

5 October 1998

Concordia

Rt Hon David Trimble MP
First Minister
The New Northern Ireland Assembly
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Dear First Minister

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 July in response to our letter about the work of the Concordia project.

As discussions progress on the issue of the role of the Civic Forum, we thought it may be helpful to summarize some of the hallmarks of the working methods we have adopted.

We feel the approach of this project could be valuable in establishing appropriate working practises and approaches for the Civic Forum.

We would be happy to meet with you and to provide further background and information if you thought this approach is worth exploring further.

We have also written to the Deputy First Minister with this information.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Ru Hogg in black ink.

Confederation of British Industry

Handwritten signature of Tom Cullen in black ink.

Irish Congress of Trades Unions

Handwritten signature of Alastair MacLurgie in black ink.

Ulster Farmers Union

Handwritten signature of Miread McCloy in black ink.

Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association

Handwritten signature of Seamus McFleamey in black ink.

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action





concordia project

DISCUSSION POINTS

This paper gives a background to the Concordia project setting out the main features of the approach taken and identifies possible benefits of this model.

BACKGROUND

The emphasis has been on identifying problem solving approaches to specific social and economic problems through co-ordinated working partnerships with organisations from different ideological perspectives.

This approach has given rise to a very valuable working method which may prove valuable if adopted by the Civic Forum.

The partners in the Concordia project involve representatives of the following sectors

- Confederation of British Industry
- Irish Congress of Trades Unions
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
- Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers association
- Ulster Farmers Union

The Concordia project sought to consider the responses to the problem of long term unemployment in Northern Ireland as a means to reinforce dialogue and use the strengths of the above organisations.

The Concordia project has been supported by the Social Dialogue Unit of DGV, Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs of the European Commission.



PROPOSAL

Based on the working experience of this group, there would appear to be considerable merit in considering an approach to work in the Civic Forum which emphasised the following aspects :

Working groups to focus on defined areas of social, economic and cultural issues.

Draft reports would be prepared to inform the work of the groups based on

- sectoral views of the partners
- inputs from outside experts
- provision and analysis of research papers
- involvement and participation of the sectors/groups affected

Plenary sessions would

- agree work programme for each area
- agree working methods
- provide feedback on reports
- provide a focal point for communications

Key success factors of the approach

The approach taken has concentrated on the following

- The value of a consensual approach focused on a single issue
- The need for adequate resourcing
- Access to outside expertise
- A structured thinking process
- The interplay between the differing ideological perspectives



BENEFITS

Best Practice would be drawn from reports which would seek to

- establish an overview of the issues
- aggregate views of the sectors
- draw out best practice
- define practical ways in which benefits can be accessed

A planning framework would address key issues in strategic way

- longer term planning
- multi sectoral planning
- involving a wide range of partners

Added value to policy planning and implementation process through

- facilitating consultation
- promoting understanding of specific initiatives
- broaden consensual support for initiatives
- test the suitability of proposed policy initiatives
- increase the return on inputs
- involving the affected groups

An additional resource would be provided by this approach in terms of

- information from informed sources
- expertise from those close to the issues
- capacity to organise and structure