

CACDP is a UK recognised awarding body and registered charity whose aim is to improve communication between deaf and hearing people.

CACDP offers a portfolio of qualifications in sign language and other forms of communication with deaf and deafblind people. CACDP is also the UK registration body for professional British Sign Language Interpreters, Lipspeakers, Deafblind Interpreters (Manual) and Speech to Text Reporters.

All of CACDP's qualifications are accredited by [Ofqual](#) and appear on the National Qualifications Framework. Courses leading to a range of CACDP qualifications are provided at approximately 30 centres throughout Northern Ireland.

CACDP welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the review of the Civic Forum. We believe that the previous Civic Forum had tremendous potential as a vehicle for social partnership between Government and the range of civic society in Northern Ireland. Brian Symington, the Regional Director of RNID was one of two disability sector representatives on the Forum, providing a direct link for Deaf people to the work of the forum.

It was disappointing that the 'stop start' nature of devolution during the lifetime of the Forum, combined with the lack of wholehearted engagement from some sections of civic and political society, meant that it failed to reach the potential many felt it may have had. If a new body is to be convened it will need to have widespread political and public support if the considerable time commitment of those involved is to be worthwhile.

All political parties in the Assembly engage with Civic society to varying degrees, and for example when producing manifestos, or responses to consultation documents will be keen to take on board the views of the relevant sector. CACDP would see a social partnership body such as the Civic Forum as a natural progression of this engagement. It would allow the Assembly as a body to engage in a similar way to the way the parties and their various policy teams do on an individual basis. However, we would not see the Civic Forum as a lobbying body, but rather as a body which would compliment the work of the Assembly by gathering evidence and information which can be fed into the work of the Assembly and its Committees.

It is our view that the membership of the Forum cannot, and should not attempt to be completely representative of the entire community. Steps can however be taken when devising the makeup of the forum to ensure that key sectors and opinions are represented. Work will need to be undertaken to assist sectors represented on the body to feed back to their respective 'constituents' and to consult them fully on the work undertaken on their behalf. Given the time commitment this can entail, a more fluid system of membership, perhaps with substitutes / alternatives allowed to attend, would be preferable to the strict 60 member body last time.

We support the idea that a work programme for the 'social partnership' body should be agreed between the Assembly and the Forum. A situation should not be allowed to arise where a Forum may only discuss issues referred to it by the Assembly, or

where the work of the Forum is completely independent of the issues the Assembly is debating and bears no relation to it. The ideal situation would be for the Forum to be seen as a body that can enhance and compliment the work of the Assembly, not compete with it. We do feel however that it would be important for the Chair of the Forum to be elected by that body from amongst its membership and not appointed by the Assembly or the Office of the First and deputy First Minister.

It is also important to recognise that the Assembly is the elected decision making body, and should not see the Forum as a body to which it can pass on contentious and difficult issues on which it cannot reach consensus. On the other hand though, it would be nice to see a body to which the Assembly gave such credibility that it was willing to do so.

The National Economic and Social Council in the Republic of Ireland is a model which could be successfully replicated here, and we see distinct advantages of having high level (Permanent Secretary) representation from key government departments on the Forum. There are also advantages in having a Forum linking both social and economic issues.

Given that the St Andrews Agreement mentioned in Strand 2 Section 19, the possibility of the establishment of an independent consultative forum 'representative of civil society' on a north – south basis, it would make sense to factor this in when agreeing the structure and scope of the body.

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CACDP are happy to elaborate on any of the above comments.

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26.08.2008