

Quick guide

The British-Irish Council

January 2012

The British-Irish Council was established as part of the 1999 Good Friday Agreement. It involves the Governments of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, the devolved Governments and the Governments of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

Introduction

On Friday, 10 April 1998, after two years of intensive negotiations, the British and Irish governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland approved a comprehensive political agreement: the Belfast or **Good Friday Agreement**.

One of the institutions created under the agreement was the **British-Irish Council (BIC)**. It was formally established when the **British-Irish Agreement** (the agreement which gave effect to the provisions of the Good Friday agreement) signed by the two governments came into force on 2 December 1999.

Objective and work of the BIC

The BIC was established under Strand 3 of the Good Friday Agreement 1998

to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands.

The BIC exchanges information, discusses, consults and endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant governments.

At its first summit in London in December 1999, the council decided on a number of priority areas of work which would benefit from such co-operation. While the list is not exhaustive, it includes:

- agricultural issues
- health
- regional issues
- consideration of inter-parliamentary links
- energy
- cultural issues
- tourism

- sporting activity
- education
- approaches to EU issues
- minority and lesser used languages
- prison and probation issues

Work currently underway includes:

- misuse of drugs
- environment
- transport
- social inclusion
- indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages
- demography
- early years policy
- digital inclusion
- collaborative spatial planning
- energy
- housing

Membership

BIC's membership as follows:

- United Kingdom (sovereign government)
- Ireland (sovereign government)
- Wales (devolved government)
- Scotland (devolved government)
- Northern Ireland (devolved government)
- The Isle of Man (Crown dependency)
- Jersey (Crown dependency)
- Guernsey (Crown dependency)

The Good Friday Agreement does not establish exactly who represents each administration on the BIC, but the leaders of each sovereign or devolved government or crown dependency normally attend the summit meetings of the BIC.

Meetings and organisation

The BIC meets in different formats: at summit level, twice per year; in specific sectoral formats on a regular basis, with each side represented by the appropriate Minister; in an appropriate format to consider cross-sectoral matters.

The secretariat for the BIC was provided by the British and Irish Governments and staffed by British and Irish officials, based in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the UK and the Department of Foreign Affairs in Ireland. However, from 1 January 2012 it has a dedicated secretariat based in Edinburgh.¹

The BIC and Wales

Wales is the leading administration in the work sector of **Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages** and joint lead administration with Scotland for **Social Inclusion**. The Minister for Education and Skills chairs ministerial meetings of the Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages Group.²

Further information

For further information on (insert quick guide subject here), please contact **Alys Thomas** (Alys.Thomas@wales.gov.uk) or **Owain Roberts** (Owain.Roberts@wales.gov.uk), Research Service.

View our full list of [quick guides](#) here.

Enquiry no: 11/2796 Alys Thomas

Research Service briefings are compiled for the benefit of Assembly Members and their support staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

We welcome comments on our briefings; these should be sent to the Research Service, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff CF99 1NA or e-mailed to Research.Service@wales.gov.uk

¹ [Scottish Government, *The British-Irish Council*, Press Release, 20 June 2011](#)

² [Written Cabinet Statement, Leighton Andrews AM, *The Second Ministerial Meeting of the British-Irish Council Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages Group \(IMLG\)*, 22 November 2011.](#)