

NICVA Briefing Paper Peace III Operational Programme

The Operational Programme for Peace III is now out for consultation. SEUPB are seeking views on the proposals for what the programme should fund and how it should be run. The consultation period closes on 4 April 2007.

Background

The EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Regions for 2007-2013 (Peace III) is “aimed at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society and promoting reconciliation.” It will assist Northern Ireland and the Border Region and specifically focus on acknowledging and dealing with the conflict, building positive relations and contributing towards a shared society. The programme will carry forward key aspects of the previous peace programmes (Peace I and Peace II) and will have a continued and renewed emphasis on reconciliation.

The Operational Plan is the document which will outline priorities and themes for funding and details the structures for administering the programme in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. An EU budget of €25 million has been committed for 2007-2013. On top of that the two governments will contribute their 25% which adds around another €75 million over the seven year period so Peace III will have a budget of around €300 million including match funding. As in previous Peace programmes, this money will be additional to the Northern Ireland bloc grant. It will operate on a North/South basis with the SEUPB as Managing Authority.

Programme Strategy

This document is underpinned by the necessity of A Shared Future, an enhanced focus on reconciliation and coherence with the National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRF) of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Peace III Programme will focus on two strategic objectives. These are:

- **Reconciling communities:** key activities will facilitate relationships on a cross-community and/or cross-border basis to assist in addressing issues of trust, prejudice and intolerance and accepting commonalities and differences. In addition, key activities will seek to acknowledge and deal with the hurt, losses, trauma and suffering caused by the conflict.
- **Contributing to a shared society:** key activities will address the physical segregation or polarisation of places and communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Region with a view to encouraging increased economic and social cross-border and cross-community engagement.

NICVA welcomes these strategic objectives as they reflect issues that were raised in the consultations carried out with the sector in the spring of 2006 which highlighted strong opinions supporting a tight focus on peace and reconciliation, peace building and conflict resolution.

Programme Priorities

The two Strategic Objectives form the Programme Priorities and each of them will focus on two key areas:

Priority 1

Reconciling communities

(Indicative budget €140-200m)

- Building positive relations at the local level
- Acknowledging the past

Building positive relations at the local level

This priority aims to challenge attitudes towards sectarianism and racism and to support conflict resolution and mediation at local level. It will be implemented through a partnership approach through “strategic models of collaboration between the public, private and community sectors that focus on reconciliation, cultural diversity and equality. The Priority aims to establish meaningful cross-community and cross-border initiatives that will improve trust and tolerance and reduce levels of sectarianism and racism.”

It is proposed that there would not be an open call as in the past for applications under this key area, but that local authorities will be invited to submit proposals on a partnership basis for programmes that contribute to the stated aims. This may include small grants at a local level, within the bigger projects. These will be encouraged to reflect the new post-RPA council areas. Also in recognition that “some dimensions of building positive relationships may be best developed at a regional level and on a cross border basis” there may be “specific calls for proposals to address issues of a more strategic nature. Such proposals may include actions to ensure the active involvement of women, youth or other identified groups.” Support will be provided for local authorities to assist them in developing programmes for application and this will be commissioned from the Community Relations Council and Border Action.

Acknowledging the past

This priority aims to support victims and survivors, with a view to developing a comprehensive approach to the provision of services. It also aims to exchange different views of history and culture and different conflict and post-conflict experiences among relevant groups of the population.

It is envisaged that funded projects will be “strategic in nature and be reflective of a partnership approach.” This element of the priority will be implemented by Border Action and the Community Relations Council which will each be awarded a global grant.

Priority 2

Contributing to a shared society

(Indicative budget €80–130m)

- Creating shared public spaces
- Key institutional capacities are developed for a shared society

Creating shared public spaces

This priority aims to regenerate urban, rural and border areas that appear derelict, segregated, underused or threatening and to transform them into shared spaces. It seeks to “tackle the problems of separation of communities within society and addressing the underlying problems of sectarianism, racism and prejudice by encouraging the development of physical environments that are not ‘marked out’ with symbols that define it as a territory of one side of a community but as open to and welcoming to all.” Projects will be encouraged to develop new and innovative approaches for changing the physical environment in a way which maximises the potential for reconciliation and economic development. In particular, this Priority will support a number of significant developments in the North-West area following a commitment made at the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference in May 2006.

It is proposed that under this priority there will be specific calls for proposals from “appropriate bodies that will contribute to stated outputs.” It is envisaged that “a small number of strategic projects will be funded” and that public bodies will lead the projects, working in partnership with private and community stakeholders.

Key institutional capacities developed for a shared society

The principal objective of this is to develop the capacity, knowledge, culture and mechanisms of key institutions with a view to promoting innovative public sector models that deliver a shared society within Northern Ireland and on a cross-border basis. It will particularly focus on the public service, aiming to provide it (at both local and central level) with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to promote a shared society and be able to engage in dialogue with communities on shared issues.

Again, specific calls for proposals will be made under this priority and it is envisaged they will be “strategic in nature”.

Project beneficiaries

Each of the priorities is accompanied by a list of targets and indicators which will be used to measure success, a list of target beneficiaries which show which areas or groups might benefit and a list of indicative operations which show the kind of activities which might be funded.

Priority 1

For Building positive relations at the local level and Acknowledging the past the target beneficiaries might include:

Areas

- Sectarian interface areas where segregation is high and inter-community conflict and dispute are high and community relations are correspondingly poor.
- Disadvantaged areas suffering the effects of physical dereliction as a consequence of the conflict.
- Areas that have experienced high levels of sectarian and racial crimes, incidents and tensions.
- Areas isolated by border closures and limited economic and social cross-border linkages.
- Areas where social and economic development have been inhibited by the conflict and problems of exclusion and marginalisation exist, illustrated by low levels of

income, skills and qualification and consequently display high levels of multiple deprivation.

Communities and groups

- Victims of the conflict, ie the surviving injured and/or disabled (either physically or psychologically) of violent, conflict related incidents and those who care for or are related to them, along with close relatives who mourn their dead.
- Displaced persons, ie those who have involuntarily moved from areas of violence or from interface areas, and communities in which there is a concentration of such displaced persons.
- People who have been excluded or marginalised from economic, social and civil networks as a result of problems related to sectarianism, racism and the conflict (this includes, *inter alia*, a focus on young people, women and older people).
- Former members of the security and ancillary services.
- Ex-prisoners and their families, ie qualifying prisoners who were or would have been released under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

Priority 2

For Creating shared public spaces and Key institutional capacities developed for a shared society areas are the same as for priority 1 and groups are:

- People who have been excluded or marginalised from economic, social and civil networks as a result of problems related to sectarianism, racism and the conflict (this includes, *inter alia*, a focus on young people, women and older people).
- Public, private and voluntary sector organisations and their staff who have a contribution to make towards developing a shared society.

Comments

Overall NICVA welcomes these key priorities. They are well focused on peace and reconciliation and take into account the transitional challenges that will be faced as a result of the Review of Public Administration.

However, there is uncertainty around the nature of the partnerships which might be invited to respond to the calls for strategic proposals. With many LSPs winding down, and new structures under the Review of Public Administration not in place until after 2009, interim arrangements may be required. How these might be formed and whether councils will completely control them is unclear. The document does set out in its section on partnership that “The implementation of this activity will build on the experiences of local partnerships in previous programmes, and will facilitate a strong partnership approach at a local level. Local Authorities will be required to work with social partners to develop strategic responses to locally identified needs in a manner that represents the independence of social partners.” NICVA believes that robust guidance on the formation of partnerships will be required to ensure the independence of social partners and ensure maximum participation in local areas.

NICVA welcomes the fact that the Operational Programme specifically mentions the involvement of women in peace-building and the involvement of young people, as this was an issue which came out very strongly in previous consultations.

The inclusion of racism, alongside sectarianism, and the recognition of Northern Ireland’s ethnically changing society is an important aspect of this programme, and one that was highlighted in consultation.

We also welcome that the document makes clear throughout that priorities are focused on urban, rural and cross-border projects. Even though there is no specific cross-border measure in this programme, this element now forms a cross-cutting theme throughout all the key areas.

NICVA welcomes lessons learnt from Peace II and Peace II+ in terms of the simplification of the processes and the clarity in focus regarding the definition of reconciliation, which is again further clarified in this operational programme.

Small grants

NICVA is worried that there may be no opportunity for groups to apply for small grants under this programme. Provision for this in the Operational Programme merely states that small grants may form part of the larger strategic project applications. This leaves it to the discretion of those making the project applications, which will be local councils in many cases, to decide whether there will be small grants in their locality.

Small grants of up to £25,000 can have major benefits for the work of many organisations. In past programmes some IFBs made provisions for the delivery of small grants. This should be made more widespread in the new programme. Small grants delivered in the right way may encourage organisations, which previously avoided the programme because of the perception that it was for large bureaucratic organisations, to get involved in peace-building. This is a serious concern for NICVA and its member organisations.

Moving from Peace II to Peace III

Key lessons that Peace III will take forward from previous Peace Programmes include:

- A greater focus on reconciliation objectives.
- A significant simplification in the complexity of the programme.
- Identifying targets and indicators regarding developing a programme with a very specific focus on reconciliation and specific targets and indicators.
- Promoting innovation.
- Encouraging bottom up approaches.

It is unclear from the document what 'bottom up' will look like either in terms of local delivery mechanisms or partnerships responding to strategic calls for projects.

NICVA welcomes the fact that up to 75% of the total eligible cost of projects will be covered under this programme. The n+2 rule will remain as part of the structure, which has caused problems in the past. This rule means that once funds are committed, they must actually be spent and claimed from Europe within a two year period.

Structure and Implementing Arrangements

The Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) is the designated managing authority for the Peace III Programme and it will implement the delivery of the programme. It will be both managing authority and certifying authority, with one part of the organisation being functionally independent of the other. SEUPB will also perform the role of Joint Technical Secretariat. It will be the body which makes the calls for applications and commissions the support from CRC and Border Action.

A Monitoring Committee will also be formed as with previous programmes. Its role is to ensure the quality and effectiveness of implementation and it will be made up of representatives from the two member states, SEUPB, business, trade unions, agri-rural interests, voluntary and community sector, environment and equality interests.

Responsibility for the selection of projects will be delegated by the Monitoring Committee to a Steering Committee(s), constituted on a cross-border basis and which will “reflect the principles of partnership.” It is unclear whether there will be only one of these, or local versions, or what exact role they will play. As these need to contain appropriate expertise to take decisions on different kinds of funding applications, there may be scope for a number of them to be formed on a thematic or geographic basis, or in line with the four sub-priorities of the programme. There will be concerns about local knowledge in funding decisions in the absence of LSPs and before the new councils are up and running. The Steering Committee(s) will also be used to guide the Joint Technical Secretariat in the kinds of strategic calls for bids they might make.

The added complexity of this programme is that the implementation of the Review of Public Administration will happen in the middle of it. This means that some or all of the functions related to EU funding will be handed over to the new councils at that stage. Therefore the structures being designed now have to be able to cope with two different administrative scenarios.

Strategic Investments

There is a necessity to spend this smaller amount of money strategically and NICVA welcomes this approach but more clarity is needed at this stage. This strategic approach can be complemented with a small grants programme for groups which are not able to participate in the more strategic parts of the programme without compromising the overall strategic intent. It is also possible that in areas where there is a difficult relationship with the local council, voluntary and community organisations could find that participating in the strategic projects is problematic.

Equality

The draft document also includes an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA). Recent figures show a rapid inward migration from Eastern Europe and the EQIA states that the programme will target migrant workers from this area. However, the data collection will need to improve and questions should be included to capture nationality/national identity and a wider range of ethnic groups. In light of the increasing diversity in Northern Ireland, the stated religion question would be more appropriate than community background. Also, more discussion is needed with representative groups to improve the monitoring of sexual orientation. This programme also represents an opportunity to take new legislation into account, for example the marital status category should include consideration of civil partnerships.

Some of the data has to be treated with caution because Peace II implementing bodies did not keep records of the number of forms issued to projects. This needs to be rectified at the planning stage of this programme.

Consultation events

NICVA will be running a series of events as follows:

The dates and venues are:

- **St Columb's Park House, Derry** Monday 5 February 2007 from 10.00am to 1.00pm (in partnership with North West Community Network)
- **NICVA, Belfast** Friday 9 February 2007 from 10.00am to 1.00pm
- **Omagh Community House** Tuesday 13 February 2007 from 10.00am to 1.00pm (in partnership with Focus)
- **Millennium Court Arts Centre, Portadown** Monday 19 February 2007 from 10.00am to 1.00pm in (in partnership with Community Network Craigavon)

To reserve a place at one of these sessions please contact Cathy Breslin on tel: 028 9087 7777 or email: cathy.breslin@nicva.org.

The consultation period closes on 4 April 2007. There is a possibility it may need to be extended slightly if there is an election. The results from consultation sessions across Northern Ireland will feed into a major conference to be hosted by SEUPB at the end of the twelve week period. Following this it will take up to six months for the European Commission to complete its approval process. This means that, even in the most optimistic scenario, the programme will not be up and running until very late this year.

Copies of the draft operational programme are available from SEUPB on 028 9026 6660 or online at seupb.org. The full document, NICVA briefings and other resources are also available on www.nicva.org.

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