

A stylized graphic of a mountain range with several peaks of varying heights, rendered in shades of light blue and white, set against a dark teal background.

HEENAN-ANDERSON

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION

HEENAN-ANDERSON COMMISSION REPORT OF 2015

‘NO-ONE LEFT BEHIND’

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1

FOREWORD

Creating prosperity is not a simple task, but is a complex, multi-dimensional issue that requires a comprehensive response. There is no panacea, no silver bullet. Employers, universities, parents, schools, local councils, voluntary and community groups all need to see it as a priority.

We firmly believe that the status quo is not an option as current levels of disadvantage and social exclusion impose substantial and growing costs on our society, including increased demands for services, reduced productivity, mental ill health, increased levels of hopelessness and reduced levels of cohesion. Living in poverty is particularly detrimental to children both in terms of their health and development, but also in terms of long-term socio-economic development and their ability to achieve their potential.

In times of austerity and huge economic challenges it is crucial that we use our limited resources in a targeted, efficient way which addresses issues for those most in need and prevents future generations from experiencing poverty. Northern Ireland urgently requires a flagship anti-poverty programme, which is a coherent cross-departmental strategy that enables working in a joined up way. As resources are limited and demands on services increase, we must review what we are doing and take radical steps to ensure outcomes can be improved. An audit of current interventions should be undertaken to identify gaps and eradicate duplication, while programmes that are not working should be discontinued.

There is a wealth of evidence nationally and internationally which highlights the importance of early intervention to reduce costs and lost opportunities further on down the line. Many existing strategies acknowledge the value of early intervention, but there is little evidence of this approach being adopted in a systematic way. Whilst some successes are evident, progress is too slow and uneven and delivering enduring pathways out of poverty has not been achieved.

Against a backdrop of unprecedented pressure on resources, we believe that the Northern Ireland Government must be ambitious around their determination to tackle poverty, inequalities and deprivation, through a focused comprehensive anti-poverty strategy with clear quantitative and qualitative targets. This way, all stakeholders can be involved and everyone knows what success looks like.

From our research it is apparent that a concerted effort is required around educational under-achievement, economic inactivity, access to quality affordable childcare and reducing the numbers of people who are not earning or learning. Addressing these issues could transform communities and act as a catalyst for economic development. Negative perceptions of those affected by poverty and inequality influence the media and widen the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’; however these perceptions do not reflect the reality for the majority of families in Northern Ireland. There are complex vicious circles of poverty, which can become endemic; yet these should not be viewed as unresolvable or as part of a broader political issue. We believe that it is time for a radical rethink of our approach, tackling the underlying causes rather than the symptoms.

A new holistic strategy is urgently required as poverty is a cost that we cannot afford and one that we should not be prepared to accept. It wastes potential and hinders economic growth.

The Westminster Government and the Northern Ireland Executive should make these issues a top priority as they renew their Economic Pact. We hope that the findings in this report will help to inform the debate around the future priorities for Northern Ireland and assist in achieving a political consensus, commitment and ambition to take on the key challenges that we face.



Professor Deirdre Heenan
Commission Co-Chair



Colin Anderson OBE
Commission Co-Chair

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Tackling intergenerational poverty and social exclusion should be a priority for any society, but in a society like Northern Ireland which is emerging from conflict the stakes are much higher. Endemic, entrenched poverty is the breeding ground for terrorism, organised crime and political extremism. If people do not see their lives and the lives of their families improving, they will inevitably question the benefits of the so called 'peace dividend'.

Despite significant efforts and a variety of initiatives by the devolved government, there is much more work to do in reducing poverty and intergenerational deprivation. The wards that were top of the deprivation tables twenty years ago are the same today. Whilst there is much good work being undertaken at community level by dedicated community workers and local groups they cannot hope to address the deep-seated causes of poverty and deprivation.

We are in the midst of a period of disengagement where the euphoria after the Peace Process has dissipated and been replaced by public cynicism and disappointment. As Knox (2014) has noted, Northern Ireland has been described as a 'post conflict' society with a stable political environment following the peace process, and yet it is a hugely segregated society with significant social deprivation. With peace came the promise of a 'peace dividend' for those most affected by the violence, however too many people still feel hopeless for the future.

Poverty and social exclusion were not reduced during the boom period. Consequently there is a widespread belief that it is impossible to tackle the causes of deprivation during this period of retrenchment, cuts and austerity; a sense that it is intractable and that dealing with it effectively is simply beyond our capabilities.

Yet we would argue that it is in these challenging periods that having a long-term vision underpinned by strategic thinking is essential. We need a renewed sense of purpose and direction that is ambitious for Northern Ireland and its future. Economic inactivity, long-term unemployment and low levels of educational attainment have stigmatised certain areas of Northern Ireland. We cannot afford another lost generation. There is an urgent need to tackle the underlying drivers of poverty and break cycles of poverty and social exclusion.

2.2 **THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN NORTHERN IRELAND WAS ESTABLISHED IN SEPTEMBER 2014 BY THE SHADOW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, IVAN LEWIS MP.**

The Commission has not focused on the specific issue of welfare reform in this report. However, it urges all the Northern Ireland political parties to use the Stormont House and Stormont Castle Agreements as the basis for a fair and compassionate welfare system, which is affordable and sustainable on a long-term basis. What is clear from the evidence presented to this Commission is that the current welfare system should be significantly reformed. Whilst we acknowledge the existence of an economic strategy in Northern Ireland, we suggest there is a need for a specific strategy with a clear action plan to tackle economic inactivity, informed by international best practice.

The process of putting this report together has been challenging and daunting but a hugely invigorating exercise. It was dependent on people giving evidence, which they did in large numbers. The Commission expresses its gratitude to those who participated and contributed with testimony and documents.

In this review of poverty and social exclusion it was recognised that any assessment could not be focused solely on child poverty but would have to follow the total life cycle, identifying areas that were particularly important. Interventions are required at key points in the life-cycle and placing emphasis on the individual or individual households is also inadequate. This Commission has therefore concentrated on the social, economic and cultural issues that have allowed poverty and inequality to become endemic in large parts of Northern Ireland and be replicated by generation after generation.

While the Commission examined issues in Northern Ireland it is believed that these recommendations may have broader resonance.

The Commission took evidence, written and verbal from over 600 participants. As there was already a plethora of statistical reports on Northern Ireland, it was decided that this report would use a qualitative methodology. It is based on the views and opinions of key stakeholders across society including government ministers, MLAs, business leaders, community workers, leaders in the community and voluntary sectors and academics.

We focused on addressing poverty and social exclusion and the current policy responses. As this is not a discrete area a range of policy areas such as the economy, education, welfare, and health were discussed.

Everything that follows in this report should be seen through the lens that persistent poverty is a complex, multi-layered, multi-faceted, difficult issue that defies a simple solution. It is not simply a dilemma that should be owned by government but is an issue that should concern all in a modern, dynamic, progressive society. This report is a means to start the conversation. It is hoped that it will give rise to debate, reflection and action.

Whilst the primary focus of this report concerns potential areas for improvement in policy and practice in Northern Ireland, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that Northern Ireland has been transformed in the past two decades. Significant investment in capital infrastructure has changed the physical landscape: for example the building of the Titanic Belfast, a major visitor attraction; the new Metropolitan Arts Centre; the rebuilding of the Lyric Theatre and opening of the Peace Bridge Derry-Londonderry. Northern Ireland's devolved government, the business community, civic society and many individuals deserve credit for this transformation.

2.3 THE COMMISSION'S REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE IDENTIFIED THE FOLLOWING KEY FINDINGS AND ISSUES:

1. Current interventions are short-term and lack focus.
2. Current interventions are reactive and current policy is failing to break cycles of poverty.
3. The education system would benefit from reform, in response to significant concerns around underachievement and leadership.
4. Poverty is poorly understood and stereotyped and there is a need for evidence-based policy making.
5. Greater collaboration between government nationally and in local Communities is a prerequisite to transformational progress.
6. Politicians have a difficult context to work in. However, there is a lack of confidence in the political structures.
7. Many of the causes of poverty are structural and related to issues such as distribution of wealth, power and opportunities
8. Policy innovations will require interventions at multiple levels.
9. Although many strategies have been devised to make a positive impact, some key strategies have yet to be put into action.
10. Whilst there has been significant political progress, many fundamental issues have not been addressed. There has been insufficient re-integration and fault lines have deepened.
11. There is an urgent need to think about new ways of doing things with meaningful measures of success.
12. There are disturbing low levels of aspiration amongst disadvantaged young people who cannot see how their opportunities and quality of life are likely to improve. This is too frequently matched by low expectations from some families, educationalists and communities.

13. The loss of human potential associated with poverty and social exclusion is not inevitable and problems are not intractable.
14. Longitudinal research is required to identify and assess the drivers of poverty and social exclusion and track outcomes. This research could include oral histories and life histories.

2.4 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission's findings lead to 20 recommendations for change. Five overarching recommendations cover

- 1. A long-term vision for Northern Ireland - Road Map to Prosperity**
- 2. The relationship between the Westminster Government and the Northern Ireland Executive**
- 3. Leadership**
- 4. A strengthened anti-poverty strategy**
- 5. A mental health strategy.**

A further 15 fall into four broad areas for action.

- Prevention and Early Intervention
- Early Years and Childhood
- Schools and Education
- Jobs, Pay and the Economy

OVERARCHING THEMES – RECOMMENDATIONS 1 – 5

Recommendation 1 – Vision 2050: Road Map to Prosperity and Social Justice

There is an urgent need to agree and develop a long-term vision for Northern Ireland. This road map will assist us to navigate the challenges and opportunities that we will face over the next three decades. This could be an invaluable tool for future proofing and unlocking the huge potential within this country.

We propose developing a long-term vision for 2050 with agreed interim objectives. This will require an inclusive and honest discussion about our country; acknowledging strengths and weaknesses and unlocking huge potential. What do we want our future to look like and how do we achieve it? We need to work together to produce a sustainable and attainable road map for Northern Ireland in order to galvanise government, business, civil society and communities to work together in unison towards collective goals.

The hope is that this vision will be rooted in the principle of equality of opportunity for all, where everyone has a chance of prospering and where future generations are able to achieve their full potential.

Setting a course based on a shared vision, which inspires positivity and hope, encourages an entrepreneurial attitude, breeds a collective confidence, cherishes effective schooling and drives a thriving economy open to all can truly be our legacy to subsequent generations. This blueprint could provide a focus for a more prosperous future.

Recommendation 2 – Refocusing joint working between the Westminster Government and the Northern Ireland Executive

The Commission has identified five ways the Westminster Government and the Northern Ireland Executive can work more closely together to directly tackle poverty and intergenerational deprivation.

1. The Economic Pact should prioritise a significant reduction in worklessness and poverty as a key objective.
2. Corporation Tax should be devolved to Northern Ireland. However, the Northern Ireland Executive should ensure any reduction in the rate contributes to new jobs and growth, which contribute to a significant reduction in worklessness.
3. Consideration should be given to developing a City Deal in Derry-Londonderry to address regional inequalities and disparities. Interventions should be targeted and multi-dimensional, at the level of the individual, household and region or city. Enterprise zones could also be considered. This will require partnership between the Treasury and the Northern Ireland Executive.
4. A new joint committee of officials should be established to share best practice in tackling worklessness and poverty.
5. A Northern Ireland representative should sit on the Social Mobility and Child Poverty (SMCP) Commission.

Recommendation 3 – Leadership

Northern Ireland needs to encourage and foster leaders at all levels of society who are willing to take risks and develop innovative solutions. We tend to be good at identifying problems but less skilled at identifying solutions. We recommend the creation of a Leadership Academy. This would be a partnership between the private, public and civil society sectors, to share ideas, knowledge and develop leadership skills.

Recommendation 4 – Comprehensive Anti-Poverty Strategy

The recent judgement from the Northern Ireland High Court on the lack of an anti-poverty strategy should be addressed as a matter of urgency with an agreed definition of objective need and a robust action plan.

Recommendation 5 – Prioritising Mental Well-being

The legacy of the troubles, including intergenerational trauma, means that Northern Ireland needs a world-class universal mental health system. There are substantial economic and social benefits not only from providing timely and efficacious treatments for mental disorders, but also from investing in people as potential parents and producing a social environment conducive to positive mental health and positive parenting. This will include the integration of mental health literacy, emotional intelligence, resilience and positive parenting into the early years and general school curricula at appropriate stages. This is one area where we believe that the UK Government should consider providing additional hypothecated funding to ensure that the Executive can make rapid progress in this area.

PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION – RECOMMENDATION 6

Recommendation 6 – Early Intervention

The focus of policy and programmes should be a transformational shift from dealing with the social and economic cost of failure to intervening at the earliest stage possible to support individuals and families before they reach crisis point in their lives. This will require joined up government not only at Stormont, but in every community with minimum three year funding agreements for community organisations delivering positive outcomes. Individuals and families with the most complex challenges identified by the relevant agencies should have one designated key worker with access to a pooled budget. This budget should be linked to delivering clearly agreed outcomes, and be utilised flexibly and innovatively in partnership with civil society organisations.

EARLY YEARS AND CHILDHOOD – RECOMMENDATIONS 7 – 9

Recommendation 7 – Childcare

We welcome the Executive’s recent draft Childcare Strategy and endorse their 2025 targets, one of which is to increase the number of childcare places from 56,000 to 100,000. We hope this will provide a platform to build a universal and affordable childcare system which must be the foundation of any effective plan to reduce economic inactivity and welfare dependency.

Recommendation 8 – Early Years Support

Sure Start-type support should be available in every community bringing together anti-natal, post-natal, parenting and child development services in an integrated service.

Recommendation 9 – Sport and Creativity

The power of sport and creative disciplines such as theatre, dance, film, television and the arts to build confidence and a competitive spirit from an early age are crucial in today’s modern world. Sport, whatever discipline, can build social confidence and self-esteem, and instil pride, respect and understanding for one another. Embracing theatre and television/film skills, from performance to management can do the same.

Perhaps sports/creative schemes similar to the Dutch ‘Sports Token’ model, where disadvantaged families are entitled to a benefit that will make it affordable for their children to participate in sports and activity, could be considered.

EVERY SCHOOL A GOOD SCHOOL – RECOMMENDATIONS 10 – 15

Education is an area that is widely acknowledged to be central to tackling poverty and inequality. Low educational attainment correlates highly with socio-economic deprivation. People with no or low qualifications are at a much higher risk of unemployment, low pay, poor conditions and poor mental health.

Recommendation 10 – Academic Leadership

The quality of leadership and management in schools is central to their success. Northern Ireland needs a Continual Professional Development (CPD) Framework for school leadership that reflects this. The Education and Training Inspectorate should move from the Department of Education and become an independent agency. A robust methodology could be developed and implemented to improve the performance of failing schools.

Recommendation 11 – Teach First

Consideration should be given to introducing a ‘Teach First’ type programme in Northern Ireland. Teach First is a programme which supports graduates to teach in schools in disadvantaged communities.

Recommendation 12 – Closing the Attainment Gap

The attainment gap in education must be addressed as a priority. Progress toward raising attainment and closing the gap in reducing educational underachievement has stalled. Setting measurable targets to raise attainment and close the gap between children who are most and least disadvantaged must be a priority.

Recommendation 13 – End the 11+ Impasse

When the transfer test was abolished in 2008 it was replaced by two different unofficial transfer tests, commonly known as the AQE and the GL. Education leaders and policymakers should consider alternative ways to assess children including the use of results from continual assessment.

Recommendation 14 – Bridge to Employment

For all students, but especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, making the link between educational attainment and jobs is essential. Consequently, every school should be supported to develop a strategic partnership with employers. This will help with student motivation and work experience. It also has the potential to create a team of mentors who can be crucial for young people who do not have a parent or carer supporting their educational progress.

Recommendation 15 – Options for 14-19 Year Olds

The Northern Ireland Executive must undertake a fundamental review of 14-19 education with the aim to develop a system that delivers academic, vocational and combined options for all young people. The development of an integrated approach to 14-19 education is essential, as a partnership between schools, further education colleges and employers. The fact that Northern Ireland's six FE Colleges have new Level 3 Apprenticeships in place, which could be expanded to offer a greater range of careers options and self-employment, is a welcome development. Priority must be given to ensure vocational training is promoted and enhanced. This must be accompanied by a much improved careers advice service.

JOBS, PAY AND THE ECONOMY – RECOMMENDATIONS 16 – 20

Recommendation 16 – The Living Wage

On a phased basis, the UK Government should work with employers to ensure all workers in Northern Ireland earn a full Living Wage. Initially, this should include employer tax incentives.

Recommendation 17 – Workforce Skills Strategies

Tackling worklessness should be a key element of updated workforce skills strategies for the IT, tourism, manufacturing and creative industry sectors. At the heart of these strategies should be a partnership between employers, Further Education (FE) colleges, universities and other training providers.

Recommendation 18 – Infrastructure Investment Summit

The UK Government, working with the Northern Ireland Executive should organise a major Northern Ireland International Infrastructure Investment Conference to identify models of modernisation across the world, examine possible funding options and set new priorities for Northern Ireland.

Recommendation 19 – Start-up Survival Plan

Research should be undertaken to ascertain why Northern Ireland has the lowest 5-year survival rate of business start-ups by region in the UK. The future success of Northern Ireland partially depends on global inward investment, but crucially also on our infrastructure and capacity to encourage start-ups and support small and medium sized enterprises to scale up.

Recommendation 20 – Work to Learn

Enhancing opportunities within workplaces can help to address in-work poverty by creating 'work to learn cultures'. Targeted action is required in sectors where low-paid workers tend to be concentrated. Partnerships between education, business and industry need to be strengthened to develop career development opportunities.

3 INTRODUCTION

The Heenan-Anderson Commission was established to examine the causes of the current levels of economic marginalisation and deprivation in Northern Ireland with specific reference to the intergenerational transfer of poverty. Specifically it was asked to consider how an incoming Labour Government would support the Northern Ireland Executive and issues affecting those who are at the margins of our community and currently feel they have no stake in the economy. Although Labour did not achieve electoral victory at the recent Westminster election, the views expressed in this report remain relevant and informative.

The Commission was co-chaired by Professor Deirdre Heenan and Colin Anderson OBE, supported by a panel of experts from academia, the trade union movement, trade bodies, the voluntary and community sector, and business. A full list of panel members is provided at [Appendix A](#).

Our approach has been a mix of consulting with politicians, political parties, public bodies and community and voluntary organisations, as well as inviting submissions from a wide range of interested and impacted parties. It was encouraging to have received so many responses from key stakeholders, including voluntary sector bodies, public bodies, politicians, businesses, communities and other interested parties from right across Northern Ireland. We are also extremely grateful for all the participants who gave up their time to meet us and express their views and opinions.

It should be noted that the Commission is not in place to replicate or duplicate research and analysis that is currently taking place in Government or elsewhere in relation to the issues being discussed.

In the remainder of this report, we outline:

- [the methodology](#)
- [our analysis of our findings](#)
- [our conclusions](#)
- [our recommendations and suggested actions](#)

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 QUALITATIVE APPROACH

This is a report that reflects the views and perceptions of a range of individuals and groups across Northern Ireland. As a qualitative piece of research, it is focused on understanding experiences and perceptions and how they affect behaviours. Where appropriate we do however refer to published data and statistics. The Commission accepted submissions through a bespoke website and undertook purposive sampling. Participants were selected who were likely to generate useful data for the project.

We believe the quality of submissions received, allied to a comprehensive and thorough stakeholder consultation programme, provides us with a wide range of views and perceptions. Interviews were conducted around a series of key questions and prompts for interviewees to discuss certain issues if they did not come up spontaneously. Some interviews were one-to-one, whilst others took the form of focus groups. Data was recorded using a dedicated note taker, who summarised issues to ensure they had been interpreted correctly. The information was systematically analysed using thematic analysis, identifying common issues and patterns that recurred.

4.2 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

We spoke to over 600 stakeholders in a mix of one-to-one interviews, focus groups, and interviews. As part of this widespread consultation we engaged with:

- Over 40 MLAs
- Ministers from Finance, Social Development, Regional Development, Education, and Employment and Learning
- Party leaders
- Special Advisors and other Political Advisors in Northern Ireland and in London
- Westminster MPs
- Senior Civil Servants

We also spoke with a wider range of individuals and organisations across sectors in Northern Ireland and London including:

- NI Chamber of Commerce
- NI Children's Commissioner
- Unity of Purpose
- Teach First
- Make it Work
- Foyle Learning Community
- Public Health Agency
- Neighbourhood Renewal Areas
- Community groups
- Church leaders
- Youth leaders
- School principals and former principals
- Academics
- Young people
- Former prisoners

In addition, we visited diverse voluntary and community groups in various local settings in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. These groups, as well as showing us some of the work they were involved in, invited along members of the local community to discuss their key issues and recommendations with us. We found these visits and meetings invaluable in getting the opinions of those at the ‘coalface’ on the issues having the greatest impact on them, the causes, and the potential solutions.

4.3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

The Commission received almost 100 submissions, both individual and collective. These were a mixture of specific, tailored responses to the terms of reference of the Commission, as well as more generic policy and research papers, not tailored specifically for the Commission, but which those submitting the papers felt would be of benefit. Contributors providing submissions included:

- Youth groups
- Community groups
- Trade unions
- Government agencies
- Student groups

A full list of submissions is provided in [Appendix B](#).

5 ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

We analysed the comprehensive notes of our consultations and the totality of the submissions provided, seeking common themes and issues. We found a high degree of consistency about the key issues and root causes of the problems. In order to ensure openness, our exchanges took place on a non-attributable basis and we believe that this approach contributed significantly to the quality of the interactions.

As well as themes that related to specific elements of society such as education, work and early years, some themes were cross-cutting. These tended to be underlying themes at the macro level, relating largely to where we have come from and where we are today, the political system and how we work together. Where best practice was identified we have tried to incorporate it within the report.

It is worth noting that there were submissions received that covered issues that sit outside the remit of the Commission, but nevertheless are important in respect of future government policy. This included issues such as corporation tax, dealing with legacy issues, parades and support for victims. Therefore the themes we have identified here do not represent the totality of problematic issues facing the Northern Ireland Executive and an incoming Westminster Government. However, they do represent the views and perspectives of stakeholders on how to improve opportunities for those who are at the margins of their communities and currently feel they have no stake in the economy.

It should also be noted that the nature of work such as this, where the focus is on root causes and solutions, tends to focus on what is not working, rather than success stories. However, where possible, we have tried to include what in the view of those consulted and those providing submissions is working, as well as what is broken and needs to be repaired.

5.2 THEMES

We have grouped together responses in relation to various strands of society in Northern Ireland such as education, work and early years. It is difficult to consider any of these themes in total isolation – for instance, the building of new social housing may involve members of the local community taking up apprenticeships to undertake the work, it may bring communities together to discuss their needs, and it may improve the health and well-being of those re-housed in new, modern accommodation. However, it is useful to consider each theme individually in the first instance to provide a flavour of the feedback received, as well as enabling us to consider the suggestions and recommendations made for improving opportunities for those most impacted. So, together with an analysis of each theme, including background information where required and an overview of the input received, this report also presents the recommendations that we have identified for each theme – a total of 20, including 5 Overarching Recommendations.

In Chapters 6 through 10, this report will examine the Overarching Themes, together with the associated recommendations, followed in turn by:

- **Early Intervention and Prevention**
- **Schools and Education**
- **Early Years and Childhood**
- **Jobs, Pay and the Economy**

Other issues also arose as part of this consultation and these are discussed in Chapter 11.

6 OVERARCHING THEMES – RECOMMENDATIONS 1 – 5

6.1 THE VISION

Building a new vision for Northern Ireland is crucial in achieving the overarching goal of making Northern Ireland a better place to grow up in. The vision needs to have broad support across all sections of society. A strategic unified vision can allow society to navigate through the more difficult times, by coalescing around a set of shared ideals. It can articulate collective values and norms by providing a meaningful sense of purpose. As the Civic Forum (2002) noted Northern Ireland has never had a public debate about what type of society it should be.

The recent Carnegie Trust Report on Wellbeing (2015) also noted that in order to move forward, we need to have an idea of where we are going which has the support of the majority of citizens. The current disconnect between government and citizens which is by no means unique to Northern Ireland is damaging and should be replaced by a sense of collective ownership and engagement focused on shared ideas.

Scandinavian countries are distinctive because they have decided what kind of societies they want to be and have crystallised this through prioritisation of specific policies such as free universal childcare. In Northern Ireland after a period of sustained devolution and relative stability, we need to provide a framework which will enable us to face with confidence the challenges that will confront us over the next few decades. Business as usual is not an option; we need to ensure that we are all moving in the same direction.

In Northern Ireland these challenges include:

- **An economy that is over-reliant on the public sector**
- **An underbelly of sectarianism and division**
- **An ageing population**
- **Increasing income inequality and child poverty**
- **Underachievement and segregation in the education system**

Vision 2050 is about having an inclusive and honest discussion about our country; acknowledging strengths and weaknesses and unlocking huge potential. What do we want our future to look like and how do we achieve it? It is a sign of maturity that we can have this conversation compared to a time more recently when this couldn't even have been considered. Our best and brightest individuals need to work together to produce a sustainable and attainable road map for Northern Ireland in order to galvanise industry, government, business and our society to work together in unison towards collective goals.

The hope is that this vision will provide equality of opportunity for all, where everyone has a chance of prospering and one in which future generations are able to achieve their full potential.

Setting a course based on a shared vision, which inspires positivity and hope, encourages an entrepreneurial attitude, breeds a collective confidence, cherishes effective schooling and drives a thriving economy open to all can be our legacy to subsequent generations. The challenges to agree a vision that can attract significant social and political commitment.

For example, Northern Ireland could aspire to have a life expectancy in the top ten in the world by 2050. This in turn would result in much more nuanced and integrated policy responses to health and inequalities than is currently the case, as life expectancy varies hugely across and within communities. Beyond this, it could lead to a much more coherent approach to public service delivery.

Recommendation 1 – Vision 2050: Road Map to Prosperity and Social Justice

There is an urgent need to agree and develop a long-term vision for Northern Ireland. This road map will assist us to navigate the challenges and opportunities that we will face over the next three decades. This could be an invaluable tool for future proofing and unlocking the huge potential within this country.

6.2 WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT AND NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE: PARTNERSHIP

Notwithstanding devolution, there are many areas of policy which would benefit from closer joint working between the Westminster Government and The Northern Ireland Executive.

The Economic Pact: *Building a Prosperous and United Community* has delivered a number of important successes including progress on research and development, communications infrastructure and greater global inward investment. However, a greater focus on how new jobs and growth can be utilised to tackle poverty and worklessness would be beneficial. The Economic Pact between the Westminster Government and Northern Ireland Executive could be recalibrated to have a sharper focus on reducing inequality. Where policy responsibility is devolved we would encourage the sharing of best practice and find opportunities to work together on innovation, which will benefit not only Northern Ireland, but also the rest of the UK.

Devolution of corporation tax could play an important role in increasing inward investment in Northern Ireland and supporting the rebalancing of Northern Ireland's economy. However, it is not a panacea for tackling poverty and worklessness. It needs to be part of a broader package which includes increasing the skills base and improving infrastructure. Increased connectivity across communities is necessary to foster a strong business environment. Corporation Tax should be devolved to Northern Ireland. However, the Northern Ireland Executive should ensure any reduction in the rate contributes to new jobs and growth which specifically lead to a significant reduction in worklessness.

Consideration should be given to developing a city deal in Derry-Londonderry to address regional inequalities and disparities. A city deal is a UK-wide initiative which aims to help a city or region boost investment, promote growth and create jobs. This would involve a different approach to doing things and the devolution of assets to support tailor-made interventions. It allows local people greater control over shaping their future. In 2013 city deal packages were concluded in 20 smaller cities in England and the first Scottish deal for Glasgow was completed in early 2015. Enterprise zones could also be considered as a way of helping regional growth.

Derry and Strabane are top of the deprivation league table with the highest rates of unemployment, highest rates of economic inactivity, highest levels of free school meal entitlement, highest levels of housing stress and lowest levels of life expectancy. By giving Derry-Londonderry the power to make decisions about its infrastructure through targeted, multi-dimensional support at the level of the individual, household and region or city this would lead to economic regeneration and a redressing of regional inequalities. The Treasury and the Northern Ireland Executive should work in partnership to achieve this and the Executive should also work with cities like Armagh, Newry and Lisburn in a similar way.

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (SMCP) monitors the progress of the government and others in improving social mobility and reducing child poverty in the United Kingdom. The framework is already in existence and performs its analysis and advisory functions effectively, yet currently no Northern Ireland representative sits on the body. All parties involved could benefit from an increased Northern Ireland presence on this Commission in developing a better-informed and well-rounded organisation that considers areas of child poverty across the UK. In Northern Ireland the relative rate of child poverty is 22% compared to a UK average of 17%. Similarly the rate of absolute poverty is 25% compared to the UK average of 20%. In real terms this means that there are around 50,000 children in NI living in severe poverty. It seems only rational that those areas experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage and deprivation, like Northern Ireland, where the percentage of child poverty is significantly higher than the UK average, should have a voice through a strong presence on the Commission.

Recommendation 2 – Refocusing joint working between the Westminster Government and the Northern Ireland Executive

There are five ways the Westminster Government and the Northern Ireland Executive can work more closely together to directly tackle poverty and intergenerational deprivation.

1. **The Economic Pact should prioritise a significant reduction in worklessness and poverty as a key objective.**
2. **Corporation Tax should be devolved to Northern Ireland. However, the Northern Ireland Executive should ensure any reduction generates new jobs and growth which contribute towards a significant reduction in worklessness.**
3. **Consideration should be given to developing a City Deal in Derry-Londonderry to address regional inequalities and disparities, as interventions should be targeted and multi-**

dimensional at the level of the individual, household and region or city. Enterprise zones could also be considered. This will require partnership between the Treasury and the Northern Ireland Executive.

4. A new joint committee of officials should be established to share best practice in tackling worklessness and poverty.
5. A Northern Ireland representative should sit on the Social Mobility and Child Poverty (SMCP) Commission.

6.3 LEADERSHIP

We have met and heard from leaders during the course of consultations and submissions. Indeed when we consider a lot of the best practice that we present in this report, it very often came down to individuals. Inspirational school principals, community representatives, business people – essentially people who have wanted to make a difference, who have analysed what is not working and have developed creative and practical solutions. Many respondents reflected on the need to be inspired by role models and the importance of sharing good practice.

However, quite a few consultees and submissions referred to the need for ‘leadership from the top’. The North Belfast Partnership pointed out that Northern Ireland is emerging from the chaotic and dysfunctional period of the ‘Troubles’ and the current system of governance at regional and city level still needs time to grow to deliver a vision for stability and growth across all sections of society.

The need for public sector reform emerged as a key concern amongst many of the respondents. Issues mentioned included the requirement for cross-departmental working, increased responsiveness to the needs of users, improved policy-making capacity and increased efficiency. It was also noted that unlike their counterparts in Scotland and Wales, local councils did not get involved in addressing issues of poverty and deprivation. However it was hoped that the new reconfigured councils would use their new and existing powers in public health and economic development to develop effective local solutions.

We would emphasise again that these are the viewpoints and perspectives of the stakeholders consulted and submissions provided, and are not to be viewed as ‘facts’. It is also not to ignore the work and effort put in by political and public sector leaders which is considerable and substantial. An elected politician made the observation that politicians, and indeed the civil service, cannot be expected to do everything themselves. The politician suggested the seconding of experts to provide input, advice and guidance on specialist issues.

Recommendation 3 – Leadership

Northern Ireland needs to encourage and foster leaders at all levels of society who are willing to take risks and develop innovative solutions. We tend to be good at identifying problems but less skilled at identifying solutions. We recommend the creation of a Leadership Academy. This would be a partnership between the private, public and civil society sectors which would share ideas, knowledge and develop leadership skills.

6.4 CHILD POVERTY

The terms of the St Andrew's Agreement of 2006 placed a legal duty on the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Executive 'to adopt a strategy setting out how it proposed to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need.' The corresponding strategy was published in November 2006 under the title *Lifetime Opportunities*.

A recent judgement from the Northern Ireland High Court in a Judicial Review held that while the Executive had adopted the 'architecture and principles' of *Lifetime Opportunities* there was no evidence it was ever crafted into a road map designed to tackle the issues of poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation. This should be addressed as a matter of urgency with an agreed definition of objective need underpinning a holistic strategy with a robust action plan.

The strategy target to end child poverty by 2020 will be missed by a considerable measure. There has been limited discussion on the impact of this missed target and what measures will be taken to address it. The impact of a low wage economy and the continuing backdrop of austerity mean child poverty is likely to significantly increase. Of particular concern is the increase in child poverty in working families, as it is frequently argued that work is the surest way out of poverty. In order to effectively tackle child poverty, it is essential to address the root causes rather than the symptoms. Whilst there has been broad support for initiatives such as the OFMDFM funded Signature Project, there is also concern that these interventions are short-term with limited funding.

Services should be joined-up, and commissioned and delivered in partnership with the people who use them.

Recommendation 4 – Comprehensive Anti-Poverty Strategy

The recent judgement from the Northern Ireland High Court on the insufficient anti-poverty strategy should be addressed as a matter of urgency with an agreed definition of objective need underpinning a holistic strategy with a robust action plan.

6.5 MENTAL HEALTH

A healthy, productive workforce is the key to economic growth and prosperity. Strong mental health is fundamental to that goal, and an emerging body of evidence points to the need to prioritise and address the mental health needs of the Northern Ireland population for the economy to flourish.

As Beddington et al (2008) point out in their 'mental wealth of nations' article; one of the key factors in the promotion of a competitive economy is wealth in 'mental capital'. If an economy is to thrive, a (mentally) healthy workforce is key. There is unequivocal evidence of high levels of chronic and serious mental health disorders in the Northern Ireland population, in comparison with other western

countries. This undoubtedly has a significant economic impact and the failure to adequately address these mental health issues has clear consequences for the economy for future generations. The use of effective treatments and interventions in individuals can not only alleviate individual suffering, but can also strengthen future communities.

6.5.1 MENTAL ILLNESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

It has been estimated that approximately a 25 per cent larger share of the population suffer from health disorders in Northern Ireland than in England and Scotland (McWhirter, L, 2002). The prevalence and economic costs of mental illness emerged as major concerns in Northern Ireland. There was a strong belief that mental health issues were poorly understood, under resourced, stigmatised and services were inappropriate, poorly funded and focused on medicating issues rather than addressing root causes. Additionally there was a belief that there was a general acceptance of relatively high levels of mental ill-health. Policy makers had not effectively and systematically addressed the issue; as a result, a lack of appropriate interventions meant children were replicating behaviours of their parents.

There was a general agreement that despite the peace process, recent decades had witnessed increased levels of mental disorder and ill-health. Whilst levels of mental ill-health have risen across Western societies, the years of violence associated with the Troubles have added an additional burden and have contributed to high rates of chronic and severe mental health problems and substance abuse.

As the Bamford Review (2006) highlighted, the impact of the Troubles on mental health cannot be considered in isolation. There is a clear link between mental health and social and economic issues in Northern Ireland, and deprivation is a key variable dictating the degree to which the Troubles impacts on individuals and communities.

6.5.2 THE ECONOMIC COST OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND TRAUMA

Mental disorders bring significant economic costs and therefore significant economic benefits can result from providing timely and appropriate treatments and interventions to those affected. The Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (NIAMH), found that the annual direct costs of medication and treatment associated with mental health conditions in Northern Ireland, in 2003 for example, was in the region of £372 million (NIAMH, 2005).

NIAMH have noted that those who were unemployed were around twice as likely to have a potential psychological illness and worklessness itself can lead to symptoms of depression.

Investment in effective therapies and treatments for mental health disorders represent an overall investment on productive potential and the promotion of economic growth. There is clear evidence supporting the use of treatments for mental disorders and the economic effectiveness of early intervention, treatments and population level policies to address these issues. Northern Ireland's integrated structures of health and social care mean that the system is well positioned to adopt holistic approaches.

The impact of the Troubles on mental health is complex and cyclical. It is characterised by the interactions between the effects of parental mental health on attachment and parenting, exposure to traumatic life events, poverty, social and cultural factors as well as ongoing sectarianism and violence (McAlister et al 2014).

Current interventions in the area of mental health disorders are inadequate and there is concern that rather than being developed and enhanced, services are actually diminishing. Mental illness remains highly stigmatised and poorly understood. Many contributors in this study contended that it was the biggest single cause of misery and despair in our society. The huge frustration is that this does not have to be the case, as effective treatments have been developed, not just to help people manage their conditions, but to free them and facilitate recovery.

We believe that dealing with mental illness should be a priority for the Northern Ireland government. Depression and anxiety are enormously costly to the economy and to wider society; timely and efficacious treatments can deliver substantial economic and social benefits. The existing system should be developed to deliver state-of-the-art, evidence-based interventions for individuals with mental disorders. Services should incorporate a preventative approach involving screening programmes for high-risk populations and groups.

Recommendation 5 – Prioritising Mental Well-being

The legacy of the Troubles, including intergenerational trauma, means that Northern Ireland needs a world-class universal mental health system. There are substantial economic and social benefits not only by providing timely and efficacious treatments for mental disorders, but also for investing in people as potential parents and, producing a social environment conducive to positive mental health and positive parenting. This will include the integration of mental health literacy, emotional intelligence, resilience and positive parenting into the early years and general school curricula at appropriate stages. This is one area where we believe that the UK Government should consider providing additional hypothecated funding to ensure that the Executive can make rapid progress in this area.

7 PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION - RECOMMENDATION 6

Identifying issues early means intergenerational cycles of deprivation and disadvantage can be overcome. Early intervention can mean a better long-term future for all in society.

The Delivering Social Change Framework was funded through the £118 million Delivering Social Change Fund. It noted:

“We believe that the most significant opportunities to improve people’s health, wellbeing and life opportunities exist in the form of early interventions and services, particularly but not exclusively designed for children and young people”

7.1 COSTS

Early intervention has been shown to provide good value for money and in the context of the alternatives, doing little or nothing or maintaining the status quo, which is a waste of human potential and talent, it provides a better option.

Early intervention represents a smart approach to spending where relatively modest investments are required to address root causes. This is a much more cost-effective approach than dealing with the results of not tackling issues. The Prince’s Trust (2010) estimated the cost of educational underachievement per generation at £22 billion, whilst the ACEVO (2012) estimated the cost of youth unemployment at £4.8 billion; more than the entire budget for educating 16-19 year olds.

This would involve a completely different way of thinking away from short-term goals and budgets towards long-term strategic interventions. Smart early interventions can make a positive impact on communities, societies and economies.

We would encourage the Northern Ireland Executive to embark on service transformation driven both by the ambition to ensure children have the best start in life and the economic imperative to reduce the costs of later higher cost interventions. The Northern Ireland Executive could champion early intervention to ensure we can do better for less. This new approach will involve shifting spending from downstream reactive programmes to proactively preventing costly damaging long-term outcomes. A key goal must be using evidence to inform and develop policy and practice with the objectives of:

- **Breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty**
- **Improving outcomes**
- **Value for money spending**

Key challenges for our government are to:

- Ensure smarter, more locally co-ordinated services for children and young people.
- Enable public services to be co-ordinated at a local level to ensure money is spent efficiently and effectively.
- Facilitate local agencies to adopt a more coherent approach through sharing resources and information. This could be further extended to the sharing of best practice between Northern Ireland and Whitehall.

Recommendation 6 – Early Intervention

The focus of policy and programmes should be a transformational shift from dealing with the social and economic cost of failure to intervening at the earliest stage possible to support individuals and families before they reach crisis point in their lives. This will require joined up government, not only at Stormont, but in every community, with minimum three year funding agreements for community organisations delivering positive outcomes. Individuals and families with the most complex challenges identified by the relevant agencies should have one designated key worker with access to a pooled budget. This budget should be linked to delivering clearly agreed outcomes and be utilised flexibly and innovatively in partnership with civil society organisations.

8 EARLY YEARS AND CHILDHOOD - RECOMMENDATIONS 7-9

The Improving Children's Life Chances: The Child Poverty Strategy (March 2011) is informed by the principle of a shift towards the use of preventative measures to tackle child poverty. *Transforming Your Care*, which set out the road map for health and social care services in Northern Ireland, contained twelve key principles underpinning the approach. One principle is a 'focus on prevention and tackling inequalities'. A key strategic document from the Department of Education, *'Learning to Learn': A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning*, December 2012, acknowledges the contribution of early years experiences to broader educational outcomes and aims to support a range of initiatives, including Extended Schools, parenting programmes and widening Sure Start. In the terms of those Not in Education Employment of Training (NEETs), *DEL's Pathways to Success 2012* stresses a preventative approach by working with a broad range of people at an early age to improve outcomes for those deemed to be at risk. As the National Children's Bureau NI (2013) noted, there has been recognition across departments and policy makers that early intervention is most effective approach to service delivery, but this is not underpinned by a commitment to move to this methodology.

8.1 PARENTING

The theme of early years and intervention encompasses the challenges of parenting. Many consultees highlighted the need to address parenting skills. Issues can include attachment disorder, absentee fathers or exposure to alcoholism and drug addiction.

The early years of children are hugely formative. Therefore ensuring the best possible start in life to avoid intergenerational poverty and its associated issues was a concern for a large proportion of participants, many of whom also flagged up the link between child poverty and poor numeracy and literacy, and the need to develop strategies to address barriers to attainment through early intervention at the pre-school stage.

This study also identified concerns surrounding children whose parents are in prison and the impact this has on their lives. One organisation dealing in offender rehabilitation pointed out that children of people in prison are statistically more likely to offend. Without support, they are also more susceptible to bullying, isolation, academic underachievement and mental health problems. These vulnerable children must be included as a target group in early intervention strategies.

Some respondents contended that a way to address this underachievement was to increase children's emotional resilience. However, others suggested that interventions should be focused on addressing the needs of parents. A children's charity recommended investing in programmes to enable parents to support their children's learning. A submission from an independent think-tank suggested giving parents better information and access to appropriate support and advice. The submission from a human rights organisation talked of the need to invest in supporting and strengthening the institution of the family. Sure Start centres were singled out for praise by many of the respondents, but it was felt that there should be a more comprehensive system of these projects covering rural and urban areas.

Identifying problems early also means that intergenerational cycles of deprivation and disadvantage can be overcome. One community organisation pointed to the effectiveness of early intervention hubs such as the Inner East Belfast Family Support Hub. Similarly, the Derry 'One Plan' initiative established an Early Intervention Strategic Partnership and agreed that the approaches to follow would include:

- **Intervening in the early stages of life (0-6 years).**
- **Intervening as soon as an issue arises, for children, young people and their families.**
- **Creating a positive and supportive environment for early intervention that is underpinned by a Child's Rights approach.**

This Early Intervention Strategy Programme draws on best practice evidence, and its recommendations include being locally driven to match local circumstances, using community volunteers, forging strong partnerships between educational institutions and wider public and third-sector services. A number of children's charities also called for a sustained, planned increase in early intervention investment.

Early intervention strategies need to be whole family interventions that have a positive influence on mental health and well-being. One community group put forward a preferred model of the Healthy Living Centre as a community-led health improvement initiative. It would be based in and led from within the top 20% of deprived wards in Northern Ireland, dealing with prevention and early intervention, focusing on investing in social capital, namely building the knowledge of people and communities, as well as investigating creative ways of sharing practice.

8.2 **CHILDCARE**

The issue of childcare is seen as critical in the early years. A comprehensive report commissioned by OFMDFM into the provision of childcare highlighted the benefits, including cognitive and social development, improved school readiness, combating poverty, tackling social exclusion, boosting potential earnings, increasing access to employment, and addressing gender equality. A number of suggestions and recommendations in relation to current and future childcare provision were forwarded:

- **One consultee asked for the introduction of means-tested, subsidised childcare with the aim of having a particular benefit for lower-income parents to stay in work or return to work after having a child.**
- **One of the sectoral representative bodies stressed 'the importance of a coherent long term childcare strategy...which...ensures that quality affordable childcare is widely available.'**
- **An early years charity recommended a common approach to funding and access to child support services for providers offering pre-school places which addresses present imbalances between statutory and non-statutory places and reflects the present ability of both the statutory and voluntary and independent sectors to deliver high quality pre-school places.**

- One of the local community forums recommended the expansion of the system of childcare support and the Sure Start programme to enable all children from areas of deprivation to have the same opportunities in early years as more affluent sections of the community. Indeed quite a few consultees and submissions from trade unions and numerous community groups expressed concern that Sure Start programmes could be cut instead of expanded.
- A community representative group recommended providing universal free childcare for all pre-school age children in Northern Ireland as well as supporting parents transitioning into employment through provision of free childcare. For instance: cover 100 % of childcare costs for parents on benefits for the first 12 months of employment.

NICVA commissioned a major study into childcare in 2014, analysing different models of childcare subsidy that could be introduced in Northern Ireland, and a cost-benefit analysis of each of its options. International comparisons revealed that as childcare becomes more affordable, maternal employment rates tend to be higher. Secondly, as maternal employment rates increased rates of child poverty decreased. However, the NICVA study also pointed out that in 2011 the rate of maternal employment in Northern Ireland was already above the global average. While at the same time the rate of child poverty was probably about average or just below that average. Importantly, the report concluded that the economic case for universal childcare was not strong, with costs outweighing the benefits, which in the long-term would lead to sizeable fiscal deficit. However, NICVA also pointed out that there was (largely unquantifiable) social value in having such a system relating to reductions in child or adult poverty. Therefore, policy makers need to consider the worth of these social benefits against the economic deficit of funding universal childcare.

We are encouraged by the recent publication of the Executive's Draft Childcare Strategy and hope this will act as a platform for providing a more affordable service across Northern Ireland, promoting equality.

This early intervention approach involves a completely different way of thinking; away from short-term goals and budgets towards long-term strategic interventions. Smart early interventions can make a positive impact on communities, societies and economies.

Recommendation 7 – Childcare

We welcome the Executive's recent draft Childcare Strategy and hope they will be able to deliver on their 2025 targets, one of which is to increase the number of childcare places from 56,000 to 100,000. We hope this will provide a platform to build an integrated and affordable childcare system.

Recommendation 8 – Early Years Support

Sure Start-type support should be available in every community, bringing together anti-natal, post-natal, parenting and child development support in an integrated service.

Recommendation 9 – Sport and Creativity

The power of sport and creative disciplines such as theatre, dance, film, television and the arts to build confidence and a competitive spirit in many disciplines from an early age are essential in today's modern world. Sport, whatever discipline, can build social confidence and instil pride, respect and understanding for one another. Embracing theatre and television/film skills, from performance to management can do the same. Perhaps sports/creative schemes similar to the Dutch 'Sports Token' model, which makes activities affordable for disadvantaged families, could be considered.

9 SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION - RECOMMENDATIONS 10-15

Education is one service that is widely acknowledged to be central to addressing poverty and inequality. People with no or low qualifications are at a much higher risk of unemployment, low pay, poor conditions and poor mental health. In Northern Ireland there is a long tail of low attainment, which, disproportionately affects those from disadvantaged communities. (CSJ, 2010)

It is reasonable to say that across all of the consultations by Commission members and submissions to the Commission, the issue of education was the one that arose most frequently and was discussed most fervently. It is multi-faceted and complex, but the key issues that arose in our work which we discuss in more detail below, were:

- **Teachers and teaching**
- **Schools and schooling**
- **The achievement gap**
- **The education system**

9.1 TEACHERS AND TEACHING

An inspirational teacher has the potential to have a transformational effect on a child's life, cultivating skills and capabilities and ensuring children achieve their potential. The issue of the quality and standards in teaching emerged as a key concern. It was contended that teaching had to some extent lost its status as a 'top' profession. There was considerable concern about the level of training or continuing professional development (CPD) undertaken by teachers. An international review of teacher training (DEL, 2014) concluded that a small minority of teachers in Northern Ireland are currently engaged in CPD programmes which lead to postgraduate award, which is counter to the trend internationally. Indeed it was noted that even if the number of teachers undertaking CPD doubled that would still only represent 'a modest investment in the professional replenishment of a key occupation group'. It further noted that if Northern Ireland is to address the serious challenges it faces, including the relatively poor performance of its post-primary pupils, 'it needs a teaching profession at the top of its game'.

A number of participants expressed concern that, in theory, a teacher could be fully qualified at 22, then work for 40 years relying on the same skills and knowledge they acquired at teacher training college. Given the shrinking public sector budgets, it is increasingly likely that CPD will have to be self-funded, and this was viewed as a particular shortcoming.

As this is a UK-wide issue and not just Northern Ireland specific, an inter-governmental arrangement between Westminster and the devolved assemblies could be reached to collaborate and assess these problems together.

A Trade Union submission asserted that access to well-motivated and engaging teachers had a major impact on children's educational outcomes. It suggested that schools should strive to recruit and retain the best teachers, and build on CPD to enhance the teaching profession. It made reference to the success of the *Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes* in schools, which is evidenced by improved results in some of the participating schools.

During the course of consultations and meetings, there was the opportunity to meet school principals, and hear about the work of other inspirational school leaders. People talked of well-led schools enabling children to lift their aspirations. However, it was also clear that there is concern about failing principals, and in particular what recourse there is to remove them. This was seen to be exacerbated by a schools inspection regime that informs schools when inspections will be taking place.

There does not appear to be a comprehensive system of managing poorer teachers out of schools, but neither is there a strong support network to help and develop those teachers identified as poorer performers. In theory this should be driven through the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service, the body responsible for teacher professional development. However, a number of principals we spoke to questioned the effectiveness of the service, which in recent years has only provided support to schools identified by The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) as being in formal intervention.

Careers advice was also a cause for concern for many of the respondents. There was a widespread belief that young people were not adequately informed about opportunities and were directed towards 'safe options'. Employers suggested that a significant improvement was needed in careers guidance and advice in schools. According to the CBI (2015), 80% of businesses across NI are not satisfied with the current performance of careers advice in schools and colleges.

Recommendation 10 – Academic Leadership

The quality of leadership and management in schools is central to their success. Northern Ireland needs a Continual Professional Development (CPD) Framework for school leadership that reflects this. The Education and Training Inspectorate should move from the Department of Education and become an independent agency.

Concern was also raised about the amount of interaction between teachers and other professions or organisations. A notable exception to this was the Youth Service. Their work was singled out for praise as it had the ability to re-engage and motivate young people. The Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) was considered an important way of ensuring educational provision for those with social, emotional and behavioural problems. It was, however, suggested that this intervention was severely curtailed due to budget constraints and this had a detrimental effect on children's life chances.

Much concern emerged about a perceived lack of dedicated careers teachers, which exacerbated the disconnect between education and business. There are limited opportunities for teachers to spend time gaining practical experience in workplaces to learn about the world of business, and similarly there is no particular incentive for business people to get involved in schools.

As part of our stakeholder engagement we talked to Teach First, which operates in England and Wales. This is an initiative which has helped to improve the status of teaching as a profession, as well as starting the process of skills and knowledge transfer between schools and business. It takes high-flying graduates from a wide range of university courses, and places them into a school with high levels of disadvantage for two years to inspire others. Not only does this bring new and inspirational thinking into schools, but it also creates a network of ex-teachers across the private and public sector who understand educational and economic disadvantage and use the skills and knowledge gained in schools to make a difference in other spheres.

Recommendation 11 – Teach First

Consideration should be given to introducing a ‘Teach First’-type Programme in Northern Ireland. Teach First is a programme which supports graduates to teach in schools in disadvantaged communities.

9.2 SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLING

The social aspect of schooling and the roles that schools play in wider society emerged as a key issue. There was support for early morning clubs and homework clubs, and a general expansion of the school support network. A homework club in a deprived area of South Belfast facilitated by Queen’s University, where young children are mentored, was given as an example of an intervention making a tangible difference. A submission from an organisation working with ex-offenders, when considering the difficulties of learning for children who have experienced trauma, stated that schools can ‘function as islands of safety in a chaotic world.’

The need to get the ‘basics’ right was highlighted by many respondents. However this meant different things to different people. For some this was as simple as getting children to attend school on a regular basis in the first place. A key Government Agency referred to the importance of schools as healthy places where nutritious food is available, where physical activity is routine and psychological wellbeing is nurtured.

It was suggested that there is an urgent need to start thinking about schools differently and to break away from some of our traditional perspectives in relation to schools and schooling. For instance, there were suggestions that the school day could be altered to mirror the working day, for instance 9am-5pm. Not only would this provide an early reflection of what children would be expected to do in the world of work, but it could also solve some of the childcare issues experienced by working parents before and after the school day. Similarly, an early years charity suggested the introduction of a formally recognised more flexible approach towards the school starting age in Northern Ireland, to align with compulsory starting ages across Europe. At present, Northern Ireland has the lowest compulsory starting age (4) in Europe, compared to between 5 and 7 in other European countries.

What was also clear from talking with stakeholders is that the system of sharing and disseminating best practice could be improved. In Northern Ireland we are fortunate to have some of the best schools in the UK, but unfortunately we also have some schools that continue to perform poorly. However, there is no apparent systematic culture where worse performing schools can learn from better performing schools. There was widespread agreement on the need to ensure all our schools are good schools, and such an aspiration or vision in itself would drive knowledge sharing.

9.3 ACHIEVEMENT GAP

It is clear from discussions with stakeholders and published research that, as well as having very successful pupils and very successful schools in attaining the deemed academic minimum of 5 GCSEs A*-C, including Maths and English, there is a significant proportion of pupils who do not attain this minimum, and a disproportionate number of these are pupils on free school meals. Indeed, following on from the discussion of stigmatisation and failure in relation to academic selection, one of our submissions from an academic researcher claimed that given the distribution of marks and norming of scores in GCSEs, there will always be a proportion who will fail, irrespective of how they actually perform in the exams.

This hierarchy of performance is related to deprivation, gender and religion. Existing research on the performance gap between Catholic girls as the top performers and Protestant working class boys as the lowest, found that 10% of this performance gap is due to religion, 22% due to gender, and 68% due to deprivation.

Given this differential in achievement, a number of consultees and submissions have expressed concern that the focus in education is on getting the necessary qualifications, potentially to the detriment of the overall enrichment that can be gained from attending school and the school environment. For example, a local community forum referred to the need to 'strive to be a society that promotes the value of education in terms of thinking and life-long learning'. A national charity dealing with young people suggests it would perhaps be more beneficial for some young people to be advised and supported to follow a vocational route. This was echoed by the submission of a provider of support services to young people, adult offenders and families in the community, which asserted that the academic, qualifications-based model is not suitable for all young people and too often leads to some 'falling through the cracks'.

The point was made in consultations that the minimum education qualifications were necessary across a wide range of jobs, and indeed for apprenticeships and vocational courses. The example was given that you need to have English and Maths to be an electrician. Given the proportion of pupils not attaining this minimum standard it was suggested that these children were 'consigned to the dustbin' with no hope of securing a 'decent job'.

There was widespread agreement on the need to ensure that increasing numbers of young people had improved numeracy and literacy skills. One of the consultees, an ex-prisoner who re-started his education in prison, highlighted the power of education. He viewed education as a 'weapon', but a

constructive and positive one as opposed to the more destructive weapons that he was associated with in the past. He also made the point that by demonstrating to others the benefits of an education, he acts as a role model to those in his community, again replacing the types of paramilitary roles that were hero-worshipped in the recent past.

Whilst there were a wide range of perspectives on the key aims and objectives of our education system, there was widespread agreement on the need to address the achievement gap:

- A trade union submission talked of the need to improve educational outcomes for the marginalised as a means to help alleviate intergenerational poverty.
- One of the charity submissions stated that as a society we should have the ambition to support all pupils to achieve a minimum of five good GCSEs including Maths and English through, for example, one-to-one mentoring or small group tuition targeted at pupils entitled to free school meals.

Others saw the focus as developing and maintaining a system that accommodated not just academic achievement but other forms of achievement:

- A youth community organisation recommended maintaining a skills-based educational curriculum.
- A local community forum suggested redrawing the education system to cover the basics of reading, writing, maths and IT, and then building in cultural/technological and vocational development opportunities around this.
- An academic paper that was submitted by Professor Bernard Barker recommended that schools should be driven by learning rather than by assessment. It stated that education should be based on the broadest possible range of participative and interactive experiences and should be measured qualitatively so that everyone's contribution is recognised and valued. In this model, children's worth, growth and personal development should be valued at least as highly as workplace skills.

There was also the recognition that it was not the responsibility of the school alone to ensure the development of children and additional support for parents particularly in rural areas was necessary:

- One of the submissions outlined the work of the Eastside Learning Partnership which promotes partnership between schools and the community in East Belfast. The Partnership has five priorities which it believes meets the needs of the children in the area, namely: improved aspiration and achievement, more focused area-based planning, schools working in partnership with the community and home environments, valuing all education pathways (academic and vocational), and improved early years interventions.

- The submission from an international children’s charity suggested that closing the education achievement gap requires early intervention, accountability and partnerships between children, parents, teachers and the wider community. A comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach is essential to achieving educational equality for all children.
- One national social policy and research charity believed attitudes and aspirations have an influence in relation to the education attainment gap. The big difference between parents and children from richer and poorer backgrounds is their belief that they will be able to achieve education goals.

Global best practice was highlighted by several participants. The Cristo Rey School in Chicago was provided as an exemplar in attaining academic achievement as well as ensuring effective personal development. In the Cristo Rey model, every child goes to work a day a week, but allied to that, between the ages of 14 and 18 all pupils get classes on being an effective teenager. The mission of the school is to get everyone to college, and certainly the figures to date, particularly in relation to children from areas where academic performance was poor, is very impressive.

The Finnish model of taking a strategic and forward-thinking approach to closing the achievement gap was also presented. In Finland, partnerships between industry and education were created, with emphasis on STEM subject’s creativity and problem-solving. These reforms built on other characteristics of the Finnish education system – the professional autonomy of highly qualified teachers, the inclusion of most pupils with Special Educational Needs, and the emphasis on helping students assess their own learning to enable them to take charge of their individual study plans and work collaboratively on cross-curricular projects. As a result, Finland tops the tables for minimal variation of outcomes between schools and within schools, regardless of family background or socio-economic class.

Whilst there were many differences of opinion around the relative merits of our education system there was unanimous agreement that it could be improved on to enhance life chances.

Recommendation 12 – Closing the Attainment Gap

The attainment gap in education must be addressed as a priority. Progress in reducing educational under achievement has stalled. Whilst Northern Ireland students continue to outperform their peers in other regions of the UK, approximately one third of pupils do not achieve a C grade or higher in Maths and around a quarter in English. Raising attainment and closing the gap between children who are most and least disadvantaged must be a priority.

9.4 THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Civic Forum (2002) noted that 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.

Many consultees were particularly exercised by the structure of the education system and academic selection. We believe these topics are much larger and more complex than can or should be covered by this Commission. However, there are some aspects of the education system that were raised by stakeholders that we believe are worth emphasising.

The efficiency and effectiveness of resource planning within schools was queried by a number of their respondents. There was a perception that too much money was spent on administration and not enough on frontline services. One of the education bodies providing a submission requested that a major review of the economic cost of maintaining our education system be undertaken. One youth charity posed the question ‘is our education system resulting in limited resources being spread too thinly on the ground?’ A school principal stated that only 59% of the aggregated schools budget actually goes to schools, a much lower figure than England and Wales, due to a disproportionate amount spent on centralised activities.

A key theme emerging from the submissions was that the current education system was in need of radical reform to meet the needs of 21st century learners. One of the trade union submissions argued that there needs to be a focus at government level on building an education system that can deliver shared education, which in turn will evolve into a more integrated and diverse schooling infrastructure. Indeed a wider question was asked by a school principal of what we want our education system to look like – what is the vision for education in Northern Ireland?

Some consultees pointed to the success of shared education initiatives in places like Fermanagh as a positive step towards achieving a more unified education system. However, others contended that Shared Education was largely cosmetic with no real sharing of resources, teaching or facilities.

Unsurprisingly, academic selection emerged as a significant theme in discussions, however there was no consensus as to how this should be addressed. Whilst the issue of academic selection in Northern Ireland has been extensively researched and reported on, we do not propose to go over that ground. However it is important to reflect the level of concern around this unresolved policy area. Many participants referred to the stigmatisation of failure at eleven and the damage that this could do to a child’s self-esteem and confidence. Conversely, others felt that dismantling the grammar school system could lead to a drop in academic standards. There was though an agreement that the current system where Catholic and Protestant tests were allowed to co-exist was divisive. There was a broad consensus too that Northern Ireland needed to develop a no failure culture in education where all pathways were equally valued.

Recommendation 13 – End the 11+ Impasse

When the transfer test was abolished in 2008 it was replaced by two different unofficial transfer tests, commonly known as the AQE and the GL. Education leaders and policy makers should consider other ways to address decisions about children’s schooling.

9.5 YOUNG PEOPLE

In our discussions about young people and the challenges they faced, the issue of NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training) was a particular area for concern. Many expressed concern about the pejorative nature of the label with its focus on what individuals did not have. It was widely considered to be stigmatising and unhelpful. Many of the community groups consulted highlighted the barriers encountered by NEETs in trying to get into employment and the perceived lack of policy responses. Predictably NEETs are over-represented amongst disadvantaged groups and the majority of respondents were pessimistic about job opportunities materialising for this group. The disengagement of this large group of people was a major concern for youth and community workers. According to the Labour Force Survey Quarterly Supplement (2014) almost 17% of the 16-24 population in NI are classified as NEETs and this figure is increasing, in part perhaps a reflection of the slowdown in the economic recovery.

One of Northern Ireland’s largest youth charities has undertaken a series of research projects focusing on the social exclusion of young people. It highlighted the difficulties facing many young people classified as NEETs including:

- A lack of childcare
- Homelessness
- The lack of parental support or role models
- Residing in fractured communities
- Troubled educational experiences
- Disengagement from the labour market

A national charity, which focuses its services on young people, reported that the most disadvantaged and hardest-to-reach NEETs are those with no qualifications, those who are lone parents and those who are disabled. Youth unemployment is particularly acute in areas of high deprivation, where low educational attainment and worklessness has been prevalent for decades.

However, it is clear also from our submissions that there are interventions underway which aim to address the issue of NEETs. In its submission, one of the youth charities recommended that:

- Interventions should be preventative with the pre-16 years and with crisis interventions for post-16 years.
- Interventions should focus on driving self-confidence, resilience and self-motivation, through engagement in education, employment or training. Programmes should aim to build resilience in terms of a sense of purpose and personal vision and goals as well as the confidence and self-motivation to continue to pursue them even if it takes time, effort and a few knocks along the way.
- We need to recognise that some young people do not have a positive learning experience.
- NEETs must have support to ‘find something we like and are good at’.

A human rights NGO in its submission recommended the use of social clauses in public procurement to deliver equality outcomes for people in society who are experiencing enduring inequality.

A number of examples were provided of successful programmes in place at present that represent replicable best practice. The Youth Leadership Programme facilitated by Co-operation Ireland, involves one-to-one mentoring, more participative teaching styles, and supported work placements relevant to the career interests of the young people involved. It is based on Austrian and German apprenticeship models and organisational training programmes. This programme was also endorsed by the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, which recommended a minimum of 10 of these programmes in interface areas.

Young Enterprise Northern Ireland delivers a programme that enables over 1,500 15-19 year olds to run their own real companies for a year with help from business mentors. The focus here is on the development of transferable skills.

Recommendation 14 – Bridge to Employment

For all students, but especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, making the link between educational attainment and jobs is essential. Consequently every school should be supported to develop a strategic partnership with employers. This will help with student motivation, work experience and has the potential to create a team of mentors who can be crucial for young people who do not have a parent or carer supporting their educational progress.

Recommendation 15 – Options for 14-19 Year Olds

The development of an integrated approach to 14-19 education is essential, as a partnership between schools, further education colleges and employers. It is welcome that Northern Ireland’s six FE Colleges have new Level 3 Apprenticeships in place, which could be expanded to offer a greater range of careers options and self-employment. Priority must be given to ensure vocational training has parity with academic qualifications. This must be accompanied by a much improved careers advice service.

10 JOBS, PAY AND THE ECONOMY

The theme of jobs and job creation, those in work and out of work, and the input of the business community, generated much debate and discussion. Given that Northern Ireland suffers from the highest levels of economic inactivity in the UK, and worklessness is linked to entrenched poverty and poor health, many respondents had strong views on the need to develop appropriate policies to address these issues. Whilst participants revealed much concern that Northern Ireland would be disproportionately impacted by the proposed programme of welfare reform, the input also acknowledged that the current welfare system was deeply flawed. The system that was established to assist those in need and act as a safety net had morphed into a complex system that trapped people into cycles of disadvantage and dependence.

Significantly though, a large number of respondents were keen to stress that, whilst the welfare system was undoubtedly flawed, there were also serious concerns about the nature and number of jobs available. Feedback revealed agreement that the government had a duty to ensure that there was a supply of appropriate jobs at all levels. Many participants were at pains to stress that poverty and social exclusion were not synonymous with worklessness or being workshy but were a reality for the working poor.

The prevalence of long-term unemployment (those who have not worked for over 12 months) was a particular issue. As the CSJ (2010) noted, the fact that it accounts for over 40% of the total unemployment count demonstrates how difficult it is to break the cycle of poverty. The intergenerational nature of the problem means that children who grow up without a working role model are much less likely to secure employment when they enter adulthood.

A growing body of evidence supports the assertion that the current system of benefits requires radical reform, as the current configuration does not facilitate nor encourage a smooth transition into and out of employment. The complex welfare system that has evolved over the past 6 decades is not equipped to tackle intergenerational poverty and in many ways simply reinforces dependency and reinforces barriers to paid employment.

10.1 THE LIVING WAGE

Making work pay is a particular concern in Northern Ireland as wages levels are persistently low by national and international standards, particularly in the private sector. A major problem in this region is the absence of jobs with decent pay and long-term prospects. As a result, for many, full-time work may not represent a sure route out of poverty. The Living Wage is an estimate of the wage that would provide a full-time worker with a basic, but adequate standard of living.

Some estimates indicate that around a quarter of employees in Northern Ireland are already earning less than the Living Wage, therefore there is something of a gap to be bridged.

The latest *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland 2014* report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, found that household incomes, poverty rates and the labour market in Northern Ireland have all worsened in the last five years, with deterioration greater than it has been in Great Britain. In particular, the average median wage in Northern Ireland over the past five years has fallen

by almost 10%, compared with 7% in the UK. Perhaps most striking is the fact that for those aged 30-59, poverty has increased, but it has solely been among those in working families.

Oxford Economics (2014) modelled the economic effects of a living wage. In their most likely scenario, the Living Wage would have added £209 million to the Northern Ireland wage bill, but this would be offset by a gain of 1,200 jobs, a reduced social security bill and increased revenue from taxation. There is also evidence that it would increase productivity, which is historically low in Northern Ireland.

It is our view that tackling low pay is central to dealing with welfare dependency. George Osborne's announcements on the introduction of a 'National Living Wage' on the 8th July are a welcome step in the right direction but we are clear that this is not really a Living Wage. The Government's new rate when it is introduced will be lower than the Living Wage - as set out by the Living Wage Foundation - this year. Further research and financial modelling is needed to analyse the impact of this policy on Northern Ireland. Whilst the National Minimum Wage is a Reserved Issue, the Stormont government could request an assessment by the Low Pay Commission of the effect of the Northern Ireland Assembly having the power to alter the National Minimum Wage rate for Northern Ireland. There is a clear tension between the demand for higher wages and the fears of small to medium employers that wage increases could not be sustained. This could be addressed through employer tax incentives.

Recommendation 16 – The Living Wage

On a phased basis, the UK Government should work with employers to ensure as many workers as possible in Northern Ireland earn a full Living Wage. Initially, this should include employer tax incentives.

10.2 AVAILABILITY OF WORK

Concerns around the value of the jobs emerged as a particular issue in these discussions. For instance, one of the trade union submissions talked of the number of 'low value' jobs created in Northern Ireland and how attractive these may be to those currently on benefits. The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy stated '... growth in output and jobs has tended to be in relatively low value added areas, which has resulted in average wages remaining significantly below the rest of the UK.' The quality of jobs and the labour market experience for many of those attempting to get into work remains very poor. Conversely, there was also a perception that a greater number of new jobs are of higher value, reflecting the knowledge-based economy, and these tend to require a degree of mobility and perhaps more importantly, higher educational attainment.

Several submissions focused on skills shortages and their impact on productivity and economic recovery. A general view is that a skill mismatch poses a major constraint, hampering economic recovery. Respondee's contended that government departments, companies and employees needed to ensure occupational requirements were matched through appropriate education and training. There was also a widescale perception that an imbalance exists between the type of skills currently on offer within the NI workforce and the skills required in the world of work. For example, graduates were being forced to take jobs that they were overeducated for and are not utilising their skills. Or in other cases, skills had not been updated and had deteriorated over time.

Feedback highlighted the significant opportunities emerging within the creative industries sector, but these need to be appropriately promoted and supported. A major training firm stated that paying for professional industry training is difficult for those in disadvantaged areas, with no overall coordination of efforts in relation to training focused on ‘meeting the real life practical needs of a fast developing and potentially very lucrative industry’.

Potential skills shortages in relation to the adult social care workforce, driven by an increasing focus on care in the community, were identified as an area of particular concern. It was noted that a strategy to address this would be enormously beneficial, with a focus on joined up collaboration between relevant departments. Some commented that social care apprenticeships were a useful way to begin to address this, and their recent discontinuation was unfortunate.

A need for a strategic approach to job creation also emerged as an issue, together with the belief that there was a general disconnect between the needs of businesses and the existing skills base.

Several of our consultees also referred to the need for businesses to be better informed around childcare and transport requirements. For many people, commuting long distances to work had a detrimental impact on their quality of life. Interestingly, feedback suggested that local businesses had not taken advantages of advances in communication and many people were travelling needlessly, as we did not have a culture of working from home.

The submission from a local innovation and knowledge-based organisation referred to a tendency to overlook local ideas and go elsewhere for innovation, when in fact inspiration may be on our own doorstep. To ensure a durable peace with prosperity, Northern Ireland needs to build a modern 21st century version of its earlier, very successful innovation economy, and this time, one that is inclusive and accessible to all. The organisation also recommended ‘connecting globally to develop locally’ and further stated that the most effective innovation initiatives are those that generate a vibrant innovation ecosystem, which includes social and cultural innovation. This could be seen in practice in the Commission’s site visit to the FabLab at the Ashton Centre; a digital fabrication laboratory which is part of a global network of FabLabs that were set up to inspire people and entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into new products and prototypes by giving them access to a range of advanced digital manufacturing technology.

Less than ten years ago the area of land known as Queen’s Island was a wasteland. The shipyards had declined and were viewed by many as a relic of the past. Today the new Titanic Quarter has been regenerated through a £7 billion project, which includes the award-winning Titanic themed visitors’ centre, a college campus and one of Europe’s newest, most innovative film studios. Significantly though, the island is home to a whole new generation of innovators and technology companies.

In the Northern Ireland Science Park, over one hundred companies are working to ensure Belfast is at the forefront of the knowledge economy. This knowledge-based hub is an example of how we can successfully carve out a niche area and compete globally.

Recommendation 17 – Workforce Skills Strategies

Tackling worklessness should be a key element of updated skills strategies for the IT, tourism, manufacturing and creative industry sectors.

10.3 REGIONAL DISPARITIES

Regional disparities remain a key concern in Northern Ireland with a prevailing belief that Northern Ireland is Belfast-centric. Consultees living in the North-West area cited major gaps across a key range of public sector areas such as education, health, employment, access to services and indeed life expectancy. Despite government promises and the establishment of a North-West Ministerial subgroup, funding and support was believed to be heavily biased towards Belfast, at the expense of the North-West. Communities here that have been disadvantaged for generations remain stubbornly at the bottom of the league tables for poverty and deprivation.

The infrastructure in the North-West remains a particular issue, including a lack of progress on the proposed A5 and A6 roads. Derry and Strabane have the highest rates of unemployment, highest levels of free school meal entitlement, highest levels of housing stress and lowest levels of life expectancy in Northern Ireland. Invest Northern Ireland figures reveal that fewer than 10 per cent of jobs created were in Derry and Strabane.

The gap in prosperity between the East and West of the region was described as socially unjust and economically inefficient. There was a strong belief that we needed an economic strategy that worked for the whole of Northern Ireland. Many noted that the latest round of cuts and austerity would disproportionately hit those areas that were most in need of investment. The regional economy was described as weak and unbalanced with too much focus on jobs in the poorly paid service industry. The 'growing chasm' between areas in Northern Ireland was the focus of much anger and concern. Respondents in the North-West demanded increased spending, improved infrastructure and increased investment. Feedback claimed that the sidelining of the second city was a 'scandalous waste of talent, opportunities and economic capacity'.

Consultees proposed that the Executive should work with the Westminster government to address the regional disparities in investment and infrastructure. This could include measures such as:

- **Prioritising geographical areas**
- **Developing Enterprise Zones**
- **Developing bespoke programmes to tackle underachievement and unemployment**
- **Ensuring the infrastructure in these regions is fit for purpose**
- **Devolving appropriate powers to local councils**
- **Investing in local young people**
- **A Northern Ireland Infrastructure Conference to encourage international investment across the regions**

The recent announcements around cuts to university places also raised concern, in particular the extent to which this was short sighted and counterintuitive. If growing the economy is the number one priority for Northern Ireland, it will be important to ensure the skills base is growing and more talented young people choose to study and work in Northern Ireland. Not prioritising this area was referred to by one business leader as ‘cutting off the pipeline that fuels prosperity’.

We believe consideration should be given to developing a City Deal in Derry-Londonderry to address regional inequalities and disparities. A city deal is a UK-wide initiative which aims to help a city or region boost investment, promote growth and create jobs. This would involve a different approach to doing things and would entail the devolution of assets to support tailor-made interventions. Such measures would give local people greater control over shaping their future. In 2013 City Deal packages were concluded in 20 smaller cities in England, and the first Scottish deal for Glasgow was completed in early 2015.

Enterprise Zones are another option for addressing regional disparities, but will require partnership between the Treasury and the Northern Ireland Executive.

10.4 REGENERATION

One of the sectorial representative bodies put forward a list of key policy priorities to ‘help create employment, regenerate town centres, revamp car parking and create a fair planning system, which supports local business’, and which by extension helps improve the economy and extend the benefits to those on the margins of our society. A local community development organisation also suggested that the private sector should be using Corporate Social Responsibility programmes to increase links to support community development.

Examples were provided of effective job creation activities where paid jobs or apprenticeships were ring-fenced for the long-term unemployed. One such example was the Stadia Project run by DCAL, which provided opportunities in the construction industry for the long-term unemployed. The example was also provided of Belfast City Council passing a motion that its future capital procurement should include a social clause where the deliverer of services has to ring-fence a proportion of jobs for the long-term unemployed.

Recommendation 18 – Infrastructure Investment Summit

The UK Government, working with the NI Executive, should organise a major Northern Ireland International Infrastructure Investment Conference to identify models of modernisation across the world, examine possible funding options and set new priorities for Northern Ireland.

10.5 AVAILABILITY OF SKILLS AND LABOUR

The barriers to acquiring skills when many courses or schemes had relatively high entry requirements was a focus in the discussions. For example participants cited some apprenticeship courses or vocational training programmes that required a minimum of five GCSEs, including Maths and English. It was suggested that this entry requirement should be reviewed as there was a perception that it was inappropriate for these types of courses.

A specific example used was the recent oil rig refurbishment at Harland and Wolff. An identified lack of skills in the area of welding resulted in a bespoke local initiative being introduced which provided the necessary apprenticeships in welding.

A submission from one of the further education colleges welcomes the emergence of apprenticeships in non-traditional white-collar occupations including software engineering, ICT and agri-food. After several successful pilots, the college noted that apprenticeships at youth and higher levels will be key to a strong skills escalator and will support the retention of skills in the region.

A recent submission in relation to the future of higher education in Northern Ireland also picks up on the theme of skills and talent retention, seeing higher education institutions as businesses generating economic activity, jobs and output and contributing to GDP. These are 'anchor institutions' to attract and retain business and investment in the region. The employment generated by higher education institutions and their students is equal to around 2.6% of all Northern Ireland employment.

However, discussions with higher education institutions also suggest that around one third of our potential students are choosing to go to higher education institutions outside of Northern Ireland, and of these only one third will return.

Indeed, some consultees and submissions while welcoming the acquisition of specific skills for specific jobs, were more focused on the acquisition of transferrable skills.

Recommendation 19 – Start-up Survival Plan

Research should be undertaken to ascertain why NI has the lowest 5-year survival rate of business start-ups by region in the UK. This would enable government to identify how best to support these start-ups.

Recommendation 20 – Work to Learn

Creating work-to-learn cultures within workplaces can help to address in-work poverty by providing developmental opportunities. Targeted action is required in sectors where low-paid workers tend to be concentrated.

11 OTHER ISSUES

The consultation exercise also brought forward a range of views, suggestions and insights into other related issues and opportunities to improve the quality of life and life chances for future generations in Northern Ireland. As these submissions offered valuable ideas, we felt they were worth including in this report.

The power of sport and play, and the benefits, were raised in a number of submissions. The Sport Changes Life initiative that has been introduced in deprived areas of Northern Ireland enables the provision of positive feedback to children and young people who may not get any other form of reinforcement.

Playboard NI has launched a 'Let Us Play' campaign focusing on making the right to play a reality for all children and young people in Northern Ireland. Play helps in the development of creativity, imagination, self-esteem and resilience, as well as contributing to social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

A submission received from a local football coaching service working in areas of deprivation, stated that it received little or no statutory support, and with Council facilities are going up in price, the costs were pricing them out of delivering a service. Their submission cited a Dutch model where a Sports Token benefit to parents on low income/benefits could be used to help their children to participate in sports and activity programmes.

A number of community groups also mentioned the importance of street arts and public art in involving those who otherwise would not get access to the world of art, and in building a sense of purpose and pride in the local community.

12 CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

IN THE PROCESS OF THIS CONSULTATION EXERCISE, IT BECAME APPARENT THAT THERE WERE MAJOR FACTORS UNIQUE TO NORTHERN IRELAND THAT UNDERLAY AND INFLUENCED ALL OUR KEY THEMES. WE DISCUSS THESE CROSS-CUTTING THEMES HERE.

12.1 LEGACY ISSUES

The matter of legacy and the impact of the Troubles represented a significant area of debate and contention that is much larger than the remit of this Commission. However, there are undoubtedly legacy issues that are perceived to exacerbate marginalisation and deprivation in Northern Ireland and cut across all the themes we have discussed so far.

It is important for the Westminster Government to acknowledge the extent to which the Troubles negatively impacted on aspiration and the creation of prosperity and contributed to economic deprivation. Communities that had suffered the most during the conflict continued to suffer disproportionately in the post conflict period.

Indeed submissions provided statistical evidence that areas experiencing the greatest deprivation include some of those most affected by the Troubles. A community-based partnership contended that there was an urgent need for acknowledgement that the Troubles have compounded economic marginalisation and deprivation. Similarly, a children's pressure group stated there should be recognition of the relationship between experience of the conflict and experience of poverty and this should be reflected in government policy.

The trauma and devastation caused by the long period of conflict makes Northern Ireland a special case among the UK regions and as such requires specific, tailored policy responses. Poverty and disadvantage have been deeply entrenched in many communities, and the frustration and anger around the perceived injustice of this was tangible in many of the communities we visited. Respondents referred to 'being written off' and being 'second class citizens' with little or no support to break cycles of dependency and disadvantage. Consensus exists that current policy interventions aimed to address the symptoms, but there was no commitment to address systemic failures.

12.2 JOINED UP GOVERNMENT

A second significant cross-cutting theme which emerged from this research was the need for increased multi-agency and cross-departmental working. Working across boundaries to ensure effective interventions was described as 'common sense', a no-brainer', yet many were concerned that services were not based around the needs of service-users. Citizens were not at the heart of public services, and co-production and design of services were suggested as alternative models.

Voluntary and community sector representatives were particularly vocal about the need for government departments to communicate effectively and work together and avoid waste created by fragmented services which do not deliver outcomes. They felt that the development of one stop shops such as 'family hubs' were a sensible way of delivering co-ordinated services, and praised this multi-agency approach.

13 CONCLUSIONS

The report has identified three key themes: Early Intervention, Education, and Jobs and the Economy, which have emerged from this Commission on intergenerational poverty in Northern Ireland. Clearly there are no quick fix solutions to some of the problems we have outlined in this report, and the issues interlink and interact in a seemingly intractable web. Poverty is linked to health, health is linked to income and income is linked to education. Whilst these problems are multi-layered and challenging, it is unacceptable to consign them to the ‘too difficult’ box, and give up trying to solve them. We must introduce new ways of working and stop doing what does not work. This also requires us to identify and collect the evidence on what works and why.

Most politicians in Northern Ireland want to change things for the better, and they and the public are frustrated at the pace of change. Northern Ireland’s greatest asset is its vibrant, talented, well-educated, young population. We must make the most of this valuable resource and ensure that every individual, no matter where they come from, is able to achieve their potential. Success may come through small and incremental gains, which improve outcomes and have mutual and obvious benefit. It is hoped that the recommendations in this report will be the start of a national conversation about how we can build a more prosperous, inclusive and secure Northern Ireland.

Whilst undertaking this research, we met many individuals and groups who are ambitious for their families and communities and are determined to break out of cycles of deprivation. It is incumbent on policy-makers and all sections of society to work together to formulate answers to some of these challenges which continue to prevent Northern Ireland from moving forward towards a bright, thriving future.

A

APPENDIX A: PANEL MEMBERS

Professor Deirdre Heenan

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Communication) and Provost (Coleraine & Magee) of Ulster University

Colin Anderson OBE

ASG Executive Chair and CEO

Alan Crowe

Chief Executive of Co-Ownership Housing

Stephen Kingon CBE

Consultant

Patricia O'Hagan MBE

Chief Executive of Core Systems

Glyn Roberts

Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA)

Peter Bunting

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Derek Birrell

Professor of Social Policy and Administration at Ulster University

Fedelma Harkin

CEO of the Talent Tribe

Lisa McElherron

Head of Public Affairs in NICVA

Andy McMorran OBE

Educationalist

John McMullan

Chief Executive of Bryson Charitable Group

Siobhán Fitzpatrick CBE

Chief Executive Officer of Early Years

Séamas Heaney

Project Director of the Old Library Trust (OLT)

June Trimble

Chief Executive of YouthAction Northern Ireland

B APPENDIX B: LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

| | |
|--|--|
| Wave Injured Group | Labour Party in NI |
| EOS NI | First Steps Women’s Centre |
| Youth Action NI | Monina O’Prey |
| NIPSA | Federation of Small Businesses |
| Doctor Rosaleen Rogers | The Prince’s Trust |
| Nevin Economic Research Institute | Include Youth |
| John O’Farrell | NASUWT |
| Co-Ownership Housing | Relatives for Justice |
| Michael Gillespie | Oxfam Ireland |
| Stephen Hopkins | Northern Ireland Science Park |
| Grafton Recruitment | Start360 |
| David Graham Reilly | Training for Women Network (TWN) |
| Carnegie UK Trust | Co-operation Ireland |
| NUS-USI | Advice NI as NIAPN Board member |
| Kate O’Halloran | Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry |
| The Centre for Cross Border Studies | Integrated Education Fund |
| Jim McCusker | Save the Children |
| Children in Northern Ireland | PlayBoard NI |
| Tom Woolley | Human Rights Consortium |
| Public Health Agency | Young Enterprise NI |
| Stephen Baker | NIACRO |

B APPENDIX B: LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR) | Robin Wilson Policy Analyst |
| East Belfast Community Development Agency | DEL |
| EOS NI | STEP |
| North Belfast Partnership | J.T.C. (Hans) Borghmans |
| Early Years - the organisation for young children | Ulster University and The George Washington University, Washington DC |
| Newington Housing Association | NICVA |
| Core Systems | Talent Tribe |
| Sandy Row Community Forum | TW Sports |
| Disability Action | Unity of Purpose |
| Upper Andersonstown Community Forum | Early Intervention City Region |
| Children's Law Centre | Ulster University |
| Stratagem | Northern Ireland Healthy Living Centres Alliance |
| Ashton Community Trust | Joseph Rowntree Foundation |
| Advice NI | Ashfield Boys School |
| NIIRTA | OFMDFM (Delivering Social Change) |
| Core Systems (Trauma Awareness) | Children's Law Centre |
| Momentum | Bernard Barker article c/o Seamas Heaney |
| NI Branch Co-operative Party | Mirabilis Health |
| Ashton Community Trust | Queen's University Belfast |
| Centre For Social Justice | |

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