

# **NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2020**



North South Ministerial Council  
An Chomhairle Aireachta  
Thuaidh Theas

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## FOREWORD

We are pleased to present this report on the work of the North South Ministerial Council in 2020. The fifteen meetings of the Council held in the course of the year brought the number of meetings held since the inaugural plenary meeting in December 1999 to almost 300. For more than two decades, the Council has worked across twelve areas of policy and through the North South Bodies to develop consultation, co-operation and action in areas of relevance to both the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government, and to deliver social, economic and cultural benefits for people in both jurisdictions.

Prior to 2020, the North South Ministerial Council had last met in December 2016. Following the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive, and the formation of the new Irish Government, the Council's normal pattern of meetings resumed in July 2020. A full programme of meetings across all twelve sectors took place in the second half of the year. The Council also held two institutional meetings and two plenary meetings in the course of 2020.

At the Council's meetings a wide range of issues were discussed, reviewing progress achieved in North South co-operation since 2016, considering current priorities, and looking ahead to future issues and opportunities for mutually beneficial co-operation. Noting the very significant contribution the North South Bodies have continued to make to communities, society and the economy in both jurisdictions, the Council expressed its appreciation to the Boards and staff of the Bodies for their work since 2016.

Work done across the NSMC sectors has continued to make a real and positive difference to people's lives and livelihoods, to businesses and to communities. Progress achieved in recent years through the work programme in the Health Sector provides some notable examples. Achievements include the delivery of the North West Cancer Centre, which was officially opened in 2017 to provide radiotherapy services for the whole North West Region, and has treated more than 700 cross-border patients. In addition, more than 270 patients from Co. Donegal have been treated in Altnagelvin Hospital under the cross-border arrangements agreed in 2016 to provide treatment to patients suffering from serious heart conditions. Other cooperative arrangements in the sector, such as the All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network and the North South Living Donor Exchange Kidney Transplant Service, continue to transform the lives of citizens in both jurisdictions.

The Covid-19 pandemic served to define 2020 and made it a difficult and sombre year for communities across the island. Covid-19 created unprecedented challenges for both Administrations, and a significant focus in each of the recent sectoral meetings was on the contribution that shared North/South policy approaches could make in addressing and reducing the impacts of the pandemic and promoting economic and social recovery.

In operational terms, the pandemic impacted significantly on the working methods of the Council and of the Joint Secretariat. Of the fifteen meetings of the Council held in 2020, just three – the plenary meeting in July and the institutional meetings in March and December – were held in the traditional format. All sectoral meetings, and the December plenary, took place by videoconference.

The implications of Brexit co-operation in each of the NSMC's sectors were considered at meetings of the Council. The common interest of both jurisdictions in minimising disruption to trade and economic activity on the island was recognised.

Commitments made in the context of *New Decade, New Approach* relating to cross-border co-operation on infrastructure and investment were significant elements of the Council's agenda across a number of sectors. Progress in this area demonstrated the continued commitment of the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to work through the NSMC to deliver projects that will benefit people across the island, and to support co-operation to help unlock the full potential of the economies of both jurisdictions. Discussions on the various commitments have taken place at NSMC sectoral meetings and bilaterally between Ministers. In addition, a Senior Officials Group comprising representatives from both Administrations has been established to drive implementation of North South infrastructure and investment commitments set out in *New Decade, New Approach*.

The role of European funding across the sectors continued to feature in the Council's discussions during 2020, with substantial drawdowns made from the EU's 2014-2020 PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes, Horizon 2020, and LIFE. The development of the new PEACE PLUS programme, which was advanced during 2020, will provide significant new resources during the 2021-2027 programme period to promote peace and reconciliation and contribute to cross-border economic and social development.

In the last year, a range of new appointments were made to the Boards of Tourism Ireland, the North South Language Body, InterTradeIreland, SafeFood, and the Loughs Agency. We would also like to thank all those who served previously on the Boards and to offer our best wishes to the new Board members.

We would like to thank officials in the Departments of the Irish Government and the Executive, the North/South Bodies, the agencies that support our work and, in particular, our colleagues in the Secretariat, for their support and co-operation during a very challenging 2020. We also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge in particular the contribution made to the NSMC over many years by our colleague Shane O'Neill, who served as Southern Joint Secretary between 2012 and 2019, and who sadly passed away in February 2021.

Co-operation through the NSMC continues to provide important opportunities to pursue shared policy objectives and improve the lives of citizens across the island. We look forward to advancing the Council's future work programmes and to the real benefits that work will bring to both jurisdictions.



**Tim Losty**  
**Joint Secretary (North)**



**Mark Hanniffy**  
**Joint Secretary (South)**

## CHAPTER 1

### NSMC PLENARY MEETINGS

At NSMC Plenary meetings Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government Ministers meet to take an overview of co-operation on the island and of the North South institutions. There were two NSMC plenary meetings in 2020. The first of these, the first plenary meeting to take place since November 2016, was held at Dublin Castle on 31 July. The second was held on 18 December by video conference and at the NSMC Joint Secretariat offices in Armagh.

On both occasions the Irish Government was led by Micheál Martin TD, Taoiseach, and the Northern Ireland Executive was led by the Rt. Hon. Arlene Foster MLA, First Minister, and Michelle O'Neill MLA, deputy First Minister.

At the July meeting Ministers welcomed the resumption of meetings of the Council. This meeting provided the new Irish Government and the new Northern Ireland Executive with the opportunity to meet formally for the first time and exchange views on a wide range of issues of mutual interest and concern.

The Joint Communiqués published following each meeting can be found at [www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org](http://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org)



*July 2020 Plenary meeting, Dublin Castle*

### Work of the North South Ministerial Council – Joint Secretaries' Progress Report

At both meetings the Council received a report from the NSMC Joint Secretaries on the work of the North South Implementation Bodies and the Areas of Co-operation.

At the July meeting the Council noted that the work of the North South Bodies had continued to make a significant contribution to communities, society and the economy in both jurisdictions, and expressed appreciation to the Boards and staff of the Bodies for their work since 2016. The Council also welcomed the mutually beneficial co-operation that continues to be taken forward between Ministers and their Departments across the Areas of Co-operation. Ministers noted the ongoing work of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership and the continued engagement of senior officials from both Administrations with regional stakeholders regarding the direction and priorities for the North West region.

At the December meeting Ministers welcomed the resumption of NSMC sectoral meetings, noting that meetings had taken place in all NSMC Sectors since the previous plenary meeting in July 2020. They noted that, having regard to Covid-19 restrictions in both jurisdictions, meetings took place via videoconference and that 'in person' meetings would resume as soon as public health conditions permitted. The Council noted that each sector had considered a wide range of issues including Covid-19 recovery, priorities and work programmes and the implications of UK withdrawal from the EU as well as various sector-specific matters.

## **Response to Covid-19**

The Council discussed the Coronavirus pandemic at both plenary meetings, expressing their condolences to all those who had lost loved ones. They also expressed their appreciation to all those who had played, and continued to play, a part in the Covid-19 response, and acknowledged in particular the extraordinary courage, resilience and commitment of health and social care workers in their work on the front line, and the wider workforce of essential workers who have kept various services and facilities operational, often in challenging circumstances.

At both meetings the Council received a briefing from the Chief Medical Officers on the current public health situation and on ongoing co-operation in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the July meeting, the Council noted that senior representatives of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government, and their Chief Medical Officers, had met at the NSMC Secretariat offices in Armagh on 14 March to review the situation regarding the Covid-19 virus and how best to address the outbreak. Senior representatives of both Administrations have continued to meet regularly to discuss the ongoing Covid-19 response.

At both meetings, the Council welcomed the close and productive co-operation that continues to take place between Health Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and health administrations, North and South, to deliver an effective public health response.

At both meetings the Council also discussed the impact of the pandemic on society and on the economy, North and South, and the measures put in place by both Administrations to support communities and businesses affected by the crisis and to assist economic recovery. Ministers agreed that upcoming meetings of the Council in relevant sectors will continue to consider how North-South approaches could contribute to the promotion of economic and social recovery.

## **Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

At the July plenary meeting the Council discussed the implications of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, including the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. The common interest of both jurisdictions to minimise disruption to trade and economic activity on the island was recognised.

At the December meeting the Council noted that, in light of the ongoing negotiations, full clarity on the impact on co-operation in a number of areas was not yet available. The Council agreed that, irrespective of the outcome of negotiations, engagement between the Administrations on this matter should continue, both within the structures of the Council and elsewhere, taking account of the evolving position. Ministers noted the role conferred upon the NSMC in relation to the submission of proposals concerning the implementation and application of the Protocol to the Specialised Committee which has been established to consider issues related to the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and agreed that officials should work to develop an appropriate mechanism, for Ministers to agree, for referring proposals to the Specialised Committee.

### **New Decade, New Approach Commitments**

The NSMC plenary meeting held on 31 July 2020 outlined a way forward on aspects related to New Decade, New Approach commitments and requested that relevant Ministers and their officials take forward discussions on these commitments, including where appropriate through the work of relevant NSMC sectors. The Council also noted that senior officials would continue to meet regularly to maintain a strategic overview of the projects and commitments set out in the context of New Decade, New Approach.

In December, Ministers noted that discussions on various commitments had taken place at NSMC sectoral meetings and bi-laterally between Ministers where the commitments are being advanced outside the NSMC structures in relation to:

- the delivery of the A5 Western Transport Corridor;
- the progress of the Ulster Canal restoration project and the Ulster Canal Greenway;
- the review of the rail network across both jurisdictions;
- the next steps to progress the Narrow Water Bridge project;
- the review into air connectivity commenced by the Department of Transport;
- the development of the Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway;
- higher education provision in the North West region;
- ongoing engagement with the North West Strategic Growth Partnership; and
- co-operation in the area of research and innovation.

### **Boards of North South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland**

At the July meeting the Council approved the appointment of directors to the Board of Tourism Ireland, and agreed that appointments would be made to fill remaining vacancies on the Boards of North South Implementation Bodies at future meetings of the Council.

### **Future NSMC meetings**

At both plenary meetings the Council approved a schedule of NSMC meetings proposed by the Joint Secretariat, and agreed that at upcoming sectoral meetings Ministers would consider priorities and work programmes in the relevant sectoral areas.



## CHAPTER 2

### INSTITUTIONAL MEETINGS

The North South Ministerial Council meets in Institutional format to discuss institutional and cross-sectoral issues. Two NSMC Institutional meetings took place this year, on 11 March and on 16 December.

On 11 March the Irish Government was represented by Helen McEntee TD, Minister of State for European Affairs and the Northern Ireland Executive was represented by Declan Kearney MLA and Gordon Lyons MLA, Junior Ministers. On 16 December the Northern Ireland Executive was represented by the Rt. Hon. Arlene Foster MLA, First Minister and Michelle O'Neill MLA, deputy First Minister, and the Irish Government was represented by Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Joint Communiqués published following each meeting can be found at [www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org](http://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org)



*First Minister the Rt. Hon. Arlene Foster MLA, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney TD and deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA, at the December Institutional meeting in Armagh. The meeting observed Covid-19 regulations.*

### Response to Covid-19

At the December meeting the Council noted that Covid-19 issues had been discussed in all NSMC sectors, including the impact of the pandemic on those sectors and the potential contribution of co-operation in those sectors to economic and social recovery.



Ministers welcomed the engagement and commitments to date across both jurisdictions in responding to Covid-19, particularly in health co-operation, and noted that both Administrations will continue to cooperate, whenever it is practicable to do so, to ensure the best response to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

## **UK Withdrawal from the EU**

In December, Ministers also noted that the Council had considered the implications of the UK withdrawal from the EU in each of the NSMC sectors. Ministers agreed that they, and their officials, will continue to engage to ensure that co-operation is maintained following the end of the transition period. The Council noted that senior officials from the Executive Office, the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs will meet regularly to discuss issues arising from Brexit and will provide regular updates to both Administrations and the NSMC.

## **New Decade, New Approach Commitments**

In December, the Council noted that discussions had taken place on a number of New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) commitments with a cross-border dimension at the NSMC sectoral meetings and bi-laterally among Ministers. A group of senior officials from both jurisdictions has been established to maintain strategic oversight and progress delivery of the projects, focusing on connectivity and infrastructure, research and innovation, and investment in the north-west and border communities. The group meets regularly and provides updates on its work to both Administrations and the NSMC. Ministers also noted the Shared Island initiative and the associated Shared Island Fund of €500 million, available up to 2025, established by the Irish Government, to support investment in new shared initiatives, including the delivery of commitments outlined in New Decade, New Approach.

## **North South Bodies**

### **Board Member Appointments**

At the March meeting the Council approved the appointment of board members to the Trade and Business Development Body, (InterTradelreland), and directors to Tourism Ireland, to fill a limited number of urgent and critical vacancies that were affecting the governance of both Bodies.

At the December meeting the Council approved the appointment of board members to the North South Language Body, the Trade and Business Development Body, (InterTradelreland) and to the Advisory Board of the Food Safety Promotion Board (*safefood*).

### **Operation of North South Bodies and Tourism Ireland**

At the December meeting, the Council noted that the North South bodies continue to deliver on their remit, as outlined in the agreement of 8 March 1999, and that the NSMC maintains oversight of their work. Ministers noted that the bodies have now been in existence for over 20 years and recognised that there have been changes to their operating environments during that time. They agreed that officials should review the operating framework of the bodies to explore whether they remain appropriate and bring forward recommendations if required.

## **Sectoral Priorities**

At the December meeting Ministers noted the discussions that had taken place at NSMC sectoral meetings with the aim of ensuring that the work programmes in the various NSMC areas for co-operation remain up to date and reflect the priorities of the Executive and the Irish Government. The Council agreed that Ministers should regularly review work programmes to ensure that they reflect the priorities of both Administrations. They agreed that consideration of longer-term sectoral priorities was required and that a paper on this will be brought to a future Institutional meeting.

## **North South Bodies Corporate Governance**

At the December meeting, the Council approved the following plans:

- the North/South Language Body Corporate Plan for 2017-19;
- the North/South Language Body Business Plans for 2018, 2019 and 2020;
- Waterways Ireland Business Plans for 2020 and 2021;
- InterTradelreland's Corporate Plan for 2020-22; and
- InterTradelreland's Business Plan for 2021.

All plans had been completed in accordance with agreed guidance issued by the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and had been agreed by the sponsor Departments and Finance Ministers.

Ministers noted that the annual report and accounts for the North/South Language Body for 2016 and 2017 had been laid before the Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Council was advised that the North/South Language Body accounts for 2018 had been certified and would be submitted to a future meeting and that the field audits for the 2019 accounts had commenced in both agencies.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **NSMC SECTORS**

The North South Ministerial Council meets in sectoral format to oversee co-operation in 12 agreed policy sectors. In six of these sectors, co-operation is taken forward by means of North South Implementation Bodies and in the remaining six Areas of Co-operation by means of existing mechanisms in each jurisdiction.

The six North South Implementation Bodies comprise Waterways Ireland, the Food Safety Promotion Board, the Trade and Business Development Body, the Special European Union Programmes Body, the North South Language Body and the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. Further details on the North South Bodies can be found in Annex 3.

Co-operation is also advanced in the agreed areas of Agriculture, Education, Environment, Health, Tourism (including Tourism Ireland) and Transport. Further details of Tourism Ireland can be found at Annex 4.

At NSMC sectoral meetings, the Irish Government is represented by the Minister or the Minister of State responsible for that Sector, and the Northern Ireland Executive is represented by two Ministers, usually being the Minister with responsibility for that Sector within the Executive and another nominated by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on a cross-community basis.

The Joint Communiqués published following these meetings are available at [www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/publications](http://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/publications).

## **AGRICULTURE**

A North South Ministerial Council Agriculture meeting was held on 18 November 2020 in the NSMC Joint Secretariat offices, Armagh and by video conference. Edwin Poots MLA, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Nichola Mallon MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, Charlie McConalogue TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Heather Humphreys TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development, attended the meeting.

### **Response to Covid-19**

Ministers discussed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Council noted the collaborative approach to further studies of Covid-19 risk in meat processing plants and its proposed mitigation as well as the position with regard to the ongoing difficulties being experienced on agricultural markets and the associated measures introduced to address these difficulties.

Ministers noted the continuing close contacts between officials from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) on a range of issues associated with the pandemic.

### **Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

Ministers noted the work being carried out to prepare for the end of the transition period and agreed to further investigate potential for co-operation to address the specific challenges which may arise for the sector.

### **Review of Work Programme**

The Council noted that DAERA, DAFM and DRCD would hold a workshop in early 2021 to review the work programme in the Agriculture Sector and noted that an update paper would be brought to the next Agriculture sectoral meeting.

### **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Issues**

The Council noted that DAERA intended to launch its Future Agricultural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland in the coming months. It also noted the simplifications DAERA intends to make to the rules governing direct payments for the 2021 scheme and the longer term approach to support payments being considered by DAERA.

Ministers noted the future plans being developed by DAFM for the agri-food sector under the latest CAP proposals and noted the resumption of close contact between officials from DAERA and DAFM on areas of mutual interest in the agri-food sector, in particular on significant environmental issues, as they relate to the implementation of future agriculture policy.

## **Animal Health**

Ministers welcomed the continuing work and progress achieved on the delivery of the 'All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy Action Plan' since the previous NSMC Agriculture meeting on 26 October 2016 and encouraged officials from both jurisdictions to seek ways to maximise existing co-operation on animal health and welfare. Ministers looked forward to the continuation of practical and effective co-operation on animal health and welfare, and disease control in both jurisdictions, in order that the health and welfare of livestock is maintained at the highest level.



## **Plant Health and Pesticides**

The Council noted the progress made with the review of the 'All-Ireland Chalara Control Strategy' by officials from DAFM and DAERA in response to ongoing scientific and surveillance evidence and noted the research being undertaken to develop a population of Irish planting stock tolerant to the Chalara Ash Dieback disease.

Ministers noted the ongoing commitment of DAFM and DAERA to continue to work towards the shared objective of achieving and maintaining good plant health status on the island and welcomed the continued cross-border co-operation in dealing with tree and plant health and in the shared approach to regulation, as evidenced through a common approach to Oak Processionary Moth risk management. The Council also welcomed the joint approach to the continued sharing of science and diagnostic capability and in the regulation of the use of pesticides.

## **Farm Safety**

The Council welcomed the continuing co-operation between both Administrations and the ongoing work to improve farm safety, including the issuing of a joint North South press release to increase awareness of farm safety across both jurisdictions and the sharing of information in relation to 'On Feirm Ground' and the EU funded COST Action programme on Farm Safety. Ministers welcomed the sharing of the NI Farm Safety Partnership fourth Action Plan and the sharing of commissioned farm safety research results.

## **Rural Development**

The Council noted the work that is ongoing in both jurisdictions to develop rural policy and the strong commitment to further enhancing the sharing of information and best practice on rural development policy. Ministers noted the good progress made in both jurisdictions in implementing the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme including under areas of co-operation. The Council also noted the excellent progress towards developing a co-produced rural development support package for inclusion in the new PEACE PLUS cross-border programme.

## **EU Funding Update**

The Council welcomed the ongoing good collaboration between DAERA and DAFM aimed at maximising the drawdown of EU funding under Horizon 2020. Ministers welcomed the €102m secured in funding to date by successful applications from both jurisdictions for the Agriculture, Forestry, Food and Marine sectors and the bio-economy and noted the progress made in funding projects, in both jurisdictions, under the DAFM National Competitive Call and the agriculture research themes under the US-Ireland R&D Partnership.



## **EDUCATION**

A North South Ministerial Council Education meeting was held at the NSMC Joint Secretariat offices in Armagh, and by video conference, on 6 November 2020. The meeting was attended by Norma Foley TD, Minister for Education, Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education, and Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Minister for Communities.

### **Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

The Council noted an assessment of the likely implications for the education sector arising from the UK's withdrawal from the EU and welcomed the commitments made to take all necessary measures to ensure that the agreed Common Travel Area (CTA) rights and privileges are protected. Ministers also welcomed the commitments made in relation to the future PEACE PLUS programme and the work that is underway to develop the programme and reaffirmed their commitment to continued co-operation on education issues following the conclusion of the transition period.

### **Response to Covid-19**

Ministers welcomed the commitment of all teaching staff in both jurisdictions to deliver remote learning to pupils. They noted the importance and context of the successful re-opening of all schools, a core policy objective in both jurisdictions, in accordance with hygiene and public health protocols.



The Council noted the heightened concern of Education Ministers for pupils with complex and additional learning needs and acknowledged the efforts of teaching and other critical support staff to maintain students' relationships and connections with schools. The Council expressed its appreciation to all staff engaged in the delivery of education in these exceptional times.

Education Ministers, and their officials, will continue sharing information and advance notice of key decisions where practicable. Ministers will convene a meeting of senior Departmental officials, along with agencies/bodies with responsibility in vital support areas, and report findings to the next NSMC meeting in this sector.

### **Review of Work Programme**

A commitment to review the work programme and a plan to convene a meeting of senior officials from relevant departments to make recommendations for the future work programme was welcomed.

### **Update on EU Funding**

Ministers noted the impact Covid-19 has had on PEACE IV funded shared education projects and that the use of online technologies to promote the objectives of shared education was being explored.

The Council noted high level engagement that has taken place between Departments on PEACE PLUS, the draft proposals for PEACE PLUS in relation to the theme of Youth, and the potential for ambitious and innovative proposals under PEACE PLUS to promote respect and understanding on a cross-border and cross-community basis.

### **Educational Underachievement**

The NSMC noted the ‘lessons learnt’ and recommendations from the Final Evaluation Report on the North-South Underachievement Practitioners Engagement Project, which was published by Co-operation Ireland in July 2017.

Ministers noted the appointment of an Expert Panel by the Northern Ireland Minister of Education, under the New Decade, New Approach Agreement to examine the links between persistent educational under-achievement and socio-economic background. Research on the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme has been provided to the Panel. An Interim Report and draft Action Plan will be provided by 31 March 2021 and a Final Action Plan by 31 May 2021.

### **Special Educational Needs**

Ministers welcomed the progress being made by the two Education Departments and Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) to facilitate and maintain the delivery of the Centre’s range of services. The Council welcomed the efforts of MCA management and staff to remain operational and the continued delivery of elements of their service throughout the period of Covid-19 restrictions. The proposed delivery plan for the Centre was noted.

The Council also noted that MCA has been considering the potential implications of the UK withdrawal from the EU and recent developments in the delivery of Special Educational Needs programmes in both jurisdictions.

## **School, Youth and Teacher Exchanges**

The Council noted North-South exchanges in the area of youth work practices and the ongoing activities of the North South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work.

## **Teacher Qualifications**

The NSMC noted the procedures being explored to facilitate reciprocal recognition of teacher qualifications in the context of the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. It also noted an update on the agreement of Marino Institute of Education and St Marys University College regarding the delivery of An Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge (SCG).

The Council was advised that the 18th Annual Conference on Teacher Education North and South, on the theme of 'Teacher Education in the Covid Moment', took place online on 21 October 2020.

## **Co-operation between Education Inspectorates**

Ministers welcomed the continuing collaborative work of the Education Inspectorates covering: capacity building for the Education and Training Inspectorate's inspection of Irish-medium education; the ongoing programme of inspection exchanges and joint working on inspections; the collaborative support in carrying out independent evaluations on projects; and the co-operation between management of both Inspectorates.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

A North South Ministerial Council Environment meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, and by video conference on 21 October 2020. The meeting was attended by Edwin Poots MLA, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Declan Kearney MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office, Eamon Ryan TD, Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications and Darragh O'Brien TD, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.



### **Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

The Council noted the work being carried out to prepare for the end of the transition period and the need for continued co-operation in environmental matters, including those of a cross-border nature. Ministers agreed to continue to cooperate on environmental issues in the coming months, recognising that it is in the common interest of both jurisdictions to work together to minimise disruption to trade and economic activity on the island.

### **Update on EU Funding**

Ministers welcomed the continuing co-operation on, and drawdown for, the main sources of EU Funding in the Environment Sector – INTERREG VA, LIFE and Horizon 2020.

Under the INTERREG VA Environment Objective, nine cross border projects have been awarded funding totalling c. €89 million in the 2014-2020 programme period. Collaboration is ongoing to maximise drawdown of the available EU monies and to continue to implement the programmes as agreed. The commitment to funding INTERREG VA after the UK withdraws from the EU, allowing the projects to be continued until their conclusion in 2023, was noted.

Two North-South collaborations were successfully drawn down under Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 5 (SC5). These related to low-temperature anaerobic digestion treatment of low strength wastewaters and photo-irradiation and adsorption-based novel innovations for waste treatment.

Benefits for joint environmental priorities from a small number of LIFE projects have been achieved through ongoing collaboration between government departments, agencies and their partnerships operating in both jurisdictions.

The potential to build on the success of the INTERREG projects through access to the new PEACE PLUS programme 2021-2027 and its environment policy objective of achieving a greener, low carbon Europe was noted.

Ongoing collaboration between officials in both jurisdictions and the submission of joint position papers focusing on a range of holistic clean air, water catchment and nature-based solutions to address future pressures from climate change, support sustainable economic recovery and protect the environment to inform emerging PEACE PLUS themes was noted.

### **Review of Priorities and Work Programme**

The Council agreed an updated work programme for the sector. The work programme will be kept under review at future NSMC Environment Sector meetings having regard in particular to matters arising from the UK withdrawal from the EU. Ministers agreed that within the work programme, consideration should continue to be given to opportunities for co-operation on wider environmental issues.

### **Cross Border Waste Management**

Both Environment Ministers continue to work together and target resources into joint enforcement action against those involved in illegal waste activity including the continued exchange of intelligence and information on problem areas with the continuation of co-ordinated joint inspections.

### **Waste Management**

Ministers discussed the efforts of both administrations to increase the quantity and quality of recycling including the publication on 4 September 2020 of Ireland's National Waste Policy 2020-2025 'A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy' and the publication of the new Northern Ireland Waste Prevention Programme 'Stopping Waste in its Tracks' and the associated actions and successes.

They also noted the ongoing work in Northern Ireland to tackle plastic pollution and the success of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes in Ireland and the opportunities for both administrations to share examples of good practice in this area.

## **Environmental Protection, Reporting and Research**

The NSMC welcomed the work being undertaken in both jurisdictions to further a clean air strategy and the collaboration between officials working together to identify cross-border research opportunities and to develop proposals.

## **Water Quality**

Ministers noted the publication of the second-cycle River Basin Management Plan for Ireland in April 2018 and welcomed the ongoing preparation of the third-cycle River Basin Management Plans in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

They noted that the public consultation on 'Significant Water Management Issues' (SWMI) closed in Northern Ireland on 22 June 2020 and in Ireland on 7 August 2020. They acknowledged the continued support for the Rivers Trusts in cross border areas and welcomed the level of beach awards in both jurisdictions for 2020 and the continued coordination on the Clean Coast and Coastcare Schemes.

Ministers acknowledged the engagement of both administrations on the work of the Advisory Group for Ireland's Marine Protected Areas. They also noted the continued engagement between the Department for Infrastructure, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Irish Water and Northern Ireland Water on exploring opportunities for co-operation including applications to access funding under the EU's new PEACE PLUS programme.



## HEALTH

A North South Ministerial Council Health meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh and by video conference on 2 October 2020. The meeting was attended by Stephen Donnelly TD, Minister for Health, Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health, and Declan Kearney MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office.

### Response to Covid-19

The Council renewed its expression of appreciation to all those who have played a part in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular the health and social care workers who have led the front-line response and welcomed the achievement of interoperability on an all-island basis of the Covid-19 Proximity Apps deployed in each jurisdiction.



*Minister Swann and Minister Donnelly at the July Plenary checking Covid-19 Proximity Apps*

Ministers welcomed the close and productive co-operation that has taken place between Health Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and health administrations, to deliver an effective public health response.

The Council noted that, since the meeting of senior representatives of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government including respective Chief Medical Officers in Armagh on 14 March to review the situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, both Administrations have continued to meet regularly to discuss the ongoing Covid-19 response. A Memorandum of Understanding on Public Health Co-operation on Covid-19 response was agreed on 7 April.

The Council noted that Health Ministers will continue to meet, both within the NSMC and outside the structures of the Council, to discuss the response to the pandemic.

### **Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

Ministers discussed the implications of UK withdrawal from the EU and noted an update provided on the matter.

### **Review of Work Programme**

Ministers welcomed the progress made to date in relevant areas of the work programme and noted that an updated paper on the review of the work programme, including consideration of the Child Protection work programme, will be considered at a future health sectoral meeting.

### **Update on Co-operation in the Health sector since 2016**

The All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network has successfully delivered its initial work programme and will move forward with the next phase of establishing the academic partnership and developing the research programme.

A Memorandum of Understanding relating to a North-South living donor exchange kidney transplant service was agreed between the Beaumont Hospital in Dublin and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

The ongoing success of the North West Cancer Centre in providing radiotherapy services for the whole North West region was noted.

The Council noted that patients with ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) from County Donegal continue to be transferred to Altnagelvin Hospital for Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (pPCI) treatment.

Both jurisdictions intend to maximise opportunities of the new cross-border structural funds programme (PEACE PLUS) which is currently in development.

The Council noted the updated Memoranda of Understanding in place between the ambulance services to provide for cross-border assistance in the management and resourcing of emergency and urgent calls and declared major incidents.

The Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) cross-border health and social care partnership is continuing to benefit from EU funding to support cross-border service delivery and is currently leading four health strands funded by INTERREG VA.

The North/South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group, which was established to contribute to reducing alcohol related harm on the island of Ireland, has continued to meet.

An update on smoking initiatives in both jurisdictions, including Tobacco Free Ireland, electronic cigarettes and banning smoking in cars, was noted.

In February 2020, the Department of Health (N) published a mid-term review of its tobacco control strategy. The development of the strategy was assisted by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

The various research initiatives under the Physical Activity Plan have been progressed on an all-island basis, including the Irish Physical Activity Collaboration (iPARC), and the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study, led by Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland.

Suicide prevention continues to be a key priority in both jurisdictions and the Department of Health (N) Protect Life 2 Suicide Prevention strategy is being implemented with new structures being established to drive progress.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been developed between the Health Service Executive, Ireland, Psychosocial Response to Covid-19 Programme and the Department of Health (N), Mental Health and Resilience Strategic Working Group to engage in co-operation and collaboration in psychosocial response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Child Protection**

The Council noted that the cross border Steering Group of officials, co-chaired by the Department of Health (N) and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, continues to meet to promote a coordinated approach on child protection issues.

The Council also received an update in relation to the protocol between Northern Ireland and Ireland for handling inter-jurisdictional child cases, and noted that an updated protocol will be presented at a future meeting of the NSMC.

## TOURISM

A North South Ministerial Council Tourism meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat offices, Armagh, and by video conference on 25 November 2020. The meeting was attended by Catherine Martin TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Diane Dodds MLA, Minister for the Economy, and Conor Murphy MLA, Minister of Finance.



*Minister Catherine Martin and Minister Diane Dodds promoting Tourism in 2020*

### Response to Covid-19

Ministers discussed how, since the emergence of the pandemic in March 2020, the travel and tourism industry had faced its biggest crisis to date both on the island of Ireland and right across the globe. In response to these challenges, taskforces in both jurisdictions were established and Tourism Ireland has been developing its Covid-19 Recovery Planning Framework – Restart, Rebuild, Redesign – to support tourism recovery when conditions improve. The Council noted the efforts made to deal with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Tourism Sector and acknowledged the importance of continued co-operation across both jurisdictions to address the impact of Covid-19 as the sector begins to recover.

### Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU

Ministers noted activity undertaken by Tourism Ireland to prepare for the UK withdrawal from the EU and noted that the Department for the Economy and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media will continue to support Tourism Ireland in this regard.

### Tourism Ireland Progress Report

The Council received a report from Joan O'Shaughnessy, the Chairperson of Tourism Ireland on the work of the board since the last NSMC Tourism meeting. Included in this was the development, approval and monitoring of the business plans for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 and the corporate plans 2017–2019 and 2020–2022. The Chief Executive of Tourism Ireland, Niall Gibbons outlined key achievements and progress made in delivering Tourism Ireland's performance goals from 2016 to February 2020 in addition to work undertaken later in the year.

Between 2016 and 2019, the island of Ireland and Tourism Ireland received numerous awards and accolades and visitor numbers continued to increase up until the outbreak and spread of Covid-19.

Ministers noted the progress made in delivering Tourism Ireland's performance goals from 2016 to February 2020 and Tourism Ireland's activity during the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020. The NSMC noted the progress made in developing the Covid-19 Recovery Planning Framework – Restart, Rebuild, Redesign – to support the recovery of the tourism industry from the devastating impact of the pandemic.

### **Corporate Governance Matters**

Ministers discussed various corporate governance matters that required the attention of the Council and approved Tourism Ireland's Business Plans and Budgets/Grants for 2017, 2018 and 2019, and Tourism Ireland's 2017-2019 Corporate Plan, which have been agreed by Sponsor Departments and Finance Ministers. The Council noted that Tourism Ireland's Business Plan for 2020, including the budget/grant provision, had been completed and submitted to Sponsor Departments and will be brought to a future NSMC meeting for approval. The NSMC also noted that Tourism Ireland had prepared an addendum to the 2020 Business Plan to guide its operations in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ministers noted that the Tourism Ireland 2020-22 Corporate Plan had been approved at board level but was being reviewed in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and an amended plan will be brought to a future NSMC meeting for approval.

The Council noted the Annual Reports and Accounts for the years 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 which have been laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Ministers noted that in December 2019 the Tourism Ireland Board approved the granting of a general Power of Attorney as a short-term measure until further Board Directors were appointed by the NSMC, and that this Power of Attorney remained effective until the Board meeting of 25 March 2020. A number of appointments to the Board of Tourism Ireland were made at institutional and plenary meetings of the Council held in March and July 2020.

### **Staffing and Organisational Issues**

The Council noted the continuation of the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer of Tourism Ireland and also noted recent developments with regard to Tourism Ireland's staffing complement and that officials would take forward discussions on this and report back to a future meeting.

### **Review of Work Programme**

The NSMC agreed that officials from the Department for the Economy and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media will review the existing work programme in the NSMC Tourism Sector and report back to the next meeting of the Council in this sector on priorities identified.



## TRANSPORT

A North South Ministerial Council Transport meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh and by video conference on 7 October 2020. The meeting was attended by Nichola Mallon MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, Gordon Lyons MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office, and Eamon Ryan TD, Minister for Transport.



*Minister Eamon Ryan and Minister Nichola Mallon promote cycling at the July Plenary*

## Covid-19 Response

Ministers discussed the ongoing liaison and communication in relation to transport services, operations and protocols in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council agreed that Ministers and their officials will continue to cooperate and communicate on the impact of the pandemic on transport operations.

## Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU

The Council noted the work carried out to prepare for the end of the transition period and the implications from a North/South perspective arising as a result of the UK withdrawal, and agreed that co-operation on transport issues should continue in the coming months.

## EU Funding Update

Co-operation continued between the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Transport on EU funding related matters including the potential loss of funding opportunities for Northern Ireland under the Connecting Europe Facility Transport Programme, arising from the UK withdrawal from the EU. The potential opportunities



that arise within the new PEACE PLUS programme (2021-2027) were recognised as important to this sector.

### **New Decade, New Approach Commitments**

Discussions took place on the various commitments outlined in the New Decade, New Approach document and associated annexes, in particular in the area of infrastructural investment.

Both Governments remain committed to the A5 Western Transport Corridor scheme as part of New Decade, New Approach and the Irish Government re-affirmed its £75m commitment to the project. Following a Public Inquiry into the scheme in early 2020 the Department for Infrastructure received an Interim Report from the Commissioner on 2 September 2020 and following consideration, the Minister for Infrastructure will decide on the proposed next steps for the scheme.

In relation to issue of high-speed rail connectivity, Ministers noted that the Department of Transport and the Department for Infrastructure would further develop draft terms of reference for a proposed study of rail speeds to ensure that the terms of reference take sufficient cognisance of the need for balanced regional development, particularly in relation to connectivity with the North-West.

The commitments outlined in New Decade, New Approach in relation to the Narrow Water Bridge were noted. Departments will consider next steps to progress the scheme.

A review to explore potential Government support for renewed air services between Belfast/Cork and City of Derry Airport/Dublin will be progressed by the Department of Transport, working with the Department for the Economy and the UK Department for Transport.

The Council also noted the ongoing work in relation to cross-border greenways.

### **Review of Work Programme**

Ministers noted that the current transport work programme dates back to 1999 and agreed it would be useful to review it to ensure the work programme takes account of developments both globally and locally, the work already done and lessons learned from that work. The Department of Transport and the Department for Infrastructure, in consultation with the Joint Secretariat, will draft an updated work programme for consideration by the Council.

## **AQUACULTURE AND MARINE**

A North South Ministerial Council Aquaculture and Marine meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat offices in Armagh, and by video conference, on 21 October 2020. The meeting was attended by Eamon Ryan TD, Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Edwin Poots MLA, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and Nichola Mallon MLA, Minister for Infrastructure.

The Council received an update on progress in this sector since the last meeting in 2016.

### **Loughs Agency Progress Report**

Ministers welcomed a progress report from the Loughs Agency's Designated Officer, Sharon McMahon. The Council welcomed the update on the activities of the Loughs Agency including the ongoing conservation and protection efforts. The Council also noted in particular the Agency's response to Covid-19, the Agency's Strategic Direction for a New Decade 2020-30, the collaborative work in delivery of a number of conservation, angling and marine tourism development projects and the success of the Foyle and Carlingford Ambassador Programme. Ministers also welcomed the Loughs Agency's continued investment in its scientific fisheries monitoring programme.



*Loughs Agency Fishery Patrol on Lough Foyle*

### **Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

The Council noted that the Loughs Agency, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) will continue to work together to consider the impact of the UK withdrawal from the EU and noted that this matter will be kept under review at future NSMC meetings in this sector.

## **Corporate Governance Matters**

The Council approved the Loughs Agency Business Plans and Budgets/Grants for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. Ministers also approved the Loughs Agency 2017-2019 and 2020-2022 Corporate Plans.

Ministers noted the Loughs Agency Annual Reports and Accounts for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018, which have been laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

## **Renewal of Framework for Processing Loughs Agency Emergency Regulations**

The Council approved the continuation of the framework designed to support the Loughs Agency in dealing with emergencies such as a serious pollution incident for a period of one year with effect from 21 October 2020 and agreed to review the operation of this procedure, including its possible renewal, based on a report from the Loughs Agency and the Sponsor Departments later in 2021.

## **Chief Executive Recruitment Process**

The Council noted that the Loughs Agency, with the support of DAERA and DECC, is undertaking a competitive recruitment process for the post of Chief Executive of the Agency. The recruitment process will be managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) as agreed with the Sponsor Departments.

## **Board Appointments**

The Council approved two appointments to the Board of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC/Loughs Agency) at an institutional meeting held in December 2020.

## FOOD SAFETY

A North South Ministerial Council Food Safety meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh and by video conference on 2 October 2020. The meeting was attended by Stephen Donnelly TD, Minister for Health, Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health, and Declan Kearney MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office.

### Progress Report

The CEO of *safefood* provided an overview of the work of *safefood* and made reference to high level achievements and campaigns including successful campaigns related to hand washing, childhood obesity and cooking chicken and burgers.

The Council noted that *safefood* had developed and distributed various resources in educational settings, had developed networks including community food initiatives, knowledge networks, and the All-Island Obesity Action Forum.



*safefood and the Healthy Living Centre Alliance launching a new campaign to support families to improve their food shopping habits by transforming their shopping trolleys with healthy balanced meals. Pictured is (left to right): Julie White, Healthy Living Centre Alliance; Tony Doherty, Healthy Living Centre Alliance and Andrew Castles, safefood*

Ministers noted that *safefood* had engaged with customers on social media and carried out research in relation to food allergens, folate status in women, lifetime costs of childhood overweight and obesity, food portion sizes, treat foods and the impact of climate change on dairy production.

Progress was also noted in relation to the tripartite initiative between *safefood*, the Public Health Agency and the Food Standards Agency NI in rolling out minimum nutritional standards for catering for staff and visitors in health and social care settings.

### **Corporate Governance**

The Council noted *safefood*'s Annual Reports and Accounts for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018, which had been laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

### ***safefood* Advisory Board Appointments**

The Council approved the appointments of members to the *safefood* Advisory Board.

### ***safefood* Advisory Committee Appointments**

The Council approved the appointments of members to the *safefood* Advisory Committee.

### **Position of CEO**

The Council approved the reappointment of Ray Dolan as Chief Executive Officer of *safefood*.



## **INLAND WATERWAYS**

A North South Ministerial Council Inland Waterways meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, and by video conference on 11 November 2020. The meeting was attended by Darragh O'Brien TD, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Malcolm Noonan TD, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Nichola Mallon MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, and Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health.

### **Covid-19 Response**

The response by Waterways Ireland to Covid-19 was considered. Ministers noted the increase in user numbers along towpaths and trails during the period of Covid-19 related restrictions. Waterways Ireland is leading a user engagement project through the Network of Inland Waterways of Europe in order to gain greater understanding of the increased recreational use of inland waterways since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, including the increasing popularity of the inland waterways as a holiday destination for the domestic market.



*A family enjoying a walk on the Royal Canal Greenway*

### **Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

Waterways Ireland's preparations for the UK withdrawal from the EU was discussed in the context of its status as a North South Implementation Body.



## **Progress Report**

An overview of the work of Waterways Ireland was provided. The management and maintenance of waterways continued with over 90% of the waterways remaining open for navigation. Capital expenditure focused on major infrastructure repairs, with the first phase of the reinstatement and repair of the weir at Meelick and work on the rehabilitation of Carnroe Weir on the lower Bann planned for spring 2021. There is an ongoing programme of replacement of existing jetties and installation of new jetties at several locations and replacement of lock gates along the navigations. There was an extension of the infrastructure at the Shannon Blueway Trail and plans for a development of the Barrow Blueway.

The completion of the restoration of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Castle Saunderson was noted, as was the commencement of restoration work on the stretch of the Ulster Canal from Clones to Clonfad along with the continued progress on the Ulster Canal Greenway.

Waterways Ireland won the “Guardian Award” at the 2016 World Canals Conference for the first ever Traditional Boat Survey of the Royal Canal, Grand Canal, and Barrow Navigation. They also hosted the World Canals Conference in Athlone in 2018 attracting 48 speakers from around the world and welcoming over 300 delegates to visit the world-class waterways and view of feats of engineering. Waterways Ireland won a Public Sector Green Award 2020 in recognition of its contribution and commitment towards growing a greener future.

The number of boats registered to use the navigations increased by 3,288 over the period 2016 to 2019.

## **Corporate Governance Matters**

The Council noted the Waterways Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for 2016, 2017 and 2018, which had been laid before the NI Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Annual Report and Draft Accounts for 2019 have been submitted to the Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions and, following certification, will be laid before the Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Waterways Ireland 2017-2019 Corporate Plan and Business Plans and Budgets for 2017, 2018 and 2019 were approved by the Council. The 2020 and 2021 Business Plans and Budgets were approved at the December Institutional meeting.

## **CEO Recruitment Process**

The process for the recruitment of the Chief Executive Officer for Waterways Ireland was approved and commenced with the appointment expected in early 2021.

## **Property Disposals**

The Council consented to a number of property disposals.

## **NORTH SOUTH LANGUAGE BODY**

A North South Ministerial Council Language Body meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat offices, Armagh, and by video conference on 27 November 2020. The meeting was attended by Jack Chambers TD, Minister of State for the Gaeltacht and Sport, Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Minister for Communities, and Gordon Lyons MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office.

The Chief Executive Officers of the Agencies that comprise the North South Language Body (Foras na Gaeilge/Irish Language Agency and Tha Boord o UlsterScotch/ Ulster-Scots Agency) and representatives of their Boards updated Ministers on the operational activities of the Agencies since the last sectoral meeting in 2016.

The Council noted several achievements, including the following:

### **Ulster-Scots Agency**

- the distribution of more than £4 million in grant aid to support Ulster Scots cultural activities across Ulster;
- the development of the Discover Ulster-Scots Centre, East Donegal and refurbishment of the Monreagh Ulster-Scots Heritage Centre, Carrigans;
- 30 additional schools across Ulster were supported to achieve Ulster-Scots Flagship School status;
- the first ever Ulster-Scots Language Week, including the Wheen o Wurds Quiz, which was taken by over 30,000 people worldwide was delivered; and
- the continued building of relationships with key stakeholders in Scotland including working with Scots Language Dictionaries to develop an Ulster-Scots Dictionary Project for inclusion in the emerging Ulster-Scots strategy.

### **Foras na Gaeilge**

- the publication of the online English-Irish dictionary, and subsequent launch of the print version, which has been distributed to bookshops;
- the supports provided to some 400 organisations annually through 23 separate schemes and funding provided to approximately 170 groups under the schemes for young people, 50 groups supporting festivals and 18 drama companies, along with business-support schemes;
- the Irish Language Officers' Scheme was reviewed. The scheme provided match-funding for four Development Officers in Belfast City Council (1); Derry City & Strabane (1); Fermanagh & Omagh District Council (2);
- the provision of annual funding for two Cultúrlainn in Derry/Londonderry and Belfast to employ eight staff members, and for two community radio stations to employ eight members of staff between them; and
- téarma.ie, the Terminology Database for Irish was launched and the new English-Irish dictionary is now online with the print version of the dictionary being distributed to bookshops throughout the island and abroad.

There has also been ongoing collaboration between the Agencies of the Body on various corporate and organisational initiatives. This included child protection materials and policies, completion of annual reports and corporate plans, coordination of statutory returns and the sharing of organisational insights and information which assist both agencies in fulfilling their roles.



*Pádraig Ó Mianáin, Foras na Gaeilge, presents new English-Irish dictionary to An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin*



*Ulster-Scots Agency's Big Burns Day celebrations at Belfast City Hall in January 2020*

## **Impact of Covid-19**

The Council noted the impact of the pandemic on the sector, and the measures put in place by both Administrations to prevent the closure of key organisations, stabilise the sector and support longer term recovery, renewal and change. Ministers welcomed the continued commitment of all staff and organisations in both jurisdictions who work to promote and provide support to the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Impact of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

The Council noted that the Agencies will continue to work together with relevant departments in both jurisdictions to consider the impact of the UK withdrawal from the EU. Ministers noted that the Body does not anticipate significant impacts on the sector, and that this matter will be kept under review at future NSMC meetings in this sector.

## **Corporate Governance Matters**

At the institutional meeting of the Council, held in Armagh on 16 December, Ministers noted the Body's Annual Reports and Accounts for the years 2016 and 2017, which had been laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Council noted that the North South Language Body Annual Reports and Accounts for 2018 had been certified and would be submitted to the NSMC at a future meeting and that the field audits for the 2019 accounts had commenced in both Agencies.

The Council approved the North South Language Body Business Plans and Budgets/Grants for 2018, 2019 and 2020, and the 2017-2019 Corporate Plan, which had been completed in accordance with agreed guidance issued by the Department of

Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and had been agreed by Sponsor Departments and Finance Ministers. The Council noted that following the necessary approvals, the North South Language Body 2020-2022 Corporate Plan and 2021 Business Plan would be tabled at a future NSMC meeting.

### **Appointment of Board Members to the North South Language Body**

The Council approved the appointment of a number of Board Members, both at the November sectoral meeting and at the institutional meeting held in Armagh in December.

## **SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES**

A North South Ministerial Council Special EU Programmes meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, and by video conference on 30 October 2020. The meeting was attended by Conor Murphy MLA, Minister for Finance, Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education and Michael McGrath TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

The Council noted that the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration provide for the continuation of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes and for a successor programme. The implementation of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes is continuing and planning for the PEACE PLUS programme is underway.

### **Response to Covid-19**

The impact of Covid-19 on the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes and the actions implemented by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to assist project delivery and ensure programme implementation were noted. The Council also noted that the PEACE PLUS programme, which is under development, will incorporate Covid-19 recovery actions.

### **Current Programmes**

The SEUPB Chief Executive provided an overview of the 2014-2020 PEACE and INTERREG programmes. The SEUPB continues to facilitate North/South participation in the INTERREG VB and VC Regional and Transnational, and Inter-regional programmes. The Council noted that 96 projects worth €277.9m have been approved for PEACE IV, and 34 projects worth €291.1m have been approved for INTERREG VA.

### **PEACE PLUS**

The Council noted the progress on the development of the PEACE PLUS programme and the public consultation to be undertaken to provide for further stakeholder engagement. Following further discussions with Departments and Ministers to reach an agreed programme, the final PEACE PLUS programme co-operation document will be submitted to both Administrations, to the NSMC and to the European Commission for approval.

### **Business and Corporate Plans**

The Council approved the Special EU Programmes Body Corporate Plans for 2017-19 and 2020-22 and Business Plans for 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.



## **Annual Reports and Accounts**

The Council noted the Special EU Programmes Body Annual Reports and Accounts for 2016, 2017 and 2018, which had been certified by the Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions and laid before the Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas.

## **Staffing and Organisation Matters**

The Council agreed that, while SEUPB's governance structures continue to operate effectively, options for an independent organisation review of SEUPB will be considered by sponsor departments and that draft terms of reference will be submitted to NSMC for consideration prior to the commencement of any review.



*The Springfield Dam PEACE IV funded Shared Spaces project is being delivered through Belfast City Council*



## TRADE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

A North South Ministerial Council Trade and Business Development meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, and by video conference on 25 November 2020. Diane Dodds MLA, Minister for the Economy, Conor Murphy MLA, Minister of Finance, and Leo Varadkar TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment attended the meeting.



*InterTradelreland staff celebrating 20 years of InterTradelreland supporting cross-border trade and business development.*

### **Response to Covid-19**

The Council noted the impact of the pandemic on society and on the economy in both jurisdictions and the measures put in place by both Administrations to support communities and businesses affected by the crisis and to assist economic recovery.

Ministers welcomed the productive co-operation between both Administrations and InterTradelreland in relation to support for businesses facing challenges arising from Covid-19 and noted the support provided by InterTradelreland to assist businesses in coping with these challenges, particularly in the areas of supply chain management, health and safety and human resources.

### **Implications of UK Withdrawal from the EU**

The Council noted the work being undertaken to prepare for the end of the transition period and the implications for co-operation in the Trade and Business Development sector arising as a result of the UK withdrawal.

## **InterTradelreland Progress Report**

Ministers welcomed the progress report provided by the Chair of the Board of InterTradelreland, Ken Nelson, and the Designated Officer, Aidan Gough. The Council welcomed the overall achievements of InterTradelreland from 2016 to 2020 and recognised the valuable contribution that InterTradelreland has made through its trade and development programmes for small and medium-sized companies trading across the border and in both jurisdictions. Ministers commended InterTradelreland for its work in helping businesses to prepare for the UK withdrawal from the EU, and for its research on this issue. The Council also recognised the impact of the innovation and technology programmes run by InterTradelreland, and its support for building relationships between companies and researchers.

## **Corporate Governance Matters**

The Council approved the InterTradelreland Business Plans and Budgets/Grants for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, and the InterTradelreland 2017-2019 Corporate Plan, which had been agreed by Sponsor Departments and Finance Ministers. Ministers noted InterTradelreland's Annual Reports and Accounts for 2016, 2017 and 2018, which had been certified by the Comptrollers and Auditors General, and laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas. Ministers asked Sponsor Departments to consider InterTradelreland's staffing complement, in consultation with the NSMC Secretariat and the Finance Departments, and to provide an update to the next Trade and Business Development Meeting.

At its institutional meeting in December, the Council approved the InterTradelreland Business Plan and Budget/Grant for 2021 and the InterTradelreland 2020-2022 Corporate Plan.

## **Board Appointments**

The Council approved a number of appointments to the Board of InterTradelreland at an institutional meeting in March and at the Trade and Business Development sectoral meeting in November.

## **Collaborative Research and Development**

The Council noted the progress and current position of North/South collaboration in relation to the Horizon 2020 Programme and the achievements and current position in relation to the US-Ireland R&D Partnership. Ministers noted that InterTradelreland will continue to work with relevant stakeholders, including Sponsor Departments, to explore new ways (both financial and non-financial) to maintain and strengthen Research and Innovation collaboration across both jurisdictions.

## **Chief Executive Officer Recruitment Process**

The Council noted that the process for appointing a Chief Executive Officer to InterTradelreland has commenced, using the existing approved process and following consultation with the NSMC Joint Secretariat and the respective Finance Departments.



## CHAPTER 4

### NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The NSMC Joint Secretariat hosted a seminar for schools in the Joint Secretariat's offices in Armagh on Thursday 23 January 2020 focusing on the subject of road safety.

The interactive seminar was attended by fifty students, aged 16 to 17, from ten schools in the local cross border area. Activities included an overview of the work of the North South Ministerial Council followed by the PSNI and An Garda Síochána, Monaghan, delivering an interactive presentation, with real life examples of how road traffic collisions severely impact families. The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service provided a physical demonstration on extracting casualties from a vehicle following a road traffic collision.

After the presentations students from the participating schools had the opportunity to play the role of Ministers from the Executive and Irish Government by taking part in a mock North South Ministerial Council meeting to discuss road safety issues and agree future policies from the perspectives of education, infrastructure and the law.



*Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service personnel at the NSMC Joint Secretariat student outreach event in January 2020*

## ANNEX 1

### NSMC MEETINGS IN 2020

NSMC Meeting	Date	Location
Plenary	31 July 2020	Dublin Castle
	18 December 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Institutional	11 March 2020	Armagh
	16 December 2020	Armagh
Agriculture	18 November 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Education	06 November 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Environment	21 October 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Health and Food Safety	02 October 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Transport	07 October 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Aquaculture and Marine	21 October 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Inland Waterways	11 November 2020	Armagh and by videoconference

North South Language Body	27 November 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Special EU Programmes Body	30 October 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Trade and Business Development	25 November 2020	Armagh and by videoconference
Tourism	25 November 2020	Armagh and by videoconference

## **ANNEX 2**

### **NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL JOINT SECRETARIAT**

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) is supported by a standing Joint Secretariat staffed by members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Irish Civil Service. The Executive Office (TEO) is the parent Department of the Northern Ireland civil servants and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) is the parent Department of the Irish civil servants.

#### **Functions**

The functions of the Joint Secretariat include:

- arranging the schedule of Council meetings in different formats;
- securing prior political agreement to agendas for meetings of the Council;
- preparing or commissioning papers for meetings of the Council, including in relation to its work programme;
- drafting Joint Communiqués and Records of Decisions of the Council;
- communicating decisions of the Council and monitoring their implementation;
- drafting an annual report on the proceedings of the Council;
- acting as a channel of communication with Implementation Bodies;
- liaising, where appropriate, through the designated Department or Office in either jurisdiction, with the Secretariat of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, the Secretariat of the British-Irish Council and with the North/South joint parliamentary forum and independent consultative forum when established; and
- carrying out such other tasks as the Council may direct.

#### **Funding**

Staff costs are met by TEO and DFA. All other costs associated with the Joint Secretariat and the NSMC are shared between the two administrations. The cost of running the Joint Secretariat in 2020 amounted to Stg £1,755,816/ €1,984,818.



## **ANNEX 3**

### **NORTH SOUTH IMPLEMENTATION BODIES**

Each of the six North South Bodies operates on an all-island basis. All have a clear operational remit and all operate under the overall policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council, with clear accountability lines back to the Council, to the Oireachtas and to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The functions of three of the Bodies, InterTradeIreland, the North South Language Body and the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, are exercised by boards appointed by the NSMC. The Food Safety Promotion Board has an Advisory Board, also appointed by the NSMC, and the functions of the Body are exercised by the Chief Executive. The remaining two Bodies, Waterways Ireland and the Special European Union Programmes Body, do not have Boards, and the functions of the Body are exercised by the Chief Executive.

A brief summary of the Bodies and their main functions and contact details are below.

#### **Waterways Ireland**



[www.waterwaysireland.org](http://www.waterwaysireland.org)

Waterways Ireland's primary function is the management, maintenance, development and restoration of the inland navigable waterway system throughout the island, principally for recreational purposes. Waterways Ireland is responsible for the following navigation systems:

- The Shannon-Erne Waterway
- The Erne System
- The Grand Canal
- The Barrow Navigation System
- The Lower Bann Navigation System
- The Royal Canal
- The Shannon Navigation System

John McDonagh fulfilled the functions of the Chief Executive Officer for Waterways Ireland during 2020 and has since been formally appointed as the Chief Executive Officer. Waterways Ireland's Headquarters is in Enniskillen, with Regional Offices in Scariff, Co Clare, Carrick on Shannon, Co Leitrim and Dublin.

## **Food Safety Promotion Board**



[www.safefood.net](http://www.safefood.net)

The Food Safety Promotion Board is principally charged with tasks involving food safety awareness - through public campaigns, conferences, training and advising professionals and the general public. It is also involved in supporting North South scientific co-operation, and links between institutions working in the field of food safety - laboratories, statutory food safety enforcement agencies, international and domestic research bodies. Its remit also includes the promotion of specialised laboratory services, North and South. Cross-border co-operation in all of these areas, between organisations working in these fields, is central to the work of the Body.

The Chief Executive of the Food Safety Promotion Board is Ray Dolan. The Body operates from its offices in Cork and Dublin.

## **Trade and Business Development Body (InterTradelreland)**



[www.intertradeireland.com](http://www.intertradeireland.com)

InterTradelreland exercises a valuable range of functions in the trade and business sector. Under the overall policy direction of the NSMC, InterTradelreland works in close collaboration with the Department for the Economy, Belfast, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Dublin, and with the existing development agencies, North and South. It has a focus on promoting North South trade and business co-operation by building enterprise capability, competitiveness and developing networks. InterTradelreland aims to add value to the work being carried out by the existing trade and business development agencies.

Aidan Gough served as Designated Officer of InterTradelreland throughout 2020, pending the permanent appointment of a Chief Executive Officer; he had since been succeeded in the role of Designated Officer by Margaret Hearty. InterTradelreland's offices are located in Newry.

## **Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB)**



[www.seupb.eu](http://www.seupb.eu)

The principal responsibility of the SEUPB is as Managing Authority for various EU Programmes. The managerial functions of the SEUPB provide for administration, grant-making and oversight roles in relation to the Community Initiatives under the European Structural Funds. Previous and current fund titles include the INTERREG I, II, III, IVA and VA; LEADER+, URBAN II, EQUAL; the EU Programmes for Peace and Reconciliation, PEACE I, II, III and IV and the Territorial Cooperation Programme.

The Body's Chief Executive is Gina McIntyre. The majority of the Body's staff are based in the Belfast Headquarters, with other offices in Monaghan town and in Omagh, Co Tyrone.

## **Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission**



[www.loughs-agency.org](http://www.loughs-agency.org)

The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission – operates through the Loughs Agency, which has responsibility for the promotion and development of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough for commercial and recreational purposes in respect of marine, fishery and aquaculture matters.

Sharon McMahon is the Designated Officer of the Loughs Agency pending the permanent appointment of a Chief Executive Officer. The Agency's headquarters is located in Derry~Londonderry.

## The Language Body/An Foras Teanga/North-South Body o Leid



[www.forasnagaeilge.ie](http://www.forasnagaeilge.ie)

[www.ulsterscotsagency.com](http://www.ulsterscotsagency.com)

The Language Body is a single Body composed of two agencies - Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch. Foras na Gaeilge is responsible for the promotion of the Irish Language throughout the island and Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch is responsible for promoting the study, conservation, development, and use of the Ulster-Scots as a living language: encouraging and developing the full range of its attendant culture; and promoting an understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots.

Seán Ó Coinn is Chief Executive of Foras na Gaeilge. The Agency has established its main office in Dublin and has subsidiary offices in Belfast and Donegal.

Ian Crozier is Chief Executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency. The Agency has established its main office in Belfast and has a subsidiary office in Donegal.

## ANNEX 4

### TOURISM IRELAND



<https://www.tourismireland.com>

Tourism Ireland is a publicly owned limited company established to promote the island of Ireland overseas as a tourist destination. It operates under the auspices of the North/South Ministerial Council through the NSMC Tourism Sector. Its functions are exercised by a board appointed by the NSMC.

Tourism Ireland works closely with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland in strategic partnership. Each agency has a distinct role and remit, and each complements the work of the other to support the tourism industry in both jurisdictions.

The Chief Executive is Niall Gibbons. The Body operates from its headquarters in Dublin and a regional office in Coleraine.

## **ANNEX 5**

### **BOARD MEMBERS OF NORTH SOUTH BODIES DURING 2020**

*Unless otherwise indicated, board members held office throughout 2020.*

#### **FORAS NA GAEILGE**

Pól Ó Gallchóir (Chairperson)	(until 12 December 2020)
Barra Ó Muirí (Vice Chairperson)	
Dominic Bradley	(from 16 December 2020)
Mairéad Farrell	(until 08 February 2020)
Dáithí Mac Cárthaigh	(from 27 November 2020)
Caoimhín Mac Giolla Mhín	(from 16 December 2020)
Ola Majekodunmi	(from 27 November 2020)
Conor McGuinness	
Sorcha Ní Chéide	
Neasa Ní Chiaráin	(from 27 November 2020)
Maighréad Ní Chonghaile	
Máire Ní Neachtain	
Liadh Ní Riada	(from 16 December 2020)
Niall Iósaf Ó Gallochobhair	
Kevin Ó hEadhra	(from 16 December 2020)
Liam Rushe	(from 16 December 2020)

#### **THA BOORD O ULSTÈR SCOTCH**

Keith Gamble (Chairperson)  
Julie Andrews  
Iain Carlisle  
David McNarry

#### **THE FOYLE, CARLINGFORD AND IRISH LIGHTS COMMISSION**

Laurence Arbuckle (Chairperson)	(from 16 December 2020)
Andrew Duncan (Vice Chairperson)	
Allan Ewart	
Patrick Gibbons	
Heather Mackey	
Philomena Mahon	
Michael McCormick	
Ian McCrea	
Terry McWilliams	
Alastair Patterson	
Fiona Walsh	



## **THE TRADE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BODY**

Ken Nelson (Chairperson)	
Martin McVicar (Vice-Chairperson)	(from 25 November 2020)
Kim Ashton	(from 16 December 2020)
Florence Bayliss	(from 11 March 2020)
Micheál Briody	
Pete Byrne	(from 16 December 2020)
Tim Cairns	
Paul Greenfield	(until 12 December 2020)
Michael Hanley	(from 25 November 2020)
Richard Kennedy	(from 13 December 2020)
Adrienne McGuinness	(from 11 March 2020)
Conor Patterson	(from 16 December 2020)
Anne Rudden	(until 12 December 2020)
David Simpson	(from 16 December 2020)
James Spratt	(until 12 December 2020)

## **FOOD SAFETY PROMOTION BOARD - ADVISORY BOARD**

Helen O'Donnell (Chairperson)	
Alex Attwood	(from 16 December 2020)
Teresa Canavan	(from 16 December 2020)
Maeve Henchion	(from 03 October 2020)
Brendan Kehoe	
Sinéad McCarthy	
Alan McGrath	
Wendy McIntosh	
Stephen Moutray	
Mervyn Oswald	(until 12 December 2020)
Eddie Rooney	
Mary Upton	

## **TOURISM IRELAND CLG**

Joan O'Shaughnessy (Chairperson)	(from 11 March 2020)
Christopher Brooke (Vice-Chairperson)	
Ruth Andrews	(from 31 July 2020)
Trevor Clarke	
Harry Connolly	
Joe Dolan	(from 31 July 2020)
Nóirín Hegarty	(from 11 March 2020)
Graham Keddle	
John McGrillen	
Stephen McNally	(from 31 July 2020)
Mary Mulvey	(from 31 July 2020)
Kathryn Thompson	