

THE INSTITUTE OF
PUBLIC HEALTH IN IRELAND

26 August 2005

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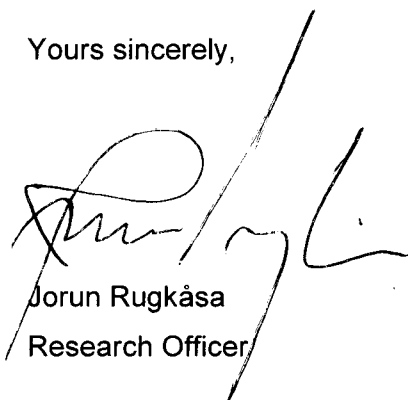
RECEIVED 29 AUG 2005

Dear Ms McMeekin,

**Re: New TSN- The Way Forward. Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy. A
Consultation Document. Phase 2**

Please find enclosed the Institute of Public Health in Ireland's response to the New
TSN- The Way Forward. Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy. A Consultation
Document. Phase 2

Yours sincerely,



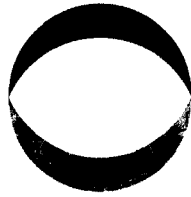
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THE INSTITUTE OF
PUBLIC HEALTH IN IRELAND

New TSN – the way forward.
Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland
A consultation document, phase 2

Response from the Institute of Public Health

INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Public Health welcomes the commitment to develop an anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland.

We are, however, disappointed that the second consultation document has not significantly developed beyond what was suggested in the first document. We believe that what is proposed is too loose; without clear targets and adequately allocated resources it is difficult to form an opinion of whether the proposed strategy will have much impact.

In our response to the first document, the Institute made a range of points that we strongly believed needed clarification. We believe that many of these still need to be addressed, and we therefore raise some of these issues again among our detailed comments.

First we would like to raise some points from the literature on poverty that, in our view, are essential to take into account in any attempt to eradicate poverty.

OVERARCHING COMMENTS

The need for a research based strategy

An anti-poverty strategy should be based on strong, rigorous research. This should improve the understanding of the pathways into –and out of- poverty. In a comprehensive review of the state of the art of poverty research, Øyen (2005) make the point that to obtain a full understanding of poverty it is necessary to include perspectives from a range of vantage points such as:

- Economy: to calculate the size of the problem
- Sociology: to investigate the issue of citizenship and inclusion
- Psychology: to understand the effects of living deprived, poor lives
- Political science: to learn from national and international action
- Law: to link human rights and poverty
- Anthropology: to learn about the experiences of poor people from their point of view
- Medicine: to ascertain the causal pathways between poverty and ill health
- History: to look at poverty formation over time

It is our view that the analysis in the current strategy is insufficient, and that a more holistic perspective would help identify how best to tackle poverty.

Some of the analysis in the consultation document, such as for example the “interesting contrasts” presented in point 2.21, demonstrate that the current analysis is lacking in depth. We strongly recommend that the report by Øyen (2005) is studied in detail.

Poverty and the Troubles

The impact and legacy of the Troubles is an issue particular to our society and which should be part of a full analysis of poverty in Northern Ireland. The poor community relations that have emerged as one of the outcomes of the Troubles do impact on the levels of poverty and on the quality of life of a large proportion of people here.

It has been established that “*the notion of citizenship and the inclusion of all citizens in the society, also the poor, [has] become a cornerstone of modern poverty research*” (Øyen 2005: 7). Such participation is clearly hindered by the poor relations between some sections of our society, and it is paramount that this is addressed. We would therefore recommend that a focus on improving community relations is integral to an anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland.

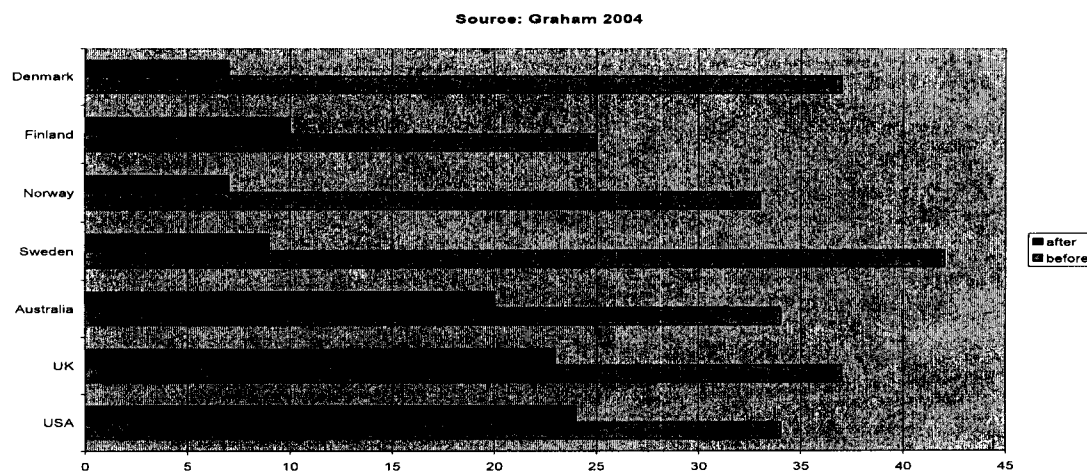
Poverty and the individual

It is necessary to understand the psycho-social impacts of poverty and of inequality, which is an inevitable consequence of poverty. There is growing evidence of clear links between inequality and ill-health (Marmot 2005, Wilkinson 1996, 2005). The psychological effect of living on the margins, with low social esteem and being at the bottom of status hierarchies manifest itself in health status. There is a clear gradient in health across social groups, with those most disadvantaged carrying a disproportionate burden of ill-health. This impacts on people’s ability to participate in the labour market. A similar gradient, where the poorest experience the worst outcomes, exist in terms of educational achievements, which, of course, is crucial in determining one’s future relative income. In sum, there is solid evidence that inequalities in society cause and maintain poverty, and that it has profound impacts on the lives and life changes of individuals.

The need for a high level, proactive approach

Based on the evidence it is clear that poverty needs to be tackled at a structural level; an anti-poverty strategy needs to affect the huge differences in our society. In a recent article, Graham (2004) compares levels of poverty in western countries before and after the effect of direct taxation and social security benefits are

calculated in. The graph reproduced below shows that before these effects are taken into account, the level of poverty is similar across all countries.



After taking the effect into account, however, clear differences emerge between the Nordic countries and the rest. In the Nordic countries, fiscal and social security policies reduce poverty rates to under 10%, whereas in the UK and the USA, the levels are reduced much less, and remain well over 20%. Welfare systems do, therefore, play a significant role in determining levels of poverty and in mediating inequalities in social position.

The consultation document has the promotion of employment and employability amongst the most disadvantaged as one of its three key high level policy areas. While a steady income from work is desirable, it has been pointed out by the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network and others (see McCann 2005), that many people live in poverty because they are either working on a very low income, or they are unable to work. What is needed is therefore better paid jobs and levels of social security benefits that ensure that people who receive them are not left in poverty.

We strongly recommend that an approach to an anti-poverty strategy is one of high level action and targets, recognising that mainstream welfare policies can and do impact on levels of poverty and on the position of individuals in society. Consideration as to how to supply better paid jobs is also necessary. Further improvements to the national minimum wage legislation may significantly impact, in a sustainable way, on the economy of low-income households, and this would be consistent with the focus of employment and financial exclusion in the draft strategy.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Funding

No funding is allocated to the new initiative rather it is intended to tackle the issues through the same 'skewing' mechanisms that were set out for New TSN. We believe that in order to provide a sufficient strategic approach and to produce tangible outcomes, core funding to support the strategy is crucial. Having a dedicated budget for the strategy does not preclude a continued skewing of resources.

Definition

The consultation document comments on different methods of measuring poverty, but does not indicate which definition will be applied in the strategy. This has obvious implications for any assessment of the progress towards the aim of eradicating poverty.

Targets

The document states that specific targets will be agreed by Ministers in discussion with Departments. There is a strong case to decide the targets as part of a consultation process. This should be supported by groups with specific expertise in areas such as health, housing, education and should include community and voluntary sector representation. The system for monitoring and implementation should be transparent and resourced.

Accountability

We welcome the commitment to set up a cross-departmental and inter-sectoral co-ordination team with wide representation. Given the lack of targets, however, it is difficult to see what the groups will be responsible for delivering. We think that much further attention is needed to develop appropriate structures for the management and accountability of an effective anti poverty strategy.

Poverty and inequality

We believe that the issues of poverty and inequality are intimately linked. Without this understanding and an emphasis on the root causes of poverty, the strategy will have limited impact. Consideration should be given to rights-based and equality based approaches to an anti-poverty strategy as these may significantly enhance the opportunities of the strategy having sustainable outcomes. Such an approach may utilise existing legislation.

International links and links with Republic of Ireland

The opportunity should be taken to learn from international developments, particularly the experiences of developing and implementing the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS) in the Republic of Ireland.

The Institute is working closely with the Department of Health and Children in the South to facilitate the work of the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS) as it relates to health.

We believe that there is much to be learned from the approach taken in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the overall NAPS strategy and the work done to develop aspects of NAPS related to health.

The Institute would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with OFDFM and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland.

SUMMARY

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland promotes cooperation for public health between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Our focus is on tackling health inequalities as this is central to efforts to improve health and social development.

The Institute of Public Health welcomes the commitment to develop an anti poverty strategy for Northern Ireland.

The Institute believes an anti poverty strategy is a central and crucial part of improving the health and quality of life of people in Northern Ireland. It is also central to social and economic development.

The link between poverty and poor health is well established in Northern Ireland and internationally. The link works in both directions. Poor health leads to poverty and poverty leads to poor health.

At the heart of the debate about what needs to be done lies a requirement to see the links between poverty and inequality.

A broad based strategy, which addresses the root causes and effects of poverty and inequality is needed. This should be supported by an action programme, targets and budgets.

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