

Summary report on workshop to explore the potential implications of Brexit

8th November 2018

Contents

1.0 Background

2.0 Discussion topic 1 – What are the potential issues, concerns and opportunities from Brexit for your sector?

3.0 Discussion topic 2 – What should we be doing as a City to address concerns and maximise opportunities?

4.0 The 3 words that sum up Brexit

Appendix 1 – List of organisations attending

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Following a request from the Brexit Committee a workshop was organised to hear the views from a range of sectors across the city. The workshop was held on Tuesday 30th October 2018 in Belfast City Hall. The format was a round table discussion and it was externally facilitated. Feedback was written, verbal and through the use of an electronic app – Mentimeter.

- 1.2 A total of 24 representatives from various external organisations and six councillors were in attendance. The sectors represented included higher education, culture & arts, health, business, industry, trade unions and the community and voluntary sector.

2.0 Discussion topic 1 – What are the potential issues, concerns and opportunities from Brexit for your sector?

2.1 Key themes arising from the discussion were:

Labour market

- Impact on availability of labour force
- 29% of EU nationals have already left – firms struggling to get labour
- Skill shortages in technology sector – some tech companies saying if skill shortages means wage increase may result in them considering if will remain in NI
- Concerns re eligibility for claimants post Brexit – how affect national insurance contributions and pensions
- NI calls for a regional migration strategy have been ignored by MAC report – we are reliant on migrant workers
- Scottish government paying EU settlement scheme fees for all public sector workers – would cost NI £55k to pay fees for all our migrants but no government to approve this
- Dependence on EU migrant workforce in hospitality and tourism sector
- Will there continue to be mutual recognition of diplomas and qualifications

Business and trade

- Added costs and complexities
- Concerns about Brexit impacting on investment
- Non-tariff barriers bigger threat than tariffs but not getting mentioned
- Practicalities of doing business across the border
- Limited strategic capacity or resources for firms to plan
- How do we get firms to help workers get 'settled status'
- Belfast already needs a serious focus on skills – Brexit could undermine our economic growth ambitions
- Making Belfast closed for business and investment
- Concerns over ease of travel and flights with EU

- How do firms get necessary approval for market access to the EU market post Brexit?
- How will Belfast CC help firms prepare for Brexit?
- Need to recognise that Belfast is part of an all-island economy

Funding

- Concerns over EU funding eg tourism projects, apprenticeship schemes
- Will EU funding be replaced by the UK government
- Loss of grassroots community training for women and childcare services
- End of EU funding for grassroots based regeneration initiatives
- Insist on co-design of replacement funding programmes to make sure they align with community plan

Lack of information & uncertainty

- Means coherent planning can't begin
- Inability to plan due to uncertainties
- Not enough information for migrants about what will happen – no security
- Lack of information sharing from Whitehall re Brexit planning
- There is a hope that issues will be sorted but concerns that no clarity at the moment
- Hard to see opportunities as so much uncertainty at the moment
- Will we have the capacity to devise solutions to problems raised by Brexit?

Higher education

- Uncertainty around access to research funding in higher education
- Brain drain from university staff – head hunting has already begun
- Loss of transnational educational development at the highest level
- NI at a disadvantage because of no post study work programme
- Higher education numbers impacted by current departmental funding
- Threat to international education programmes

Health Care

- Major concerns on health care issues

- Staff loss in health service
- Access to cross border health care
- Risk to services, particularly social care as reliance on EU workers

Young people

- Young people's voices are missing from the discussions a lot of the time
- Worries from future university students about research and travel
- NICCI report on impact of Brexit on young people
- Young people have not been education on how this will affect them in short or long term
- Young people feel removed from a process that will affect them for the longest

Arts and Culture

- Mobility of artists and artworks
- Impact on product offering and the risk that we will have to rely on imported products from countries that can afford to fund development
- Loss of ERASMUS programmes and loss of cultural diversity
- Reduction in access to international investment in our cultural product and offering
- Concerns around loss of EU funding when the sector is already struggling due to significant funding cuts

Community Relations

- Good relations in local council areas – risk of hate crime increasing
- Concerned that issues of identity which had been settled by GFA are now back on the table
- Np provision as yet for EU migrants to vote or stand in local council elections in May 2019
- Concerns that the language and tone of negotiation being used at all levels is further hampering local relationships between communities.

2.2 The opportunities that were identified included:

- Potential of new global linkages
- Opportunities to design programmes for ourselves
- Devolution, return of powers to Stormont and local government via the Withdrawal Act, rights of local government to be consulted on matters currently dealt with by EU legislation
- Opportunity to revise procurement rules and procure more locally
- Potentially the money going to the EU could come back to NI
- Opportunity to remove the funding rules that the NICS say are due to EU rules
- EU Commission often used as a scapegoat, accountability will now rest with regional politicians
- Opportunity for Council to play a greater role in trade, using existing links in USA, China and others
- We are not leaving Europe, need to maintain relationships with our neighbours and have opportunities to continue networking and sharing best practice
- Ensure City Deal enhances Belfast – Dublin corridor
- Potential to develop free ports (ports that are situated within the UK but outside its customs border)

3.0 Discussion topic 2 – What should we be doing as a City to address concerns and maximise opportunities?

3.1 The suggestions arising from the discussion included:

- Youth Brexit Committee
- Talk to business – there are things which can be done now regardless of what sort of Brexit we end up with
- Robust joint agency planning for ‘no deal scenario’ especially health
- Get “unfettered” locked down in UK law
- Lobby for post study work programme for international students in NI
- Know the post Brexit settled status system. Teach it to employers, ask them to help get EU26 migrants through the process
- Support service for EU citizens to get settled status
- Start assessing what we’d want and now want in future trade deals
- While NI is in the international spotlight re Brexit, develop an international scale civic pride or showcase event to attract investment, tourism, education
- Special circumstances of the ‘Easyjet Generation’ need to be considered.
- Are there opportunities to open other channels of discussion with ROI?
- Withdrawal Agreement provides for a UK-EU Specialised Committee on Ireland/Northern Ireland - how do we ensure that we can feed ideas into that?
- In the backstop, NI is one of the most attractive regions in Europe to invest. How do we market this?
- The future UK-EU relationship is still to be negotiated. How do we ensure Belfast/Northern Ireland interests are fed into those negotiations and reflected in the outcomes?
- Other Countries are running events, toolkits, reports and plans. Where are ours?
- Extra spaces in third level education be targeted at sectors with skilled labour demand
- InterTradeIreland have Brexit vouchers. How are those being promoted?
- Can Council look at how can assist third sector/ build capacity to help them apply for other funding sources when EU funding not available

- Need great steer from central govt what funding will be available when we leave
- How can the Common Travel Area be used/developed to address concerns around mobility/rights of British/Irish and non British/Irish workers/citizens... as well as other issues?
- Using the city deal opportunity & investment wisely to support the local economy
- Understanding special designated status & opportunities it could bring
- Exploit the unique position of Belfast - city centre offer & mix
- Opportunity to review regulation or de-regulate in some instances
- Resilience & scenario planning- cross sector
- Advice & information for business & individuals
- Connecting with councils and cities
- Workshops at community levels
- Focus on building the local economy
- Build a strong Belfast economy
- Look at the Belfast- Dublin corridor links & opportunities
- Better infrastructure between NI & EU
- Education for young people in school and college
- Maximise co-operation opportunities e.g. Between small businesses etc
- Show leadership on Brexit preparation - HR, legal, procurement, funding, data all need to be ready, share what you are doing with others to help them
- Vision for the city to be maintained protected and invested in. Arts and cultural offering currently central to city's offering need to be assisted through rental support, exemptions, emergency funding, indemnifying risk for Arts.
- Pay the settled status fees for EU migrants living in city, what a gesture this would be to show we value them
- EU Capital of Culture bid offers continuity of vision and ambition for city. Let's use that as roadmap and invest in city's proven ability and inspiration
- In the current political vacuum, opportunity for Councils to step up and represent people
- Look at rail and ferry links to Europe

4.0 The 3 words that sum up Brexit

4.1 The participants were asked to feed back the 3 words that summed up their thoughts on Brexit. This exercise was done using Mentimeter and the feedback is contained in the following wordcloud. The larger the word the more it was quoted and 'uncertainty' was the most quoted word.

Three words that sum up your thoughts on Brexit



Appendix 1 – List of organisations attending

Advice NI
BCCM
Belfast MIPIM Taskforce
Belfast Visual Arts Forum
Belfast Youth Forum
BMA (NI)
Community Arts Partnership
Community Relations Council
GMB
Health & Social Care Board
IEA
Loughview Community Action Partnership (LCAP)
Manufacturing NI
NILGA
Queens University
St Mary's College
The Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Theatre NI
Tourism NI
Ulster University
WBPB
Women in Business Northern Ireland
Workforce Training Services