

Northern Ireland Assembly Transition Programme
Core Sessions on National Relationships

The Civic Forum in Scotland
Summary of Paper from Martin Sime, Director, Scottish Council
for Voluntary Organisations

The NI Assembly - Relationships with other UK Assemblies

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Martin Sime

Director, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

Martin Sime
Martin Sime
2000

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
129 Queen's Quay, Glasgow, G2 3JZ

Telephone: 0141 205 2000
Fax: 0141 205 2001
E-mail: info@scvo.org.uk
Website: www.scvo.org.uk

**Northern Ireland Assembly Transition Programme
Core Seminar on External Relationships.**

The Civic Forum in Scotland

***Summary of Paper from Martin Sime, Director, Scottish Council
for Voluntary Organisations.***

The purpose of my paper will be to provide primarily Scottish background and context to the development of relationships between civic society and the new devolved Assemblies and Parliament.

In particular, I will focus on the role, history and aspirations of the Scottish Civic Assembly and on the developing plans to establish relationships between the Scottish Parliament and civic institutions. I will review some of the issues of principle and practice which will need to be addressed and attempt to place the 'civic agenda' in a wider context of accessibility.

I hope to explore the extent to which a Civic Forum can contribute to "a participative approach to the development, consideration and scrutiny of policy and legislation" - one of the four principles guiding the Scottish process leading to the creation of our Parliament. Finally, I will argue that the encouragement of civic engagement, far from undermining the legitimacy of elected politicians is an essential tool in revitalising and extending democracy.


Martin Sime
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Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

18/19 Claremont Crescent Edinburgh EH7 4QD tel 0131 556 3882 fax 0131 556 0279

TOWARDS A CIVIC FORUM

Principles

- Additional
- Facilitative
- Inclusive
- Independent
- Accessible
- Transparent

TOWARDS A CIVIC FORUM

Remit

- Promote dialogue on public policy
- Organise discussion and consultation on behalf of Parliament/ Assembly.
- Explore the potential for consensus across civic society
- Act as an information signpost for Parliament.

TOWARDS A CIVIC FORUM

Key Challenges.

- Agreeing the role
- Being independent from Government
- Funding
- A gateway, not a gatekeeper
- Being accepted by elected politicians
- Getting everyone on board.

Civic sector	Voluntary organisations	Trade Unions	Private companies	Churches	Professional Associations	Non-civic bodies
	44,000 voluntary organisations, ranging from very small pre-school play-groups through to £multi-million household name charities	There are 47 trade unions affiliated to the Scottish Trades Union Congress.	The DTI estimates there are over 200,000 private enterprises in Scotland.	There are over 3500 churches in Scotland - ranging from the mainstream Christian denominations to Muslim, Hindu, Jehovah Witness and other faith organisations.	There are around 100 professional associations in Scotland - either Scottish based or the Scottish part of a UK or GB body. They range from the Institute of Chartered Accountants Scotland to the Association of Master Bakers.	There is a range of public bodies which can develop the characteristics of a civic organisation - but are in fact statutory. They include community councils, local authorities, non-departmental public bodies (quango's), local enterprise companies.
Representative / intermediary bodies	The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is the national umbrella. Councils for voluntary service represent voluntary organisations locally. 'Sub-sectoral intermediaries' eg Youthlink Scotland represent voluntary organisations in their relevant field.	The STUC is the umbrella body for trade unions in Scotland, whilst Trade Councils play a co-ordinating role at local level.	The Confederation of British Industries (CBI), the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland, the Institute of Directors, Scottish Development Industry, and local Chambers of Commerce, all have a role in representing the interests of private business.	The Association for Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) represents 10 denominations.		
Wider Involvement	Scottish Civic Assembly	Scottish Civic Assembly Economic Council ECOSOC		Scottish Civic Assembly		

The Scottish Civic Assembly - a summary.

The Scottish Civic Assembly is a forum bringing together organisations from all areas of civic society to facilitate a civic input into all areas of policy and practice in Scotland. It was developed in the wake of the 1992 Election and one of its key objectives was to press for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament and a renewal of democracy in Scotland.

The Scottish Civic Assembly currently has over 130 member organisations whose subscriptions fund all its activities. Membership is open to organisations and their representatives across the spectrum of civic groups - business, voluntary sector, the trades unions, the churches, professional associations and organisations from the arts and sports fields. The Scottish Civic Assembly has attracted the membership of several national umbrella organisations such as the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Action for Churches Together in Scotland and SCVO, the umbrella body for the voluntary sector in Scotland. These organisations provide vital networks through their own membership which help provide some credibility to the representative aspect of the SCA's work.

Elections from the membership are held annually to the 24 strong Scottish Civic Assembly Council.

The Scottish Civic Assembly holds 2 major plenaries a year, where member organisations meet to discuss a topic of major concern and to seek to establish consensus on the issues involved. Over the last 3 years, the Plenary meetings have discussed;

- **Employment and Training** (*consensus was reached that relevant parts of the Social Chapter should be implemented*);
- **Transport, Energy & the Environment** (*an integrated transport system with specific measures for rural areas was agreed*);
- **Poverty** (*it was agreed that a Scottish Bill of Rights should guarantee citizens an adequate standard, to be determined by a new and independent body*) and
- **Preparing for Change** (*a range of principles to be submitted to a forthcoming Scottish Parliament was reached and a formal submission has recently been submitted for consideration by the Government's Consultative Steering Group*).

Scotland is now preparing for the Parliament next year and the Scottish Civic Assembly, once set up to lobby for the existence of that Parliament, is also preparing for the role it can play in the new Scotland. A Parliament committed to the principles of inclusion and participation needs to ensure that the civic voice is strong and fully incorporated into the policy and decision making process.

The Civic Forum

