Framework notes how the “Government will need to work across boundaries focusing on the outcome rather than traditional departmental lines” (pp.7-8). **The commitment expressed for the Executive to work through the NSMC and BIC is reflective of the obligations entered into under the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and, in particular, Strand II. Moreover, it would be detrimental to the effective delivery of the PfG if such a commitment was not actively integrated into its operationalisation at central and local government levels. Such a commitment must not be seen as separate from the Executive’s other commitments or from the PfG, but as a channel that can, where this would be appropriate, maximise benefits to Northern Ireland.**

It is the view of CCBS that in order to fully profit from the focus on outcomes and to ensure they are achieved, all those working towards them – including Government – need, where this would be relevant, to work across jurisdictional boundaries through cross-border cooperation. Indeed, cross-border cooperation would assist in the achievement of several of the outcomes set out in the Draft PfG Framework, including Outcomes 1 (“We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy”), 5 (“We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil

their potential”), 10 (“We are a confident, welcoming, outward-looking society”), and 14 (“We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure”).

It is vital that we recognise that our wellbeing in Northern Ireland is dependent on the wellbeing of the citizens of the neighbouring jurisdiction, and of those further afield, and that any resulting programme to improve wellbeing for all in Northern Ireland crosses with those of others beyond our borders. Failure to recognise this and to engage in a process that seeks to address wellbeing in isolation – concerned exclusively with outcomes, indicators and measures limited by a border – will result in missed opportunities to achieve greater degrees of sustainable wellbeing. Therefore, **CCBS recommends that the PfG Framework includes explicit reference to cross-jurisdictional cooperation in Outcomes where such cooperation would be beneficial.**

The Programme for Government Outcomes

(Q16) The PfG outcomes are not currently guaranteed to work as a set. In order to ensure that the 14 outcomes contained in the Draft PfG Framework work as a set and that there is coordination and joined-up thinking in the development of action plans for each outcome, **it would be advisable to develop an overarching narrative** representative of the overall outcome or desired change the PfG wishes to achieve for Northern Ireland. Without doing so there is the risk that individual action plans will be entirely responsive to their respective outcomes rather than to an overarching outcome to which they should all contribute. Notwithstanding the fact that the Introduction to the Draft PfG Framework states that “There are 14 strategic outcomes which, taken together, the Executive believes best describes the society we wish to have” (p.9), CCBS considers that what currently constitutes the “purpose” of the PfG (“Improving wellbeing for all – by tackling disadvantage, and driving economic growth”) should be somewhat expanded.

CCBS recognises that as it is presently structured the PfG Framework is in line with what was suggested by the Carnegie UK Trust in its *Towards a Wellbeing Framework*, which was “a society-wide conversation on wellbeing – led by the NI Executive – which can feed into the development of a Wellbeing Framework, consisting of a high-level statement of purpose, strategic commitments and outcomes”.² Nevertheless, CCBS believes that the PfG Framework’s purpose is not sufficiently defined in order to ensure adequate coordination between its 14 outcomes and to allow proper measurement of progress towards that overall purpose. **Therefore, CCBS recommends that the PfG’s purpose be expanded to include a more concrete vision of Northern Ireland society that summarises the result of successful progress towards the 14 outcomes.**

(Q17) CCBS considers 12 outcomes should be included in the PfG as currently drafted, but Outcomes 10 and 13 should be changed to:

“We are a confident, welcoming, outward-looking society **with the capacity to cooperate across borders**”;

² Carnegie UK Trust, *Towards a Wellbeing Framework: Background Report prepared for the Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland* (2015), p.19. The Centre for Cross Border Studies also submitted a response to the Carnegie UK Trust’s *Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland: A new conversation for new times*, which can be accessed at <http://crossborder.ie/ccbs-response-to-measuring-wellbeing-in-northern-ireland/>.

“We connect people and opportunities through our **physical and digital** infrastructure”.

However, we would add the following comments in respect of the detail of individual outcomes as they are currently set out in the Draft PfG Framework.

Outcome 1: “This outcome is about increasing the productivity and success of local business in a sustainable and responsible way, **ensuring that growth is balanced on a regional basis**. Achieving this will mean growing our economy, and **making sure that growth benefits people in all parts of the region**” (p.17).

In order to ensure regionally balanced economic development, such development must be able to capitalise on cross-border and all-island opportunities, and be attentive to the specific nature of the border region.

Outcome 1: “The **key drivers of this outcome include innovation, research and development (R&D)** and improving the skills and employability of those in, and those wishing to join, the workforce so that people can progress up the skills ladder, supporting higher levels of productivity” (p.17).

In terms of innovation, as noted by the OECD,³ the optimal approach needs to be on an all-island basis, and therefore the PfG needs to create space for that context and provide the structures at operational level.

Outcome 1 (The role of the Executive): “In respect of this outcome, we will work, amongst others, with local government, with business and with entrepreneurs, with institutions of learning and other skills providers, with trades unions, and with international partners” (p.17).

It is a matter of concern that third sector organisations and wider society are not specifically identified as partners with the Executive in the achievement of this Outcome. Without ensuring wider participation in the achievement of this Outcome (and all other Outcomes) it will undermine movement on the indicator relating to the increase in the confidence and capability of people and communities (Indicator 28).

Outcome 2: “This outcome is about ensuring that our ambition for economic growth and social progress takes into account the impact on the environment and the depletion of our finite natural resources. It also incorporates the need to tackle environmental crime occurring within and outside the waste sector” (p.19).

Whilst environmental concerns in general can only be properly addressed from an all-island and cross-border perspective, environmental crime in particular needs to be tackled on a cross-border basis.

Outcome 5: “This outcome is about **having a more innovative, creative economy**, with a broadening base of businesses engaged in innovation and R&D, and **where there is increasing collaboration between companies inside and outside the region**” (p.25).

³ OECD, *Regions and Innovation: Collaborating across borders* (2013).

Innovation as an economic driver is not the sole preserve of business, and innovation – particularly social innovation – originates within communities and the CVSE sector. This needs to be reflected in the PfG.

Outcome 5 (The role of the Executive): “In respect of this outcome, we will work, amongst others, with our partners in business, the arts and culture sector and our education and learning partners”(p.25).

Again, as in relation to Outcome 1, the CVS and wider society should be included as partners with the Executive in achieving this Outcome. Broadening the constituency of partners will contribute to innovation.

Outcome 7: “This outcome is about creating safe environments, giving people the confidence they need to live productively and well. It will be supported by an effective and efficient justice system in which individual and collective rights are supported and disputes are resolved fairly and swiftly. In addition, **a safe community is one where paramilitary groups and criminal gangs cannot exert influence**” (p.29).

Given the Fresh Start Agreement’s creation of a Joint Agency Task Force to tackle cross-border crime, the PfG needs to be conscious of the need for a cross-border approach to fulfilling this outcome, particularly in rural border communities.

Outcome 7 (The role of the Executive): “In respect of this outcome, we will work, amongst others, **with our justice agencies**” (p.29).

The PfG needs to explicitly refer to collaboration with justice agencies in the Republic of Ireland in order to combat cross-border crime, as envisaged by the Fresh Start Agreement.

Outcome 10: “We want to give people the confidence to embrace the opportunities that this brings – in economic, social and cultural terms, and to **broaden our horizons to acknowledge the strength that comes from being part of a global community**” (p.35).

Evidence of such strength should be included within the PfG itself, with concrete references to cross-border cooperation in relevant areas, and by changing the wording of the Outcome as suggested earlier.

Outcome 10 (The role of the Executive): “**Building confidence** in our communities; **increasing our economic, social and cultural links** with the wider world” (p.35).

That confidence must be built through capacity-building measures in order to allow people to be initiators in the increase of links with the wider world. The Executive also has to be judged on its own confidence and ability to make and exploit links with the ROI, actively encouraging policy-makers to assess the potential for cross-border linkages when designing policy.

Outcome 11: “This outcome is about **ensuring that the services we provide for people are responsive, efficient and effective, that they are shaped to meet the needs of people, and that they are accessible** in ways and at times that fit into people's lives” (p.37).

For those living in the border region, those needs may be best and more efficiently served by the provision of shared cross-border services, and the PfG must make explicit reference to this possibility. It should incorporate and reinforce what is contained in the Statutory Guidance for the Operation of Community Planning in relation to collaborative working across boundaries, which states: “Community planning partners and neighbouring councils should assist each other in providing relevant information to inform the community planning process. Neighbouring councils can also choose to work together to share resources, and where relevant, establish protocols for working together e.g. Memorandums of Understanding” (p.25).

Outcome 13: “It involves improving the physical mobility of people, and the provision of essential energy, water and telecommunication services **to ensure that our communities can access social, economic and cultural opportunities. This involves tackling some of the key barriers to balanced regional growth and inclusion**” (p.42).

Especially, but not exclusively, for border communities, such access can only be provided on a cross-border basis. The framework for cooperation in terms of planning already exists,⁴ but needs to be implemented and reinforced through explicit reference in the PfG. Moreover, given its importance to connectivity and to economic development, as noted earlier CCBS recommends that this Outcome be changed in order to refer explicitly to digital infrastructure, which is inadequate in many rural areas and in the border region.

Outcome 13 (The role of the Executive): “In respect of this outcome, we will work, amongst others, with communications providers, with the construction sector, with housing providers, with the environmental sector and with transport providers to achieve these aims” (p.42).

Whilst not necessarily in relation to the actual provision of infrastructure, it is essential that the Executive work with those representing communities and communities themselves in order to ensure the correct provision of infrastructure support. Additionally, given their role and proximity to local communities, local authorities must be key partners with the Executive.

(Q18) CCBS does not believe there are other additional outcomes that should be included in the Programme for Government.

The Programme for Government Indicators and Measures

In this response, CCBS will confine itself to addressing those indicators and measures we consider to have a cross-border dimension, or that have more overarching implications for the Programme for Government’s success going forwards. However, it is important to note from the outset that, as a general principle, CCBS recommends that data used for measures should be collected and mapped at the lowest Local Administrative Unit level, in order to identify regional and rural/urban imbalances in indicators performance and progress toward outcomes. Such an approach would address the issues raised in Northern Ireland’s Regional Development Strategy, for example, which notes: “Accessibility to services can be difficult in rural areas and there are wider implications for both transport to services and the provision of a core set of essential services. In the border area, “back to back” planning decisions can lead to access problems to services for

⁴ Department for Regional Development and Department for the Environment, Community and Local Government, *Framework for Cooperation: Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland* (2013).

rural communities. Opportunities exist for co-operation between jurisdictions to ensure this is not the case”.⁵

Indicator 1 (Reduce crime): “With effect from April 2014 **the target achieved sample size of the NICS was reduced from 3,500 interviews to 2,000 interviews. This reduction was occasioned by the need to make savings generally in the levels of Departmental spending**” (p.47).

The reduction in NICS sample size due to departmental spending reductions points to a concern regarding the need to adequately resource monitoring of progress toward all PfG outcomes and indicators. Without the necessary resourcing and the maintenance of consistency in terms of data collection, the success of the PfG and citizens’ capacity to assess progress will be undermined.

Indicator 2 (Reduce health inequality): “**Inequalities in health outcomes arise from the most invidious effects of poverty and deprivation [...].Reducing these inequalities – by tackling deprivation, by supporting people to make healthy lifestyle choices, and by providing excellent standards of care** – is critical to improving quality of life for people experiencing deprivation in the most fundamental way” (p.48).

The reduction of health inequalities can also be related to ease of access to care, which may be better provided for on a cross-border basis. In order to assess this, the data set needs to offer a comparative geographical perspective.

Indicator 5 (Improve the quality of the healthcare experience; Lead Measure: % of people who are satisfied with health and social care (based on their recent contact): “A good healthcare experience lies at the heart of a high quality health service. It is also **key to providing a service which is owned by both the people of Northern Ireland and the staff which provide it**” (p.54).

The question arises here in relation to Northern Ireland citizens accessing healthcare in the Republic of Ireland (such as in the specialist paediatric cardiac service in Dublin). To what extent is the Northern Ireland Government responsible for the quality of care such patients receive, and therefore is the collection of data on these individuals necessary?

Indicator 13 (Improve the quality of education; Lead measure: **% of schools where for provision for learning is good or better**, p.67).

It is essential that such an indicator and lead measure are not divorced from the wider context, including that relating to Indicator 12 (Reduce educational inequality). Whilst the quality of educational provision needs to achieve the highest standards possible, educational outcomes are affected by wider social conditions.

Indicator 16 (Increase the proportion of people at work): “**An economy is successful if it can provide high income jobs** and place its population within work” (p.71).

As in all other indicators, it is essential that data supporting them are collected and mapped at the lowest Local Administrative Unit level in order to detect regional variations in performance. Here, the provision of high income jobs needs to be assessed in terms of regional distribution.

⁵ Department for Regional Development, *Regional Development Strategy: Building a Better Future* (2010), p.74.

Indicator 21 (Increase the competitiveness of the economy; Lead measure: External sales): **“Export led growth is likely to be a key area in which we can strengthen the competitiveness of our economy. External trade is also an important source of wealth and employment”** (p.80).

The distinction between external sales to GB and exports must be highlighted, especially given the post-Brexit context in which Northern Ireland businesses will be operating in. Careful analysis of the possible consequences to Northern Ireland’s export performance must be a priority, and the results of that analysis must be used to inform the Executive’s interaction with the UK Government in relation to measures to improve economic performance that are not within the Northern Ireland Executive’s powers.

Indicator 22 (Increase innovation in our economy; Lead measure: Regional innovation ranking): **“Evidence shows that innovative companies grow nearly twice as quickly in terms of both employment and turnover as non-innovators. In addition, following the financial crisis, economic recovery has been substantially stronger in countries which had previously invested the most in Innovation and R&D”** (p.82).

CCBS recommends that the lead measure be supplemented by international comparators, ideally with regions similar to Northern Ireland, as has been produced by the OECD and its Regional Innovation series. Additionally, thought should be given to broadening the field of innovation beyond business, as innovation is also a driver in the VCS, for example.

Indicator 23 (Improve transport connections for people, goods and services; Lead measure: Average journey time on key economic corridors): **“These corridors have been designated as Key Transport Corridors in the Northern Ireland Regional Development Strategy and align with European Commission’s Trans-European Transport Network for Northern Ireland. Performance improvements in terms of reducing average journey times on these corridors does, therefore, impact in both regional and trans-national terms”** (p.83).

Given the trans-national or cross-border impacts of performance of transport corridors, the proposed lead measure should be supplemented or informed by measures of performance beyond the immediate jurisdiction. Only with such supplementary measures can Northern Ireland’s Regional Development Strategy’s objective of strengthening links between the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland be achieved. Furthermore, this would put into practice the *Framework for Cooperation: Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland*, which highlighted “the need for co-operation on issues which transcend boundaries and [...] emphasise the importance of working together for the development of urban and rural areas and for the efficient provision of infrastructure and services” (p.5).

Indicator 23: **“The development of metadata as a product of regional data capture will support decision-making and actions in terms of long-term infrastructure planning and investment. This will also inform and support a range of regional and European applications for the co-financing of projects that are proven to have the capability to deliver indicated outcomes”** (pp.83-84).

Given that European applications will almost certainly not be possible in light of the UK’s decision to leave the EU, it is all the more urgent that the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland

enhance their cooperation in relation to transport connections and regional planning in order to ensure maximum efficiency in delivery.

Indicator 24 (Improve internet connectivity): “Ofcom reports to the Secretary of State every three years, describing the state of the electronic communications networks and services in the UK” (p.86).

Given the strategic and cross-cutting importance of internet connectivity to Northern Ireland’s wellbeing, and of scrutinising and addressing disparities at rural/urban and regional levels, it is crucial that the Northern Ireland Executive have access to the relevant up-to-date data at Local Administrative Unit level. The Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly should also require Ofcom to report directly to them. Additionally, it should be considered whether this indicator should be grouped alongside those related to the development of the Action Plan linked to the Economic Strategy Refocus, or whether its stand-alone position is a guarantee of the priority that should be offered it.

Indicator 40 (Improve our international reputation; Lead measure: National Brand Index): “The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index measures global perceptions of 50 developed and developing countries. **Each nation’s reputation is measured across six dimensions: Exports, Tourism, Governance, People, Investment and Immigration, and Culture**” (p.111).

This is an important indicator, and every effort should be made to resolve the obvious issue of being included in an Index composed of nation-states rather than regions or sub-national polities. However, CCBS recommends the inclusion of an additional dimension measuring Northern Ireland’s membership of international networks and partnerships (through its institutions, organisations and businesses).

Conclusion

CCBS broadly welcomes the innovative approach to the new Programme for Government, and sees its ambition as worthy, especially if its implementation exploits cross-border opportunities to maximise its potential where relevant. However, its ultimate success will depend on the ability of all citizens to actively participate in every stage of its development, and to measure its progress. This will demand genuine openness at central and local government levels. Therefore, CCBS strongly recommends that the final version of the Programme for Government views all sections of Northern Ireland society as partners for all 14 of its Outcomes, and that explicit references be made to the cross-border opportunities for delivery of those Outcomes and their associated Indicators. This too demands openness and leadership that denote genuine confidence in Northern Ireland, which cannot be properly reflected if the cross-border and/or North-South dimensions are sidelined to the margins of the final Programme for Government Framework.