



Centre for
Cross Border Cooperation

Strategic Plan 2026 - 2029



Chairperson's Foreword

Historically the fluid boundaries of the past, replaced by more fixed borders, presented



challenges for people to work together for a common good. Like today, working for a common good was not always possible, but more and more people try and are increasingly successful.

Cross-border cooperation can be a driver of a vibrant and resilient civil society because it expands civic action beyond the regional.

Education, employment and environmental challenges amongst others, transcend borders and boundaries in today's global and on-line world. So, governments, public agencies and civil society can no longer operate effectively in isolation but achieve better outcomes working together.

Our current and historical inter-connections across these islands underscore how such cooperation builds a sense of collective agency and toward a common good founded on mutual interest and mutual benefit.

Moreover, cross-border, joint, civil society initiatives will further influence decision-making across these islands and reaffirm the importance of civil society's role as a space of shared dialogue on our interconnected islands.

The Centre for Cross Border Cooperation will continue to create space for us all, regardless of identity, belief or background, to engage beyond boundaries of the mind; to research and discuss the challenges; and explore solutions because the challenges we all face do not stop at physical boundaries or borders.

We will help broaden horizons and deepen civic engagement; make civil society more impactful; ease access to the labour market on these islands; and enhance the ability of future generations to broaden and improve their educational opportunities and experiences.

We look forward to working with you in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Peter Osborne'.

Peter Osborne

(Chairperson of the Board of the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation)

Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

Cooperation across borders and boundaries is embedded on these islands.

Mission

To improve the lives of people on these islands through the promotion and facilitation of cooperation.

Values

Independence

As a trusted source, the Centre is committed to being objective, impartial, independent and non-party-political.

Inclusion

The Centre values all voices and aims to provide a trusted platform for all communities to share their experiences and expertise, and to contribute in a meaningful way to seeking out cross-border solutions to the challenges they encounter.

Collaboration

The Centre values its collaboration with grassroots organisations, academics, government agencies and others to achieve its aims.

Empowerment

The Centre believes it is important to help build the skills and confidence of groups and organisations to engage in cooperation.

Evidence-informed

The Centre's distinctive leadership comes from its high level of expertise on cross-border matters based on high quality research.

Sustainability

The Centre is committed to promoting enduring change by fostering sustainable partnerships, with a focus on long-term impact.

Introduction

Cooperation between Northern Ireland and Ireland, as well as between the island of Ireland and Great Britain, is beneficial because it fosters peace, stability, and economic prosperity across the region. Collaborative efforts in areas such as trade, infrastructure, health, and education help strengthen social and cultural ties, reduce political tensions, and create opportunities for shared growth. By working together, these regions can address common challenges more effectively, while promoting mutual understanding and respect, which is essential for building on the progress achieved since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

This Strategic Plan will guide the work of the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation for the three years from 2026 to 2029. Its implementation will be supported through annual Operational Plans with SMART objectives, which will be regularly monitored by the Board.

The process of developing this Strategic Plan included:

- Assessment of performance against the measures of progress set out in the current strategy
- Analysis of the current and potential 2026-2029 operating context, and of the Centre's strengths and weaknesses.
- Identification of stakeholders and gathering of informed views from them on the Centre's strengths and weaknesses, and on areas the Centre could focus on in the 2026-2029 period.
- Production of a first draft of the 2026-2029 Strategy informed by stakeholder engagement and by a four-hour strategy session involving the Board and CCBC staff.
- Refinement of the draft strategy by a smaller planning group.
- Draft Strategy circulated to Board and key stakeholders for feedback.
- Final draft of 2026-2029 Strategy circulated to the Board for approval.

Key Thematic Areas and Aims

Over the period of this Strategic Plan, the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation will be focusing on three themes – *what* we will be doing: labour market mobility; education and skills; and building the capacity of civil society. Under each of these themes, there are a range of priorities, as set out below. The Strategic Plan also sets out the means by which the Centre aims to take forward work under these three themes – the *how* we are going to do it . All of this is centred around the Centre’s Vision for change, building towards a point where cooperation across borders and boundaries is embedded on these islands.

1. Key Thematic Areas (the What)

1.1 Labour Market Mobility

Aim 1.1: Strengthen an all-island labour market, enabling workers and employers to thrive.

Building on the work it has undertaken since its inception, the Centre’s highly impactful flagship [Border People](#) project will provide a deeper understanding of the cross-border flows of workers on the island of Ireland, supporting the advice sectors in their provision of information to workers and employers moving and employing between jurisdictions. With an awareness of the changing world of work, and collaborating with relevant partners, the Centre will seek policy and systems change to resolve administrative barriers to labour market mobility.

Priorities for the period of the Strategic Plan:

- Provide accessible and accurate online information and advice for people crossing the border to live, work, study or retire.
- Signpost people to relevant information on cross-border issues including social security, taxation, welfare benefits, healthcare, pensions and motoring.
- Strengthen the cross-border capacity of advice services and support organisations.
- Drive policy and systems change to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving employment landscape.
- Research and disseminate the advantages of reducing friction in cross-border working.
- Strengthen relationships with governments, economic agencies, business and industry leaders.



1.2 Education and Skills

Aim 1.2: Facilitate collaboration in education and skills through effective cross-border cooperation.

Under this current Strategic Plan, the Centre will highlight the obstacles that disincentivise learners from fully exploiting the opportunities to study, train and/or undertake apprenticeships in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland. Similarly, along with relevant partners, it will identify and promote the opportunities for cross-border collaboration in the provision of learning and training.

Priorities for the period of the Strategic Plan:

- Identify impediments to portability of qualifications and skills in the two jurisdictions and recommend changes.
- Promote collaboration in training and apprenticeships.
- Identify impediments to students from one jurisdiction to study in the other jurisdiction and recommend changes.
- Through the provision of information and support enable cross-border mobility of students and trainees.



1.3 Building the Capacity of Civil Society

Aim 1.3: Empower civil society to drive cooperation, North-South and East-West and engage in cross-border learning, cooperation and policy influence.

From 2026 to 2029, the Centre will support civil society in increasing its capacity to engage in cross-border work, whether on a North-South and/or East-West basis. It will also support civil society in ensuring that the development of policies is supportive of cross-border cooperation rather than creating administrative obstacles to such cooperation.

Priorities for the period of the Strategic Plan:

- Expand and develop the informal [New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands](#) network.
- Build the capacity of, and opportunities for civil society organisations to engage in cross-border work and policy influence.
- Improve policymaking by matching it to realities on the ground, through the provision of platforms for civic society organisations to inform and influence decision-makers.
- Collaborate to solve shared problems and/or exploit common resources.



2. Key Methodologies (the How)

2.1. Public Policy Influence

Aim 2.1: Influence public policy to facilitate better cross-border cooperation.

The Centre is keenly aware that when it is developed without sufficient attention to the environment beyond a jurisdiction's borders, public policy is not only ill-equipped to exploit cross-border opportunities, but can also result in obstacles to cross-border cooperation. That is why, as part of this Strategic Plan, the Centre will seek to ensure that where relevant, the development of public policy incorporates a cross-border vision supportive of collaboration.

Priorities for the period of the Strategic Plan:

- Strengthen strategic relationships with Cross-Border bodies, governments and relevant government departments and agencies.
- Build the capacity of politicians and civil servants in relevant departments, north and south, to support cross-border cooperation.
- Monitor and influence the extent to which public policy supports or inhibits cross-border cooperation.
- Engage in mutual learning with relevant networks and initiatives in the UK and Europe.
- Share and exchange lessons learnt and best practices with other countries.



2.2 Research & Evaluation

Aim 2.2: Harness the power of research and evaluation to promote cross-border learning and cooperation.

As has been the case since the Centre's establishment in 1999, research and analysis will continue to be at the heart of what it does for the duration of this Strategic Plan. The Centre will, therefore, undertake research to identify where cross-border cooperation

would be of mutual benefit to communities in more than one jurisdiction and the extent to which there is support and capacity for such cooperation, and to do so in partnership with others where there is a common purpose. In the implementation of this Strategic Plan, the Centre will also be looking to what areas of research it could be undertaking beyond 2029.

Priorities for the period of the Strategic Plan:

- Carry out, commission and disseminate high quality research in support of effective cross-border cooperation.
- Develop research collaborations with other stakeholders across the island and beyond in support of the Centre’s mission.
- Carry out or commission initial research to assess the need for, and potential of, future areas of work and research.
- Measure attitudes, behaviour and capacity in relation to cross-border cooperation.



2.3 Bringing People Together

Aim 2.3: Build collaboration by bringing together decision-makers, academics and practitioners on a cross-border basis.

Cross-border collaboration and the creation and strengthening of cross-border partnerships cannot properly take place in the absence of spaces for cross-border conversations to take place. It is in such spaces that the sharing of best practice, the identification of obstacles to cross-border cooperation and potential solutions becomes possible. That is why as part of this Strategic Plan, the Centre will provide opportunities for cross-border discussions and for the building of cross-border networks.

Priorities for the period of the Strategic Plan:

- Continue to support and enhance the work of the [Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation](#).
- Establish more practitioner networks and sector-specific exchanges.
- Expand and develop the annual conference.
- Create safe spaces in which sensitive conversations can take place.
- Organise annual lectures on key strategic issues, both north and south.



2.4. Communications

Aim 2.4: Effectively promote the Centre’s mission and its role as a trusted civic infrastructure essential to cross-border cooperation.

As an organisation with a mission to improve the lives of people on these islands through the promotion and facilitation of cooperation, the Centre will ensure that it communicates effectively the work it undertakes as part of this Strategic Plan. It is essential that key actors and the wider public are made aware of the opportunities that can be exploited through cross-border cooperation, and are supportive of initiatives that will facilitate such cooperation, including the Centre’s own strategic role in this regard.

Priorities for the period of the strategic plan:

- Clearly and deliberately articulate the Centre’s convening power in bringing together governments, agencies, civil society, and academia across both North–South and East–West axes, as well as its civic impact, including where policy has shifted, barriers have been reduced, and cross-border cooperation has been enabled as a direct result of the Centre’s interventions.
- Increase public awareness of the Centre’s reputation and the impact of its work through increased media engagement.
- Enhance the Centre’s digital presence through its website and social media.

- Ensure effective communication with the organisation’s stakeholders to secure the Centre’s strategic positioning as a unique and trusted civic infrastructure supportive of cross-border cooperation.
- Improve the branding and increase the effective dissemination and promotion of the Centre’s reports.



3. Organisational Development (ensuring the Centre can deliver)

3.1 Human Resources

Aim 3.1: Ensure the Centre has the staff and associates to deliver its aims and objectives, and they are effectively supported, managed and given the opportunity to develop.

To realise the objectives of this Strategic Plan in terms of what it wants to do and how it wants to do it, the Centre will have to ensure it has sufficient staff to succeed, and that both its existing and any newly recruited staff have the correct supports in place in order to allow them to prosper. The Centre will also seek to complement its staff team with mutually beneficial partnerships with external experts willing to work with the Centre in the achievement of its mission.

Priorities for the period of the Strategic Plan:

- Ensure the Centre has the appropriate terms & conditions and human resource policies and procedures.
- Ensure the Centre has the staff it needs to achieve its aims and objectives, and they are effectively supported and managed.
- Ensure staff are given the opportunity to learn and develop.
- Ensure the Centre has the Research Associates it needs to achieve its aims and objectives, and these associates have the support and guidance to contribute effectively to cross-border cooperation.

- Ensure effective internal communication.

3.2 Finance & Funding

Aim 3.2.1: Ensure the Centre has the financial resources needed to achieve its aims and objectives and these resources are effectively and efficiently managed.

An essential element of this Strategic Plan is to ensure the Centre not only has the finances necessary to do what it wants to do in the period 2026 to 2029, but also to secure the funding necessary for beyond 2029. As well as looking to develop successful applications for research funding, the Centre will also continue to secure additional sources of revenue that will support it in its mission.

Priorities for the period of the Strategic Plan:

- Develop and regularly review an income generation strategy.
- Increase unrestricted funding from sponsorship and other sources.
- Ensure the finances of the Centre are effectively and transparently planned, managed and reported on.
- Develop other funded research partnerships.
- Robustly manage financial risk.

3.3 Governance

Aim 3.3.1: Ensure governance of the Centre by the Board reflects the requirements of the law and best practice.

The Board of the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation is essential to the establishment of its strategic direction, and in supporting the Centre's staff-team to achieve its strategic objectives. Therefore, this Strategic Plan includes a range of priorities that will contribute to ensuring the Board is in the optimal position to perform its essential functions.

Priorities for the period of the strategic plan:

- Ensure the board has the skills and structures to govern effectively.
- Ensure there are current strategic and annual operational plans against which progress is regularly monitored by the board.
- Effectively manage risk.
- Be a good employer.
- Support, manage and appraise the Director.
- Regularly review the performance of the board and the trustees.
- Develop and regularly review succession plans in relation to critical roles.
- Effectively evaluate the Centre's work.