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LIFETIME OPPORTUNITIES



GOVERNMENT'S
ANTI-POVERTY
AND SOCIAL
INCLUSION
STRATEGY FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND



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As part of our commitment to tackling poverty and social exclusion this document was produced by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in conjunction with all other Northern Ireland Government Departments.



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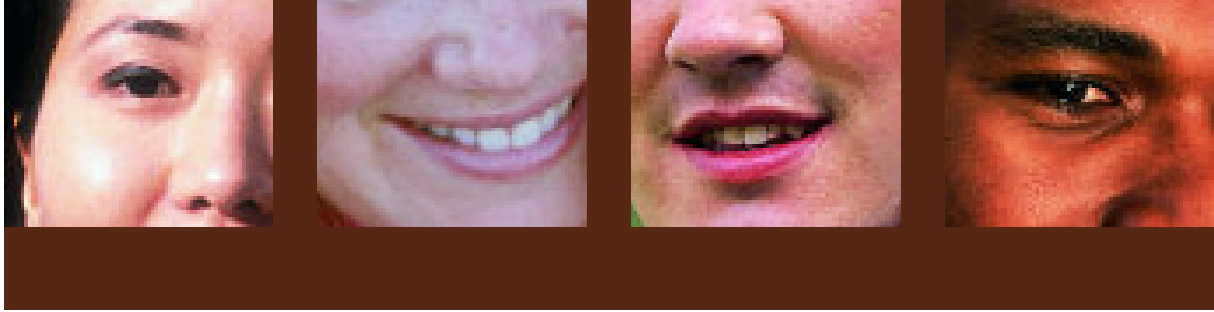
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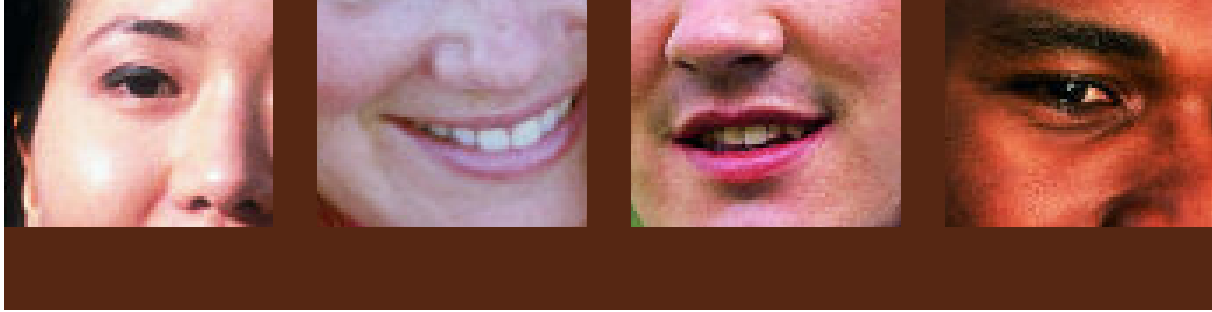
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Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland

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Ministerial Foreword

Achieving social justice for all has been a top priority of this government. Delivering it means we must guarantee opportunity for all in our society, not just for a privileged few. So it is our responsibility to ensure that opportunity is dispersed as widely as possible, and that people are not denied the chances to which they are entitled in life.

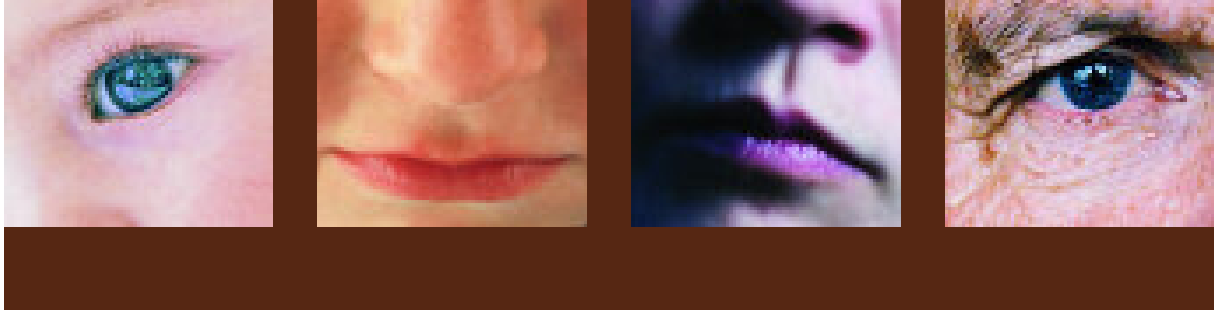
As a government, we have made real progress. Policies like the National Minimum Wage and tax credits, combined with rising employment and sustained economic growth, have halted the rise in inequality and have lifted 2 million people out of absolute poverty across the UK as a whole.

But inequality still remains too high. Despite the sustained growth in Northern Ireland's economy and the improvements we have secured in education, health and housing, 327,000 people across Northern Ireland are still denied the opportunities to which they are entitled, including around 102,000 children and 54,000 pensioners.

This strategy, Lifetime Opportunities, demonstrates our determination to ensure that, by 2020, no one in Northern Ireland is denied the opportunities they are owed.

Achieving this goal will require an effort across all of Northern Ireland's departments – which is why I have made Lifetime Opportunities a cross-cutting priority within the current Comprehensive Spending Review for Northern Ireland.

But this is an effort that must extend beyond government too. I welcome the contributions that stakeholders across Northern Ireland have made to the development of this strategy, outlining their proposals and ideas for the way forward. I am determined that this constructive partnership should continue to ensure our targets are delivered. I will therefore be establishing a Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Forum for that purpose – working in partnership with the key stakeholders in monitoring and benchmarking progress against our targets.



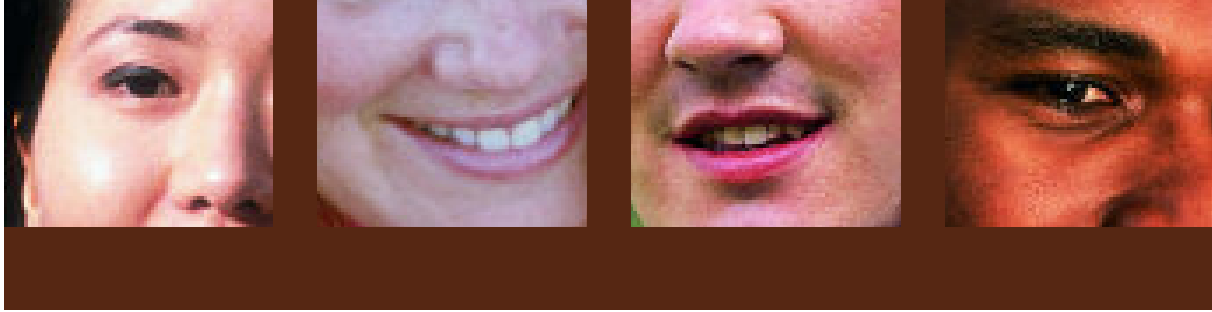
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In recent years, Northern Ireland has enjoyed a massive increase in prosperity and a hugely increased quality of life. It is our duty to ensure that the benefits of that prosperity and the opportunity it presents are enjoyed by all in society. Doing so will be a massive challenge, but it is something that we as a government are determined to deliver. And this strategy marks the latest, crucial milestone in that process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Hain'.

PETER HAIN MP

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland



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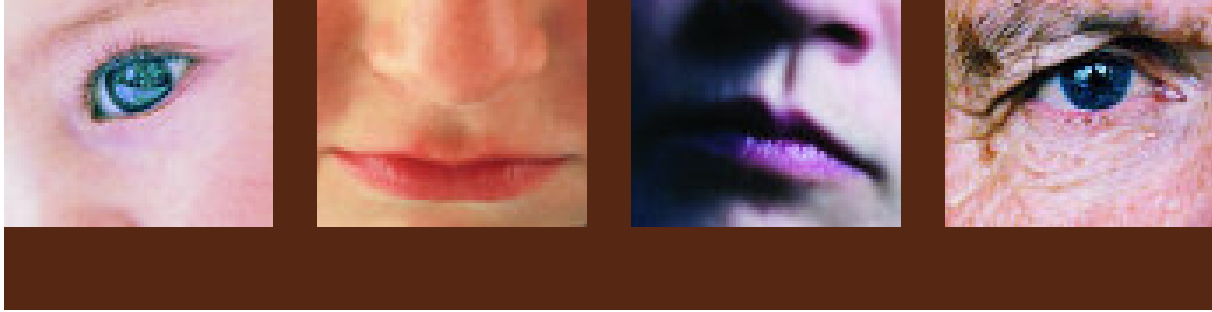
Executive Summary

Lifetime Opportunities is government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland. It is the result of a commitment by the previous Executive to review the New Targeting Social Need policy which led in turn to evaluation, analyses and extensive consultation.

From the evaluation it was evident that policy to tackle poverty and social exclusion was being driven through largely separate departmental programmes with little evidence of a joined-up approach at departmental level being reflected in co-ordination of services at a local level. Strategic objectives were missing and those objectives which were set, reflected departmental priorities rather than any overall government commitment to reducing poverty. Monitoring arrangements therefore, while rigorous, did not serve to adequately reflect and measure progress against the broad objective of reducing poverty and social exclusion.

The quantitative analysis points to generally positive social and economic trends since the early 1990s with continued improvements in the economy and in standards of education, health and housing. Progress is also evident in reduced socio-economic differentials between the two main communities, which had been an explicit objective of New Targeting Social Need. Against these positive trends however there remain around 327,000 people, including 102,000 children living in poverty across Northern Ireland.

Consultation on the development of an anti-poverty strategy started in April 2004 with many different views emerging since, about priorities for future policy. There was however a broad consensus about the need to prioritise child poverty, maintain a focus on promoting social inclusion and the need for long-term targets with resources allocated to meet these. There was strong support for continued partnership working and the process to be led at Ministerial level.



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The Strategy

Lifetime Opportunities is structured around a number of general challenges which become the priorities for future policy and action. These are as follows:

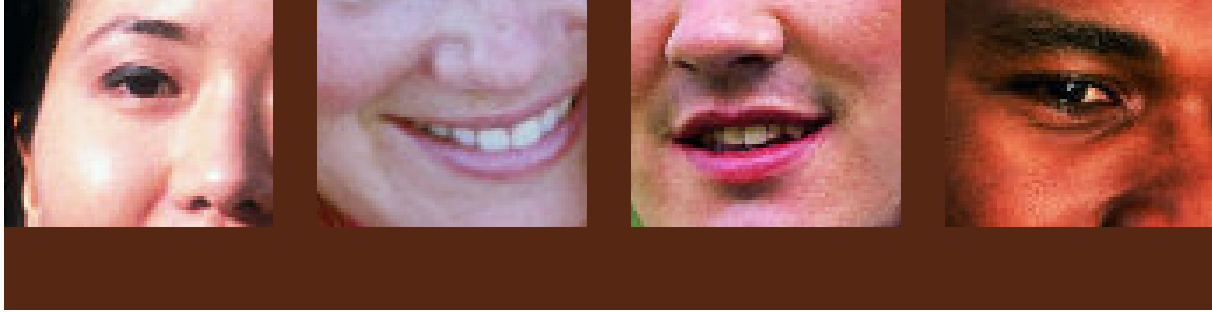
Eliminating Poverty - Despite improvements in general prosperity and social conditions in recent years, the focus of future policy and effort must be on the 327,000 people here, including 102,000 children and 54,000 pensioners, who remain in poverty.

Eliminating Social Exclusion - The priority is also to provide opportunities for everyone to participate fully in the social and economic life of our community. For those individuals and families who suffer from multiple social problems, this presents the greatest challenge.

Tackling Area Based Deprivation - The concentration of multiple deprivation such as high unemployment, crime and low educational attainment in mainly urban areas poses particular challenges for government. For the 284,000 people who live in such areas there is much greater risk of poverty, poor health, both physical and mental, and the despair that comes from having no apparent prospect of improvement. Tackling the multiple deprivation that has persisted in many areas for decades, must therefore be a priority within the overall strategy.

Eliminating Poverty From Rural Areas - While poverty and multiple deprivation tend to be concentrated in urban areas, pressures on the agricultural sector, demographic change and the physical isolation leave many in rural communities in or at serious risk of poverty and social exclusion. Here the challenge and priority is to build a strong rural community infrastructure which will help provide economic and social opportunities for everyone, but in particular for young people who want to live and work in the countryside.

Shared Future – Shared Challenges - Against the backdrop of 30 years of conflict and a longer history of community division in Northern Ireland, the promotion of respect and tolerance between the two main communities is a significant challenge but an essential condition nonetheless for achieving the pace of further economic and social change needed to eliminate poverty and social exclusion here.



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Tackling Inequality in the Labour Market - Just as it is important to continue to create employment as a route out of poverty, it is equally important to promote equality of opportunity for all in accessing employment. Inequalities in the labour market persist, including those based on religion, gender and disability. Policy and legislation must be used as a means of removing barriers to participation in the labour market.

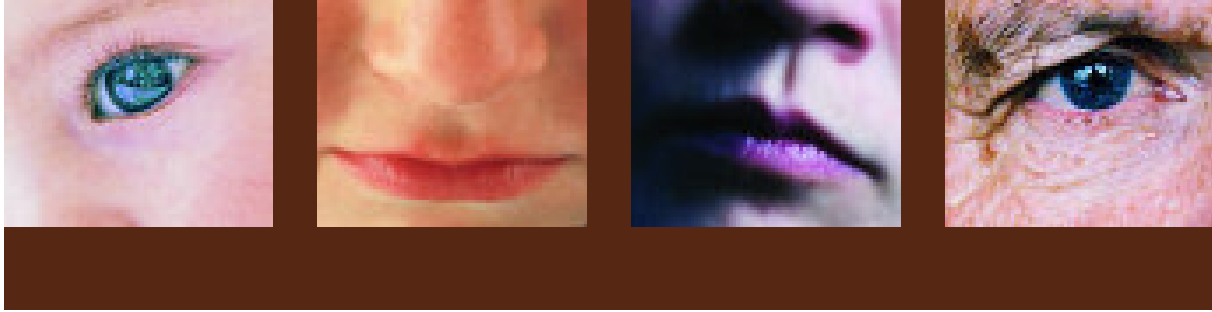
Tackling Health Inequalities - People who are better off tend, for the most part, to live longer and healthier lives than those living in poverty. It is important therefore to reduce inequalities in health between geographic areas, socio-economic and minority groups and to direct spending towards those in greatest need.

Tackling Cycles of Deprivation - Policy must break the cycle and the process that results in children who are born into poverty developing into underachieving young people with limited aspiration and low levels of educational qualifications and skills. They in turn become working age adults living in low incomes often in poor health and benefit dependence, with the prospect of a shorter, less healthy, comfortable and financially secure older age. They are also the adults most likely to be parents of children again born into poverty – with the cycle continuing. Policy must disrupt this process focussing on different priority needs and different times in people's lives, from early years through to childhood, adult working life and later years. For that reason, Lifetime Opportunities defines specific goals and targets for each of these stages in life as follows (targets are detailed in the main text):

EARLY YEARS (0-4)

Our goal is to ensure that every child should have a chance to develop their full potential in infancy regardless of social background.

The importance of Early Years experience in helping shape positive, social, psychological and educational development is well recognised in research such as that published recently by the Northern Ireland Department of Education. Maximising provision and support, therefore for children in their early years is an investment which will help lay a solid foundation for their future.



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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (5 – 16)

Our goal is to ensure all children and young people experience a happy and fulfilling childhood, while equipping them with the education, skills and experience to achieve their potential to be citizens of tomorrow.

Poverty has a negative impact on children's upbringing and can reduce the chances of children enjoying a happy childhood, achieving skills and qualifications and therefore affecting outcomes in later life. Research shows that chances of escaping from poverty are greatly improved by educational attainment. Therefore the focus is and will remain on breaking the link between poverty and educational underperformance.

WORKING AGE ADULTS

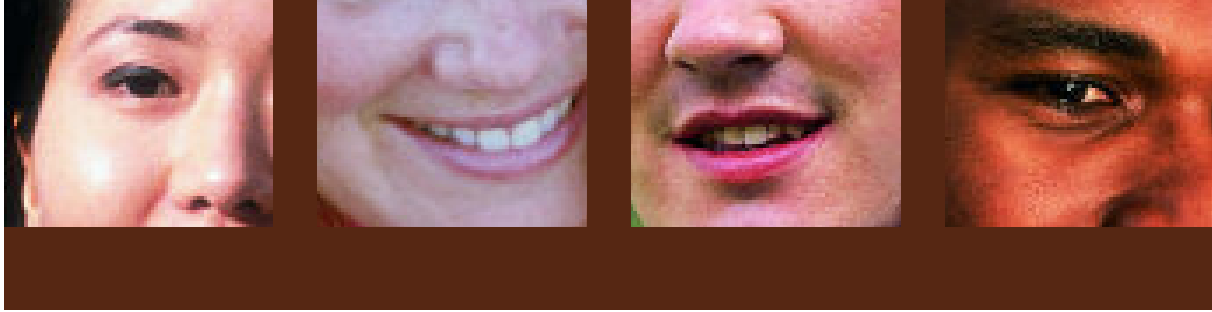
Our goal is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life.

It is generally accepted that employment is the best route out of poverty for people of working age and we want to ensure those people who can work have access to employment. However government also recognises that for some people work is currently not an option and support through the benefits system is needed until they are in a position to enter employment.

OLDER CITIZENS - BEYOND WORKING AGE

Our goal is to ensure older people are valued and respected, remain independent, participate as active citizens and enjoy a good quality of life in a safe and shared community.

For those older people who choose to remain or re-enter the labour market, government is committed to tackling age discrimination in order that these people



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can make this choice. However for some, as economic activity reduces, employment is less relevant as an insulator against poverty. For these older people the emphasis must be on having sufficient income to meet needs, including through increasing awareness and take-up of financial entitlement, particularly for those reliant on benefit income.

Significant challenges therefore remain, particularly if government is to meet its objective in Northern Ireland of working towards the elimination of poverty and social exclusion by 2020. This Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy sets out what government has achieved, the continuing challenges and a clear statement of what government aims to achieve through challenging long-term goals and targets.

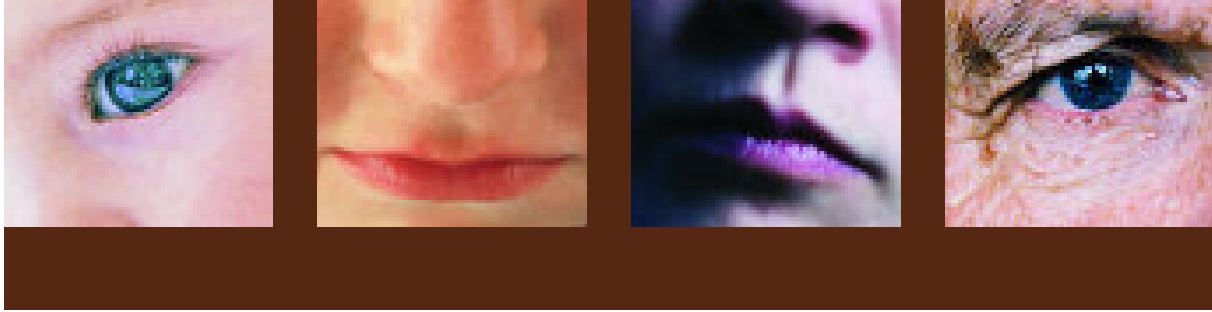
To underline the importance of early intervention as a means of preventing poverty, Lifetime Opportunities commits to ***work towards enhancing support for early years by establishing children's centres in the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland.***

In addition, recognising the priority of removing barriers to people joining or rejoining the labour market, the strategy commits government to ***work towards providing support to address barriers to employment for every unemployed or every economically inactive person who wants it.***

Making It Happen

In order to achieve the goals and targets set, and the commitments within Lifetime Opportunities, government has made the strategy one of the key cross-cutting priorities within the current Comprehensive Spending Review. Consequently, departmental spending plans and resources will be directly linked to the delivery of commitments within the strategy.

In addition, and in line with a commitment within the UK's report to the European Union "The UK National Action Plan for Social Inclusion", the UK and Irish governments will

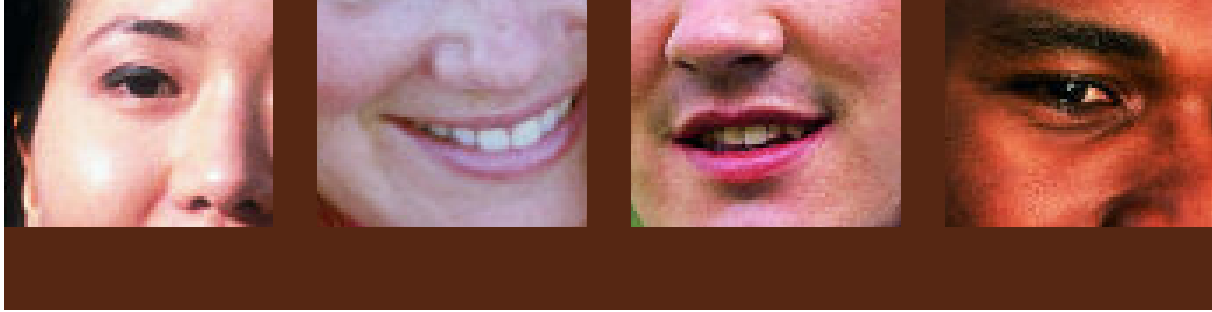


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seek to co-operate and develop shared learning, exchanges of best practice and joint working in tackling poverty and social exclusion affecting the quality of lives of families and communities across the island of Ireland.

Progress against goals and targets within the strategy will be monitored by a Ministerial-led forum, bringing together the main stakeholders along with those responsible for policy and delivery. When necessary, guidance will be provided on how, for example, to reflect the principles and priorities of the strategy and strategic investment decisions and maximise the social benefits of significant public expenditure. Also, organisations which emerge from the Review of Public Administration will demonstrate, transparently, the outworking of the principles of Lifetime Opportunities, in their business plans and programme delivery.

Government is determined to eliminate the scourge of poverty which blights the lives of so many people in Northern Ireland. The Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy, Lifetime Opportunities, aims to build on progress to date and address continuing challenges. It recognises different priorities at different stages in people's lives and the need for policies and programmes to be tailored to these specific needs and targeted at those in greatest objective need. It must also insulate people from becoming poor and socially excluded as well as providing routes out of poverty for those who do. With continued economic growth and political stability, there is perhaps the best opportunity yet to achieve this objective.



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1. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Kingdom is a country of growing prosperity. The last decade has seen many more people in jobs thanks to record levels of employment; crime has fallen by 44%; 19 out of 20 have seen their incomes rise by 2-3% each year; 800,000 children and 1 million pensioners have been lifted out of poverty; and there have been year-on-year increases on educational attainment and life expectancy. These improvements have benefited less well off people more than most, extending the opportunities of living in the UK to a wider section of our society than ever before.
2. Northern Ireland, like the rest of the UK has experienced a period of sustained economic growth in recent years. This is reflected in the continued growth in employment, and falls in numbers of unemployment (58% reduction between 1992 and 2005) which are among the largest decreases in the UK. Along with improvements in the economy, Northern Ireland has seen improvements in standards of education, health and housing.

What is it like to be Poor?

At 'Get Heard'¹ events participants provided an insight into what it is really like to be in poverty and to be socially excluded:

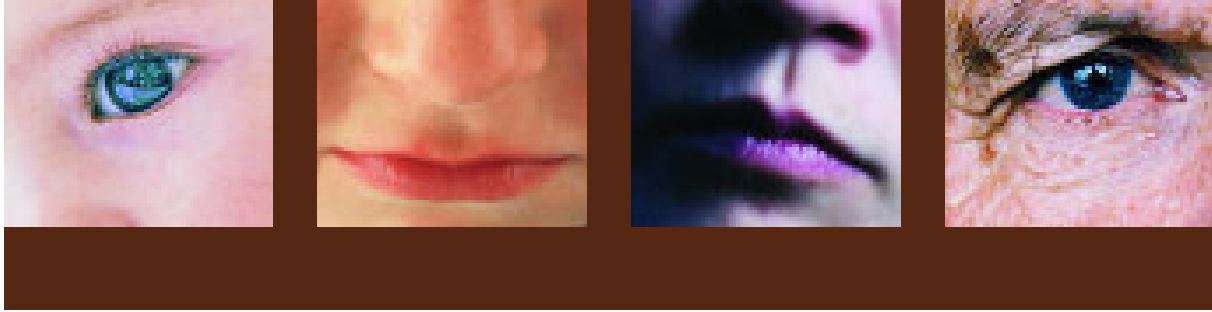
"Feels as though you are penalised for being a single parent rather than being supported when you need it."

"No social life makes you depressed."

"You feel like you're in a vicious circle that you cannot get out of."

"Everything becomes so difficult when you have other obligations as well, such as needing to care for elderly relatives, finding quality time to spend with the kids etc."

1 'Get Heard' see Chapter 6 paras 163-164.



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“It is really difficult to be able to plan ahead – and others still expect you to do that.”

“Poverty should be de-stigmatised.”

“The government needs to accept that poverty is not a lifestyle choice.”

“We need real practical and financial incentives for people wanting to return to work.”

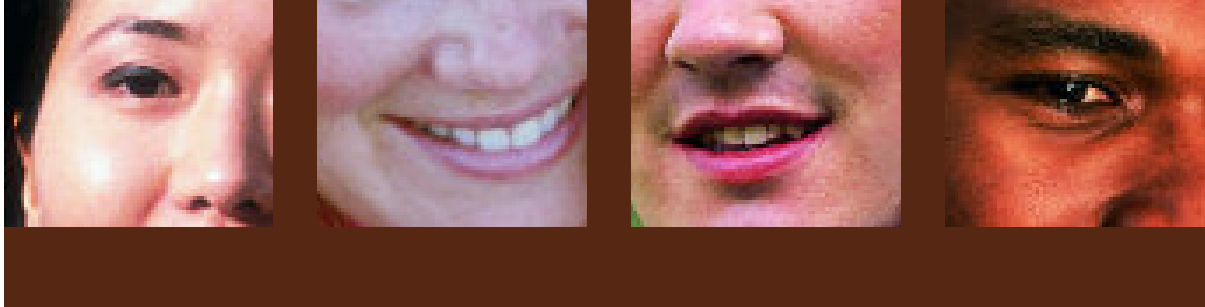
“Parents need increased expansion & investment in Sure Start.”

“It is really important to have a decent home so we need more social housing for low income families”

How do we measure poverty?

Type of Poverty Measure	What it Measures
Absolute low income	Whether the poorest are seeing their incomes rise in real terms
Relative low income	Whether the poorest are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole
Material deprivation and low income combined	A wider measure of living standards

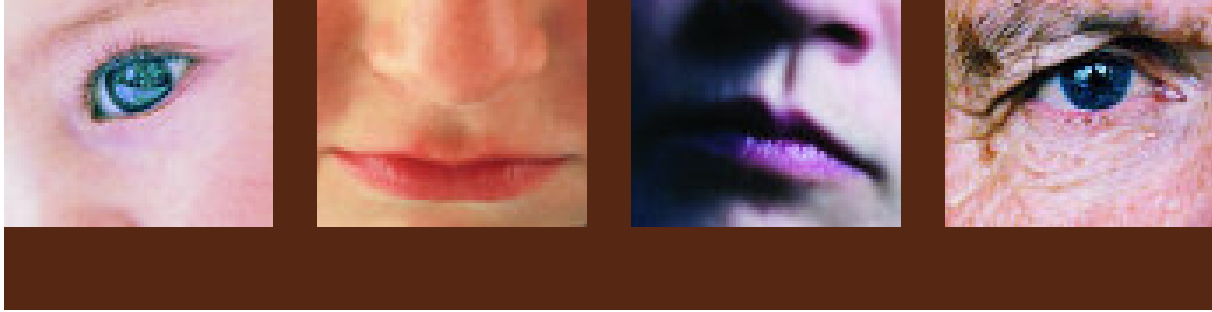
3. However in Northern Ireland, and throughout the UK, far too many people continue to live in poverty. Tackling poverty and enabling everyone to have the opportunity to achieve their potential in life continue, therefore, to lie at the heart of the UK



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government's policy agenda and its visions for the future. Government strategies for tackling poverty and social exclusion are outlined in "Opportunity for All" www.dwp.gov.uk/ofa and "Reaching Out, An Action Plan on Social Exclusion".

4. The UK government's Social Inclusion Strategy is rooted in an understanding that work is the best route out of poverty for people of working age. Within this context, government aims to provide access to work for those who can, whilst supporting those for whom work is not currently an option.
5. To this end, significant support has been provided through programmes such as New Deal and more recently, the Pathways to Work Initiative, to assist unemployed and economically inactive individuals to move towards and into work. Reforms to make work pay have also been introduced. These include, minimum wage and a system of tax credits, boosting in-work incomes, improving financial incentives to work and tackling poverty among working people and among households with and without. As a result in the UK as a whole, 2 million people have been lifted out of absolute poverty since 1997.
6. In Northern Ireland the implementation of New Deal and other employment and training programmes, along with these reforms, have provided assistance to those who are less well off. Financial support through a range of social security payments and through tax credits, currently amounts respectively to around £3.3 billion and £550 million annually. These reforms and measures have contributed to:
 - the employment rate continuing to rise. The most recent working age employment rate is estimated at 70% or 768,000 people;
 - an unemployment rate of 4.3% compared to a UK rate of 5.5%;
 - establishing a minimum wage that, from 1 October 2006, rose to £5.35 per hour for workers aged 22 years and over;
 - pension credits benefiting 112,518 people throughout Northern Ireland (September 2006); and
 - 146,000 in-work families receiving child and working tax credits (April 2005).
7. In Northern Ireland, government has committed to end child poverty by 2020. To date it has driven this commitment, and more generally to tackling poverty and



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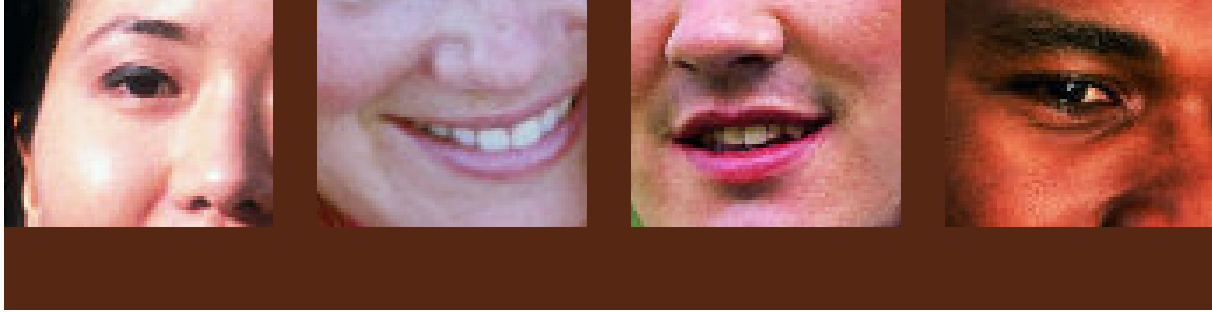
social exclusion, through New Targeting Social Need. Building on New Targeting Social Need and retaining the principles of targeting those most disadvantaged within our society, we now want to make further progress. We want to focus on the most important issues that we need to tackle to work towards the elimination of poverty and social exclusion here in Northern Ireland by 2020.

8. Alongside tax and benefits policy, government has and will continue to seek to strengthen and support the Northern Ireland economy, target resources at those areas, groups and individuals in greatest objective need, and legislate where necessary to protect the vulnerable from discrimination.
9. Government will also continue to work within the broader policy context of the European Union. Through the 'Lisbon Agenda' and the Lisbon Goals it is committed to create more and better jobs, greater social cohesion and make an impact on poverty. As they are common goals across the EU, we must continue to learn from, and work with other Member States such as the Republic of Ireland, to share ideas and good practice in developing policies and strategies to achieve them.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Eliminating Poverty

10. The pace of economic and social development in Northern Ireland has been significant in recent years with more people in employment than ever before. In the past 8 years for example, there has been an increase of 82,000 people in employment. The unemployment rate has fallen by around three-quarters in the past 10 years and, standards in education and health have risen simultaneously.
11. Undoubtedly, continued economic growth is necessary to provide the wealth in order to lift people out of poverty. While Northern Ireland in recent years has had one of the fastest growing regional economies in the United Kingdom, it started from a much lower base and, in many respects, continues to lag behind particularly in skills, earned incomes and levels of economic inactivity in the workforce. It is



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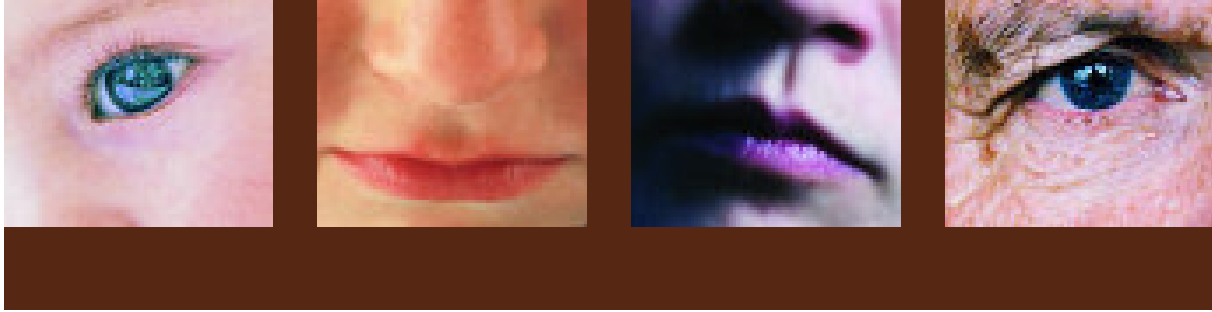
also heavily reliant on the public sector for employment and economic activity. The public sector accounts for 27% of total output in 2002 compared with 18.1% for the UK as a whole. The private sector is underdeveloped with almost a third of all employment in the public sector.

12. The Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy "First Steps towards Sustainability" published in May 2006 provided, for the first time, an overarching framework for tackling the challenges towards our long-term objective of securing the future for the present generation and protecting the future for generations to come. "Lifetime Opportunities – Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland" has been developed with regard to the guiding principles of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy.
13. As Northern Ireland emerges from 30 years of conflict and political instability, the economic prospects have never been better. However, the economic and social legacy of the 'Troubles' is still with us and will require sustained political progress, along with sound economic and social policies in coming years. The scale of the challenge for government therefore, is to work towards the elimination of poverty currently experienced by around 327,000 people here, including 102,000 children and 54,000 pensioners; to tackle the poverty affecting 284,000 people living in the most deprived parts of towns and cities across Northern Ireland and to deal with the particular poverty issues faced by those in rural areas.

Eliminating Social Exclusion

What do we mean by Social Exclusion?

Some individuals and families suffer from multiple social problems. They may, for example, be poorly skilled, unemployed, living on a low income and coping with difficult home circumstances. They might live in poor housing and in areas blighted by crime. Those living in rural areas may have difficulties in accessing the types of services that other people take for granted.



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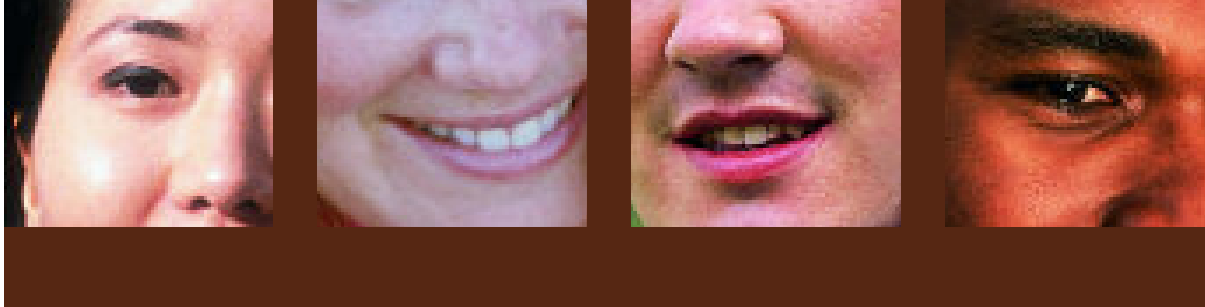
Sometimes people's problems are so numerous and the effects are so severe that it is impossible for them to lead what most people in Northern Ireland would consider to be normal every-day lives.

Government uses the term "social exclusion" to describe what can happen to people who are subject to the most severe problems. Social exclusion has to do with poverty and joblessness – but it is more than that. It is about being cut off from the social and economic life of our community.

Government has identified social exclusion as one of the most serious social issues of our time. It believes that for too long interventions have sought only to repair the damage caused by social exclusion. For many people the help comes too late to be effective in addressing the problem.

Government is committed to cutting away the very roots of social exclusion and to preventing the damage happening in the first place.

14. The challenge is also to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and enjoy the benefits of so doing. Not everyone who is poor is socially excluded and many people living in poverty are sustained through social, family and community support networks. Not everyone who is socially excluded is poor. Poverty may not be the main issue for those individuals from, for example, minority ethnic groups who face discrimination and in some cases the difficulties of language barriers; for the person with a disability who may face particular barriers to employment; or lesbian, gay and bisexual people who may experience homophobic bullying.
15. However, social exclusion and poverty go hand in hand, particularly for those individuals and families who suffer from multiple social problems. They may, for example be low skilled, unemployed, have a low income and be coping with difficult home circumstances. They might live in poor housing and in areas blighted by crime. Those living in rural areas may have difficulties in accessing the types of services that other people take for granted.



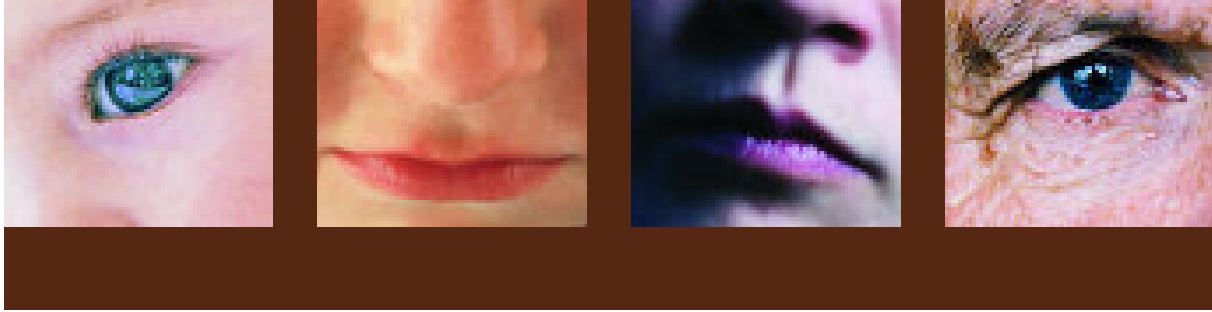
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16. Government through the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) initiative, has set out to develop policies and strategies to tackle, in a joined-up way, the many factors leading to social exclusion overall and, in particular among a variety of vulnerable groups. This has been done in partnership with other public agencies and the private and voluntary sectors. To date this work has covered people from minority ethnic groups; Irish Travellers; people with mental health difficulties; older people; people with disabilities; homeless people and pregnant teenagers. This recognises that groups can be excluded for different reasons, and therefore different solutions are required. Some PSI initiatives are being taken forward as strategies, for example older people, while others such as homelessness, disability and people with mental health problems are still being developed. Equally government, recognising the increasing risk for example, for groups such as lone parents, must continue through the PSI process to develop policy targeted at the needs of all who are socially excluded or risk social exclusion.

Tackling Area-Based Deprivation

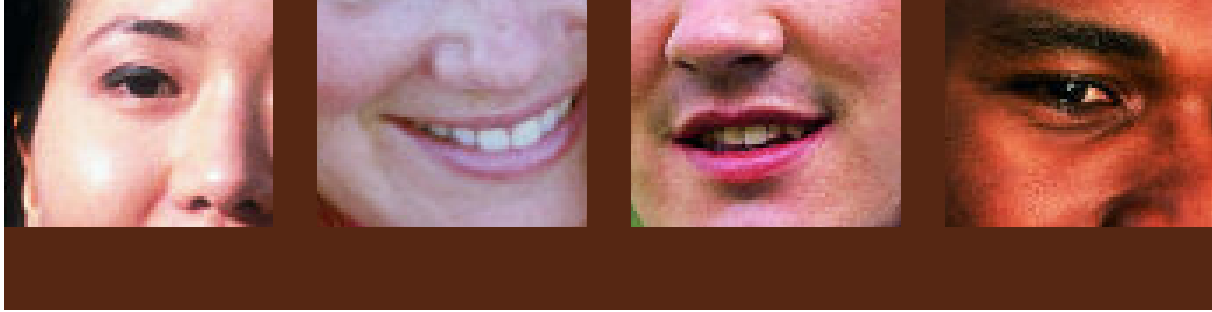
17. The concentration of multiple deprivation² such as high unemployment, crime and low educational attainment in urban areas, poses particular challenges for government and for those statutory agencies providing a range of services aimed at improving people's lives within those communities, as well as posing challenges for the communities themselves. Furthermore, the geography of deprivation has persisted stubbornly over the past 30 years. Thus, while many areas have benefited significantly from regeneration policies, some, including many areas identified in the 'Belfast Areas of Need' study in the late 1970s, still display the same patterns of acute and multiple deprivation.

2 In order to objectively direct resources at area based deprivation, Government commissioned the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM). The NIMDM 2005 identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Northern Ireland. It develops previous measures published in 2001 and will allow for more effective targeting of policies and resources on deprived areas. The NIMDM measure recognises the multi faceted nature of deprivation and covers themes such as income, employment, health, disability, education, skills and training, proximity to services, the living environment and crime and disorder.



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18. For urban neighbourhoods experiencing multiple deprivation and the 284,000 people who live in these areas, there is much greater risk of poverty, poor health, both physical and mental, and the despair that comes from having no apparent prospect of improvement.
19. Policy needs to focus on the most persistently and acutely deprived areas on the basis of objective need and to tailor and develop strategies, working in close partnership with these communities. It needs to stop the downward spiral of deprivation and offer communities a realistic prospect of regeneration of their neighbourhoods and improvement in their lives.
20. 'Neighbourhood Renewal' lies at the heart of government's approach to tackling multiple deprivation in the most acutely deprived urban neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland.
21. The "Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy" targets 36 areas across Northern Ireland. It aims to close the gap for people living in these neighbourhoods compared to the quality of life enjoyed by people living in the rest of Northern Ireland. This gap is illustrated in a number of ways. For example, men and women living in the most deprived areas can expect to have a shorter life expectancy, 5.3 years for men and 3.7 years for women. In terms of our young people, only 37% of school leavers from the most deprived areas leave school with 5 or more GCSEs, the average across Northern Ireland is 61%. The skills base within Neighbourhood Renewal areas also compares very unfavourably when measured against the rest of Northern Ireland, with only 28% of people aged 16 to pensionable age qualified to level 2, the Northern Ireland average is 45%.
22. The "Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy" seeks to address these issues in a targeted and joined-up way over a 7 to 10 year period, using a partnership approach involving the local communities together with key statutory agencies, elected representatives and the private sector in a Neighbourhood Partnership. Individual neighbourhood visions and action plans are being developed and implemented aimed at addressing locally agreed priorities. Implementation of Neighbourhood Renewal is actively working to improve the quality of life for those people living in



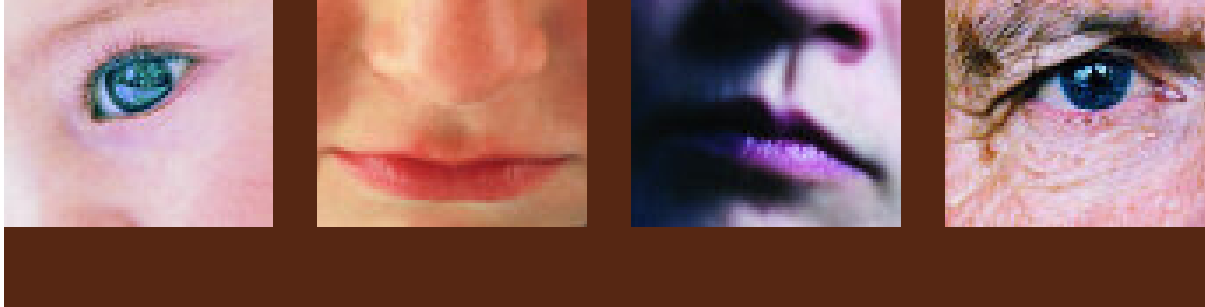
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the most deprived neighbourhoods. The Strategy's partnership approach involving the key interests within neighbourhoods works to:

- target funding at the most deprived neighbourhoods;
 - make public services as effective as possible by improving the co-ordination of statutory providers; and
 - maximise the impact through the prioritisation of new resources going into Neighbourhood Renewal areas.
23. Neighbourhood Renewal will seek to translate, where appropriate, the goals and targets set for the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy by reflecting these within agreed floor targets to be established for Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Floor targets will help reduce the gap between the quality of life for people living in these areas compared to other parts of Northern Ireland.

Eliminating Poverty in Rural Areas

24. While poverty and multiple deprivation tend to be concentrated in urban areas, rural communities are also at risk with high levels of deprivation in less accessible rural areas. This is for a variety of reasons. Patterns of migration of younger people away from rural areas have resulted in a greater concentration of older people in areas vulnerable to poverty and social isolation.
25. Agriculture continues to have an important economic role in the rural economy. It faces challenges including through changes in support arrangements and in market requirements, which mean that fewer farms are economically sustainable without an external source of income and there is less employment available in the farming sector.
26. Government will strive to increase the economic sustainability of all farm businesses, to increase added value in the land and marine based economy and increase local and export demand for NI produce, yielding more sustainable employment in rural areas. Actions will include targeted strategies for Research and



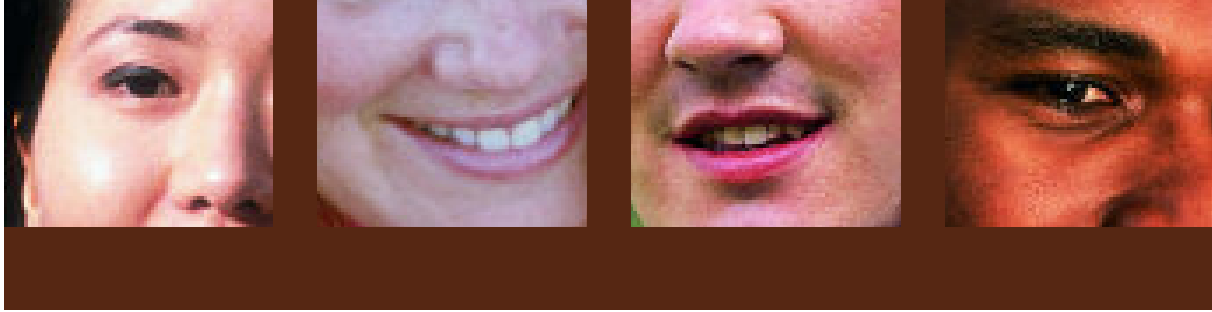
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Development and technology transfer, for food and for significant economic sectors. The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) will provide competence, development programmes to assist the development of competitive and sustainable farm businesses through improvements in existing enterprises or by on-farm diversification.

27. Government recognises the need to strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas by supporting farm based non-agri businesses and non-farm small rural businesses in the creation of rural jobs. Government will work to ensure that rural and fisheries dependent villages and communities in greatest need, are sustained and regenerated and have equitable access to public services and programmes. Government will seek to build a strong rural community infrastructure which will help provide economic and social opportunities for everyone, but in particular, for young people who want to live and work in the countryside.

Shared Opportunities, Shared Challenges and Shared Future

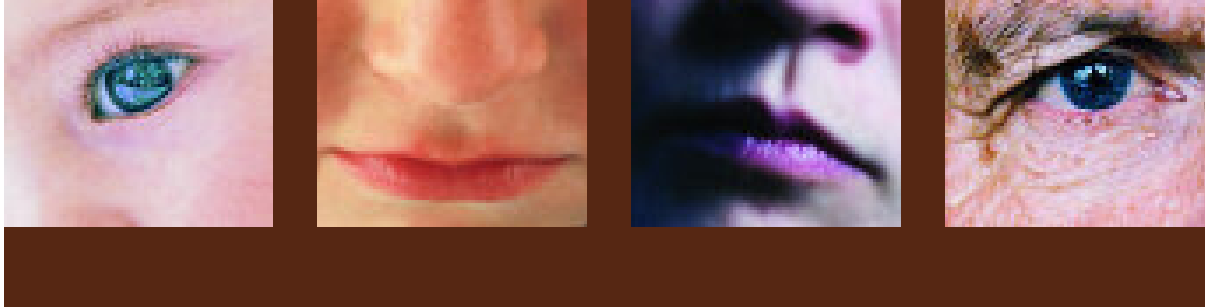
28. There is little doubt that many of the poorest in Northern Ireland live in areas which have suffered greatly during the long years of inter-community strife and conflict. Many would accept that the poverty and disadvantage endemic within such communities has led to a sense of limited opportunity and limited investment in the future. In such an environment it is easy to see why so many young people were drawn into violence and paramilitarism. If we are to fully exploit and benefit from the end of the conflict in Northern Ireland, we must address not just the economic legacy but also the social consequences, particularly the continued division, hostility and mistrust which persists. In A Shared Future, government has set out how it plans to promote good relations, greater respect and tolerance between all communities. This is undoubtedly a challenge given the history of conflict in Northern Ireland. Equally challenging is the need to show that shared futures will also be futures free from poverty and social exclusion.



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Tackling Inequality in the Labour Market

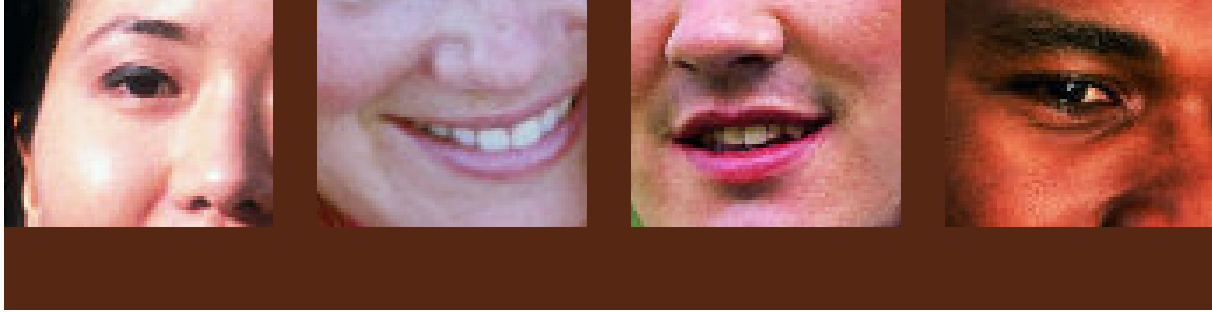
29. Government has repeatedly stressed the importance of creating employment opportunities as primary routes out of poverty and of the promotion of equality of opportunity as key to tackling labour market inequalities. Both policy and legislation have been important in contributing to reduced inequalities in the labour market. New Targeting Social Need in particular has provided a policy base for ensuring the directing of resources at those in greatest objective need as a means to reduce community differentials. Equally, government has in place a robust framework of fair employment and broader anti-discrimination legislation providing protection from discrimination in the area of employment including training, recruitment and promotion. It is evident however that inequalities persist with, for example, Catholics more likely to be economically inactive than Protestants and more likely to be long-term unemployed, while Protestants are under-represented in certain sectors of the economy. Women's participation in the labour market continues to lag behind that of men while the labour market disadvantage for people with a disability persists and it is reflected in relatively low disability employment rates which are even lower in Northern Ireland than the rest of the United Kingdom.
30. For that reason, the challenge for all of us is to remove barriers to employment which some individuals face. The introduction of new pilot initiatives such as Pathways to Work for Incapacity Benefit claimants, for the first time provides support and assistance to those who face ill-health barriers to employment. We must have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in developing and implementing programmes to eliminate poverty. We must also take forward and improve legislation to ensure that there is no disadvantage in the field of employment experienced by different sections of society based, for example, on their gender, religion, political opinion or any of the other dimensions defined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. For that reason government has continued to develop plans for a Single Equality Bill for Northern Ireland, in line with the commitment of the previous Executive. This will strengthen and simplify the existing framework of anti-discrimination legislation in Northern Ireland.



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Tackling Health Inequalities

31. Investing for Health is Northern Ireland's long-term strategy to improve public health. One of the overarching goals of the strategy is to reduce inequalities in health between geographic areas, socio-economic and minority groups. This goal is being delivered through regional strategies on issues such as smoking, as well as by local health improvement plans developed by Boards and Investing for Health Partnerships.
32. The DHSSPS's distribution of funds to each of the Health and Social Services Boards is largely determined by the application of the Capitation Formula. The Capitation Formula is kept under review to ensure that, at the most strategic level, health and social care resources are allocated fairly and more effectively according to need. The latest available information regarding the redistributive effect of the formula shows that in 2006-07 around £35m will be redistributed between the four HSS Boards, which represents the net effect of £36m being skewed because of age/gender differences and £32m skewed because of deprivation-related need. The redistributive impact at electoral ward level is much greater, as the areas are much more distinct and differ in their age/gender profile and relative affluence or deprivation. At electoral ward level the formula will move around £222m gross between electoral wards because of needs arising from age/gender differences, while £324m gross will be redistributed because of social disadvantage. The revisions to the Formula resulting from the latest research will further increase its sensitivity to need and will skew even more resources toward the most disadvantaged areas.
33. Clearly, therefore, the challenges are about continuing to strengthen and support the Northern Ireland economy while assisting people to overcome barriers to employment, including education and skills, so that they can compete and prosper in a modern and growing economy. It is also about providing support and safeguards for those who are unable to be economically active through the welfare system and full participation in social and economic life.

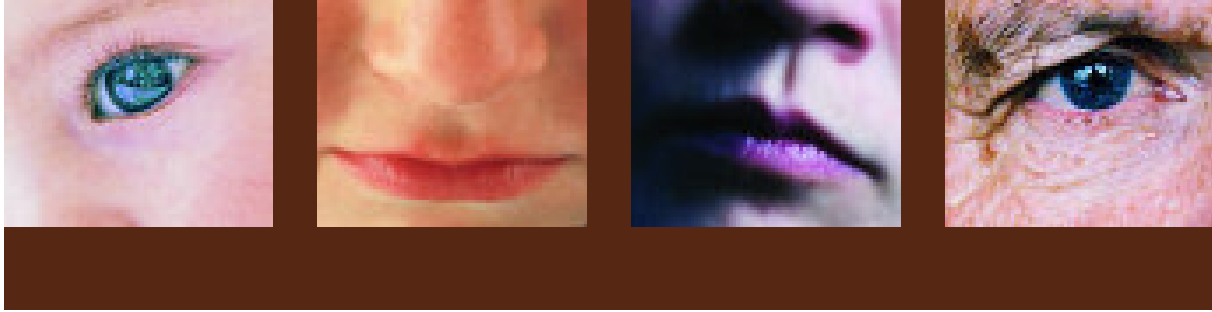


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34. In general it is also about dealing with the multiple disadvantage that blights the lives of some who live in both urban and rural areas, tackling the deprivation that has persisted and preventing areas at the margins from slipping into dereliction and decay.

A Lifetime Approach

35. Poverty and social exclusion can affect all of us at any time in our lives. It can be the result of loss of employment through redundancy or poor health. This point was well made by the voluntary organisation, The Simon Community, whose recent advertisement reminded us that we are never more than two pay cheques away from homelessness.
36. Thus while single events can have a profound effect, equally some children are born into a life of disadvantage from which, without the proper help and support, it is difficult to escape. Policy must break the cycle and the process that results in children who are born into poverty developing into under-achieving young people with limited aspirations and low levels of educational qualifications and skills. They in turn become working age adults living on low incomes, often in poor health and benefit dependent with the prospect of a shorter, less healthy, comfortable and financially secure older age. They are also the adults most likely to be parents of children again born into poverty – with the cycle continuing.
37. Policy to undermine this process must therefore target distinctive social need at different times in people's lives, from early years through to childhood, adult working life and later years. It must set ambitious goals for each stage, along with specific and challenging targets to meet these. Only by doing so is it possible to provide the proper framework of support needed to help people escape from poverty but importantly prevent poverty to begin with.

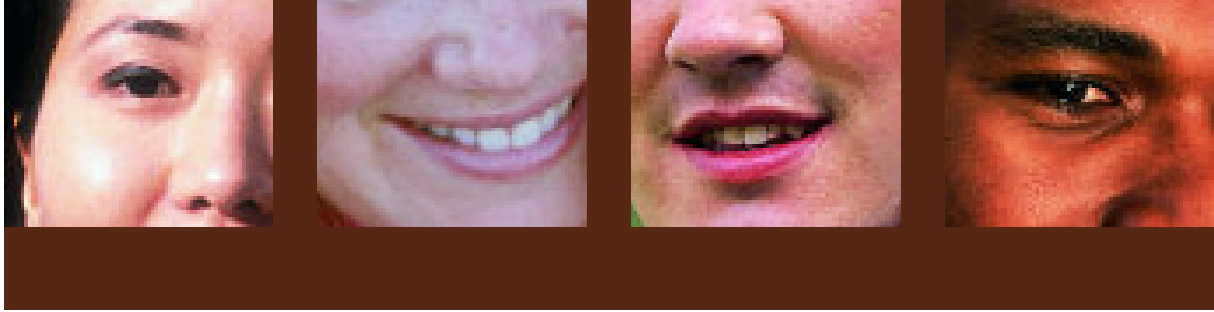


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What some of the Statistics say

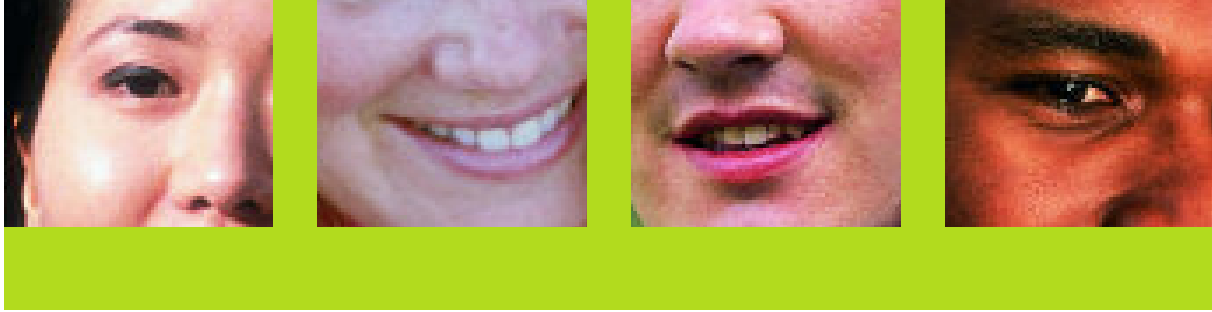
In summarising relevant socio-economic trends in Northern Ireland it is particularly evident that:

- in terms of employment levels, the Northern Ireland labour market has improved. However we still lag behind the UK in terms of working age employment rates. To remove this gap would require 56,000 additional people in employment. Employment rates are particularly low among people with disabilities, lone parents and young people 16-25;
- the current economic inactivity rate (27%) is the highest in the UK;
- while overall educational performance continues to improve in Northern Ireland, disadvantaged children are achieving significantly less in terms of qualifications;
- similarly, while levels of education and skills within the working age population have increased, some groups are still educationally disadvantaged, specifically older adults, people with a disability and some 16-25 year olds;
- the quality of the housing stock continues to improve. However in some places poor housing conditions persist, most notably in the private rented sector. Homelessness has also increased markedly in recent years;
- against a generally uprising health trend, health inequalities between the poor and the better off remain significant;
- the proportion of households in NI who do not have any savings (41%) is one and a half times the UK level (27%);
- the risk of poverty in Northern Ireland is higher for individuals living in urban areas outside the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMUA);



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- 41% of individuals in lone parent families live in poverty compared with 19% of all individuals;
- children are most at risk of poverty in urban areas outside the BMUA. Thirty per cent of children in such urban areas live in income poverty, compared to 22% in the BMUA and 20% in rural areas. Working age individuals are similarly at the greatest risk of poverty if they live in urban areas outside the BMUA; and
- the pattern of pensioner poverty is different. Thirty-three per cent of pensioners living in rural Northern Ireland live in households experiencing income poverty, compared to 12% in the BMUA and 16% in urban areas outside the BMUA.



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2. EARLY YEARS (0-4)

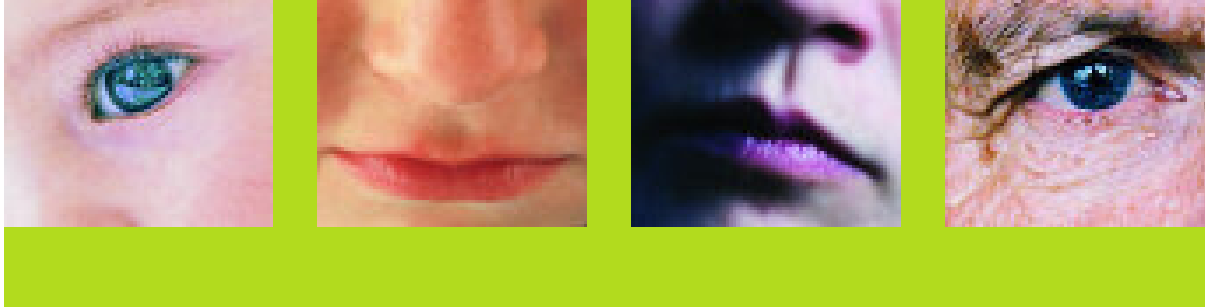
Our goal is to ensure that every child should have a chance to develop their full potential in infancy regardless of social background.

38. “Pre-school can play a part in combating social exclusion for disadvantaged children by promoting a better start to primary school and pre-school has a positive impact on children’s progress over and above family influences.³” The importance of Early Years experience in helping shape positive, social, psychological and educational development is well recognised in research such as that published recently by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. Maximising provision and support, therefore for children in their early years is an investment which will help lay a solid foundation for their future. In many countries, ‘headstart’ programmes have been introduced in order to ensure that the development of children in disadvantaged backgrounds does not fall behind. They typically focus on language, social development, nutrition and healthcare and parental support.

Progress So Far

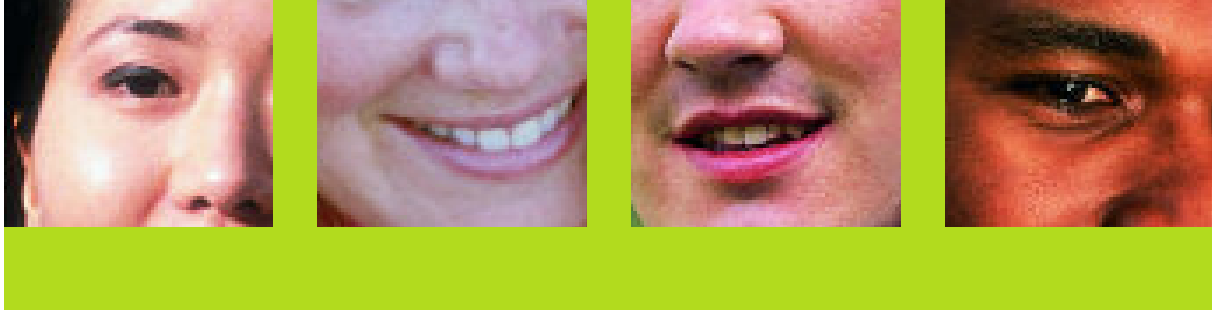
39. A Children’s Minister has been appointed and OFMDFM have launched a 10-year strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland.
40. The future development of childcare in Northern Ireland is set within the context of structural changes with the administration of public services in Northern Ireland. This is a period of significant change for childcare provision in Northern Ireland and the “Review of Children First” document will be an instrumental tool in informing the way forward for this provision and its delivery in Northern Ireland.

3 Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) Summary Report (Melhuish et al, 2006) Department of Education



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41. At the heart of government's drive to improve the quality of Early Years among those most in need, is the Sure Start programme. Sure Start aims to improve health and emotional development for young children and also to support parents in their role of parenting. It was introduced in Northern Ireland in July 2000 when Ministerial approval was given for 15 projects across Northern Ireland with full year funding for these projects amounting to £4m.
42. In March 2001, a further eight projects were created with the result that there is now a total of 23 Sure Start projects operating across Northern Ireland. The introduction of the programme here means that over 20,000 children aged under four and their families will have access to the services provided through Sure Start.
43. Expansion and enhancement of Sure Start is set to happen through the Children and Young People's Package enabling 12,000 more children access to the services of Sure Start. From September 2006 it is anticipated that there will be 7 new projects and 19 existing projects will expand their services.
44. Since 1 November 2006, the Department of Education oversees Sure Start and is taking forward a new developmental programme for 2 year olds in conjunction with the existing, extended and new Sure Starts, benefiting the most disadvantaged children.
45. Just as the quality of children's early experience is acknowledged as central to healthy development, the benefits for all children of pre-school education are also well recognised. In Northern Ireland in the 1997/98 school year there were funded places for 45% of children in their pre-school year in 160 nursery schools, nursery units attached to primary schools, and in reception places in primary school. By the 2003/04 school year places were available for 95% of children in their pre-school year.
46. This increase has been achieved through the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, which is the Department of Education's contribution to the Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy, "Children First", published in 1999. The Expansion Programme has provided additional pre-school places in 100 new nursery schools and units and in 375 voluntary/private settings.

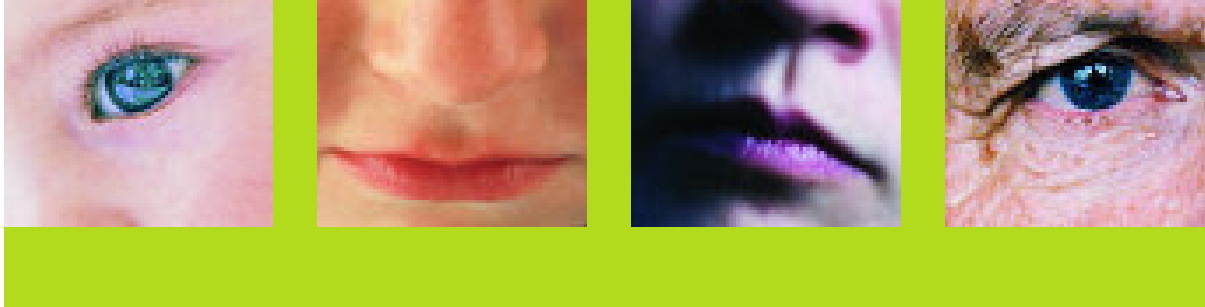


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47. When children are being admitted to pre-school education, legislation gives priority to those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds - defined as children whose parents are in receipt of income support or income-based job-seeker's allowance. This recognises the benefits that pre-school education brings such children, and forms part of the Department's policy of targeting social need.
48. To improve the life chances of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, an investment of £8m over two years will be used to provide for the establishment of multi-disciplinary support teams that provide support services to schools, and other early years settings.
49. In addition, £100k will be allocated in 2006/07 to increase the enrolment of traveller children in pre-school settings.

Supporting Parents

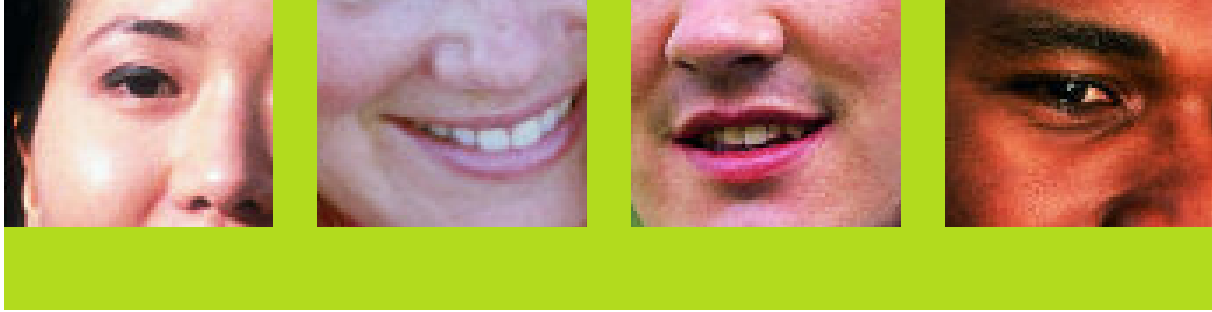
50. Parents play a key role in giving their children the best possible start in life. However, we recognise that being a parent is challenging at times and so our aim is to ensure that families are able to access appropriate support services and become equipped to nurture, care for and support their children.
51. The tax credits system provides financial support to help working families cover the costs of childcare. From April 2006 eligible parents have been able to claim a maximum of 80% of their childcare costs. The average weekly childcare element paid to Northern Ireland families in 2004/05 was just over £50.
52. In 2004/05 approximately 250,000 children benefited from Child Tax Credit in Northern Ireland. In 2004/05 the average amount of credit was £3,187 for families with children in Northern Ireland. This compares with £2,790 across the UK as a whole.
53. Legislation now gives parents a greater choice in balancing work and family life. Paid maternity leave has been extended to six months with further consideration



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being given to extend this to nine months from April 2007. Two weeks paid paternity leave are also available with an option to extend this up to 13 weeks unpaid leave.

54. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) is leading on the development of a “Family and Parenting Strategy” which will be put out for consultation later this year. This strategy will seek to ensure that resources are put into prevention, to support parents at an earlier stage giving them access to the help and services they need, thus reducing the number of families needing more intensive, expensive services, and empowering them to be in control of solving their parenting difficulties.
55. It is also important to address the issue of smoking among adults, including pregnant women, not least because of parents’ influence on children’s smoking habits and the need to protect the unborn and newly born from the direct and indirect effects of tobacco smoke. The “Northern Ireland Tobacco Action Plan” identifies pregnant women as one of the three main target groups and outlines a range of services targeted at this group.
56. Breastfeeding is widely acknowledged as the best means of giving infants a healthy start in life. A “Breastfeeding Strategy” has been in place since 1999 to help promote and support breastfeeding in Northern Ireland. Since then there have been significant improvements to breastfeeding support. These include the implementation of the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative, Sure Start programmes involving breastfeeding, training in breastfeeding management along with the establishment of breastfeeding support groups and peer support programme. Major public information campaigns in 2004 and 2005 have helped promote breastfeeding and encouraged public support for breastfeeding mums. This work is reflected in the results from the latest UK Infant Feeding Survey which shows that breastfeeding rates in Northern Ireland increased from 54% in 2000 to 63% in 2005.



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Challenges

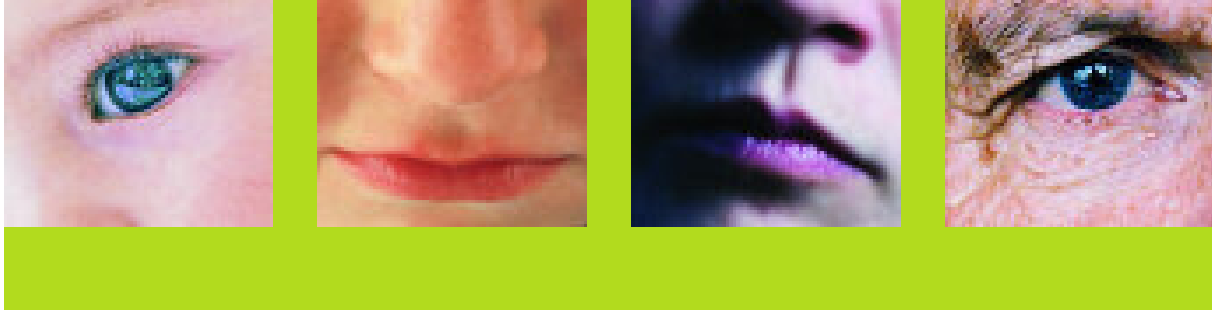
At Get Heard⁴ events Northern Ireland participants highlighted that: “In Northern Ireland the Pre-School Expansion Project is appreciated, but we want it to provide more hours per child per week.”

Lone parents pointed out the need to ensure consistently high standards of childcare.

“Cheaper childcare does not always offer the same opportunities or experience. This means that some services are not accessible to those on lower incomes.”

57. In Northern Ireland there are 110,000 children under the age of 5 (in 2005). Approximately one in five (21%) or 25,000 of these children live in relatively poor households. By 2020 there will be 108,000 children under the age of 5 years.
58. They risk not enjoying the start in life they need and deserve and we therefore need to do more. We need particularly to provide all children with a safe, stable, healthy and stimulating environment which allows the child to thrive and develop the confidence and self-esteem to face future challenges. We need to ensure that parents have access to the support they need both for healthy pregnancies and to develop good parenting skills. Early intervention and ongoing support is critical for parents of very young children to improve outcomes later in life, particularly for those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged and who may not have access to family support networks.
59. For all parents, having the choice to work, or not, during the early years is a decision which families should be able to make for themselves. This means providing access to quality day care provision that is affordable and allows them to balance the demands of parenthood and working life.

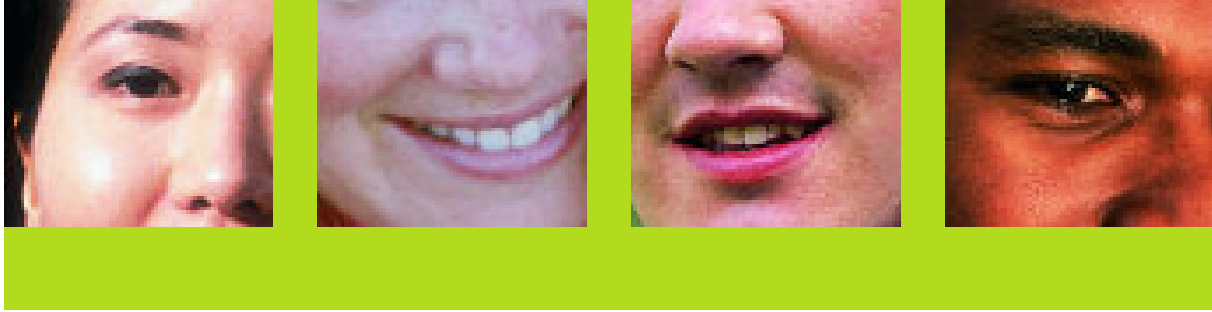
4 'Get Heard' see Chapter 6 paras 163-164



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60. There needs to be a specific focus on high quality public services for young children with targeted support for those with additional needs such as children with disabilities, as well as support for parents to meet their responsibilities to ensure an enjoyable, secure and nurturing childhood for their children. In addition we need to set targets against our priority challenges.

61. Government has already set a specific target to eliminate child poverty in Northern Ireland by 2020. Achieving it is complex. Much of the focus is centred around helping parents participate in the labour market and providing financial support for those who cannot work ensuring decent family incomes. The quality of Early Years experience of children and parents will also contribute. Our goal and targets must be about providing every child, regardless of social background, with the safe, secure and stimulating environment they need to reach their full potential and to support their parents to help achieve this. To that end, and building on current developments, we will ***work towards enhancing support for Early Years by establishing Children's Centres in the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland.***



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EARLY YEARS TARGETS

Goal

Our goal is to ensure that every child should have a chance to develop their full potential in infancy, within a nurturing environment regardless of social background.

End child poverty by 2020-based on the estimate of approximately 130,000 children in Northern Ireland in relative income poverty in 1998/99, this means lifting 65,000 children out of poverty by 2010 on the way to eradication by 2020.

By 2020, to develop and implement a curriculum from pre-school to age 6, which is broad and balanced, which provides progression and which introduces children to more formal learning.

By 2025, 70% of all infants will be breast-fed at one week after birth (50% by 2010).

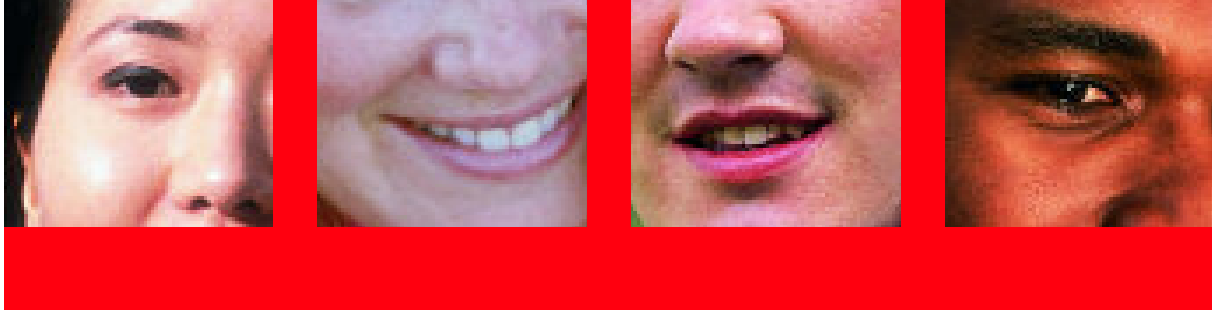
Every young child will experience and reap the benefits offered by good quality play provision.

By 2020, every parent in Northern Ireland will have access to a range of information and services to enable their children to reach their potential and have the opportunity to lead useful and satisfying lives by becoming active contributors to their community through participating socially, educationally and economically.

By 2020, ensure that every child lives in a decent and safe home, which is warm.

Provide opportunities for young children in rural areas to benefit from projects and schemes such as accessible rural transport, day care provision, crèches and initiatives that also support their parents as well as seeking to improve their overall quality of life.

By 2020, government will support every Local Authority to identify and address gaps in provision of services for Early Years children in rural areas.

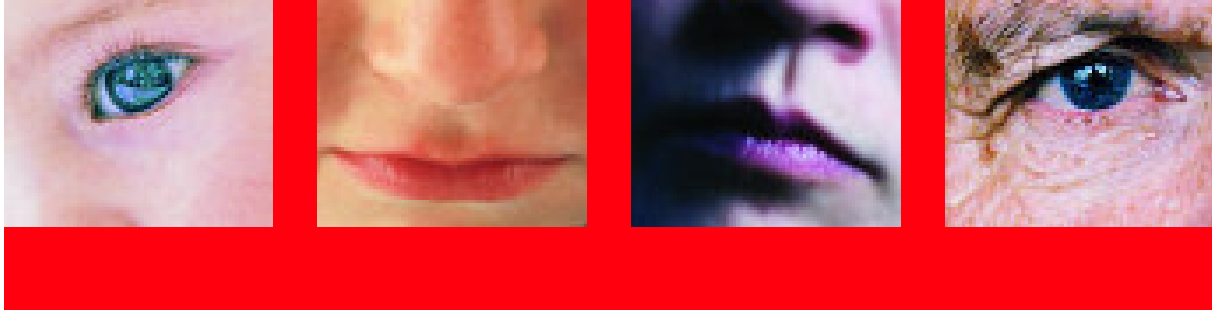


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3. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (5-16)

Our goal is to ensure all children and young people experience a happy and fulfilling childhood, while equipping them with the education, skills and experience to achieve their potential to be citizens of tomorrow.

62. Poverty has a negative impact on children's upbringing and can reduce the chances of children enjoying a happy childhood, achieving skills and qualifications and therefore affecting outcomes in later life.
63. The most important factors that influence a child's life chances are education and skills. To enable all young people to take full advantage of employment opportunities, we need to target support and arrange appropriate interventions aimed at increasing opportunities for young people to gain knowledge, skills and/or experience.
64. Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, have for too long, lived in a society under stress. The social and psychological effects of this are evident in the levels of teenage crime, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and poor levels of educational achievement. It is much to the credit of parents and those who work with children in Northern Ireland that the social and psychological consequences of the troubles have not been more acute. As we move out of conflict we must invest heavily in the citizens of tomorrow to ensure that every child has the opportunity to experience a fulfilling childhood and reach her or his full potential.
65. Concentrating effort on reducing inequality in areas such as child poverty, financial assets, social capital, discrimination and childhood ill-health, is likely to yield the greatest results in promoting equality of opportunity and preventing the transmission of social exclusion from one generation to the next. To tackle these inequalities we will include a range of actions to educate young people about alcohol and drug misuse in order to prevent problems later.

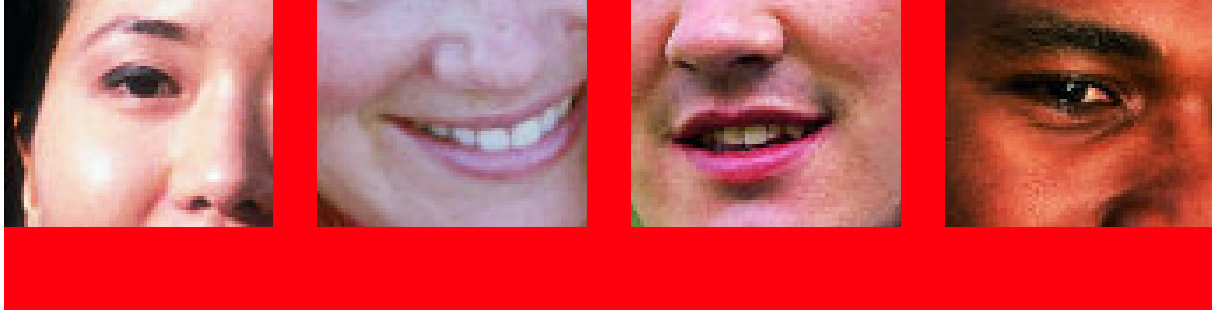


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66. For those facing teenage parenthood, coming out of care, facing barriers through disability or have caring responsibilities, additional support is required to improve long-term outcomes. For such young people access to the right sort of advice, training and support to meet their needs and abilities is essential at this stage, if they are to develop and realise their full potential in later life.

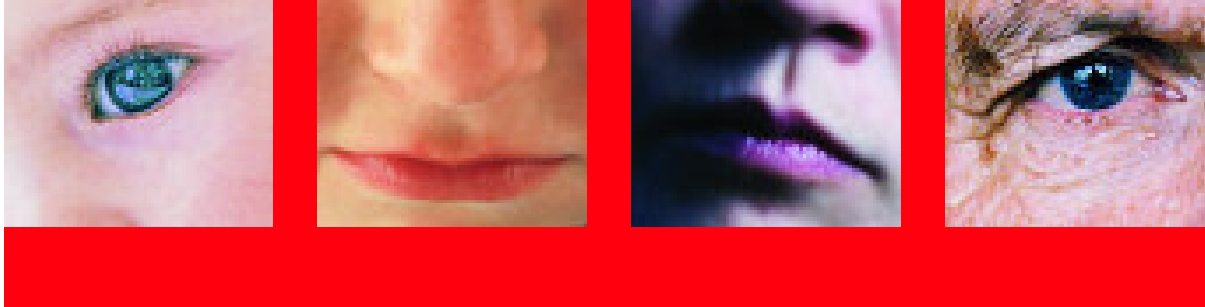
Progress to Date

67. Children need champions and influential public sector positions with a particular focus on their interests. For that reason government has established a Ministerial Champion for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland. It has also established an independent Commissioner for Children and Young People to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people.
68. Furthermore, Directors of Children's Services will be appointed within the Education and Skills Authority and the Health and Social Services Authority to co-ordinate the authorities' responsibilities for children in the operational delivery of both education and health and social services. It is likely that both directors, once appointed will work closely together to integrate a wide range of children's services.
69. In June 2006 government launched a Children and Young People's Strategy which aims to ensure that by 2016 all our children and young people are fulfilling their potential. The strategy includes strategic goals in key areas affecting children and young people and takes into account the role of parents and families. It also examines the scope for achieving a more joined-up approach within government to children's issues. Its vision is that all children and young people living in Northern Ireland will thrive and look forward with confidence to the future.
70. In order to convert policy commitments into practice government has committed significant resources to deliver two funding packages which will benefit children, particularly those in greatest social need.



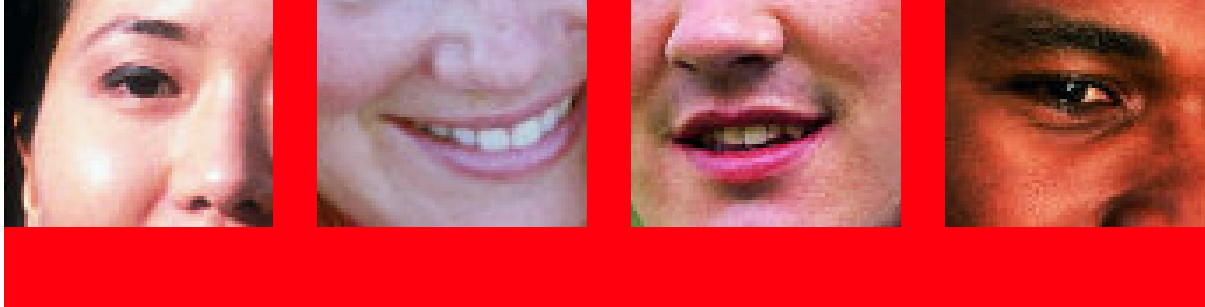
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71. The Children and Young People Funding Package is around £45m in 2006-07 and £58m in 2007-08 and the Skills and Science Funding Package is £15m in 2006-07 and £20m in 2007-08.
72. The Children and Young People Funding Package's overall objective is to reduce underachievement and improve the life chances of children and young people, by enhancing their educational development and fostering their health, well-being and social inclusion through the integrated delivery of the support and services necessary to ensure that every child has the best possible start in life. The targeting of this package is based on both area and individual need and therefore is focused very much on the Neighbourhood Renewal areas where deprivation levels are highest. A significant element of the package is the Extended Schools theme, aimed at nursery, primary, post primary and special schools working in disadvantaged areas. In developing the Extended School, local neighbourhoods are working closely with clusters of schools to maximise the resources and address local need in an integrated and co-ordinated way.
73. The Skills and Science Funding Package aims to enhance investment in skills and training programmes for the employment of young people, to tackle economic inactivity, increase the skills of the working age population and improve the science base to compete more effectively in highly skilled international markets.
74. The School Improvement Programme was launched in 1998 and provides a comprehensive strategy, involving all education partners, to raise standards in schools. It is concerned with tackling low achievement and raising standards for all, in all types of schools. Some £70 million has been committed within the past four years to the programme.
75. To improve the life chances of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, an investment of £8m over two years will be used to provide for the establishment of multi-disciplinary support teams that provide support services to schools.



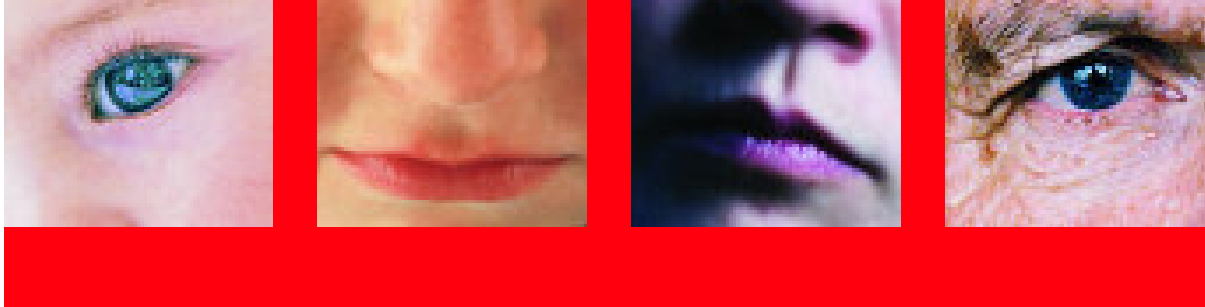
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76. Life Skills Training - £100,000 is being invested in Life Skills Training as part of transition planning for young people over the age of 14 with statements of special educational needs.
77. Youth Services - the value of Youth Services in encouraging young people to realise their potential and become responsible citizens cannot be under-estimated. Both the Children and Young People and Skills and Science packages, focus on the need to invest in our young people to help them achieve their best. In tackling deprivation through Neighbourhood Renewal, these new funding packages and through "Renewing Communities" government has made clear the need to extend detached youth work, increase mentoring schemes and put in place programmes to encourage and support young people.
78. This youth work provision focuses on marginalized and isolated young people in rural areas as well as young people who are part of hard-to-reach communities of interest that fall within the categories of Section 75 of the (NI) Act 1998. Funding of £750k has been allocated to this programme and will provide for 5 youth workers to be placed in voluntary sector projects in addition to a further 20 youth workers across the existing four Education Boards.
79. The Children and Young People's package has provided funding for comprehensive work in the area of child protection making £125k available to the Education and Library Boards to support Child Protection Officers.
80. Education Maintenance Allowance - recognising the importance of financial support in participating in education and the value of encouraging young people to remain in full-time education, government introduced the Education Maintenance Allowance. This is a fortnightly payment of up to £60 for students who are aged 16, 17 or 18 years on or between 2nd July 2005 and 1st July 2006. It is paid directly to young people from households with an income of less than £30,810 who stay on in education after they reach statutory leaving age (i.e. after the end of their compulsory schooling).



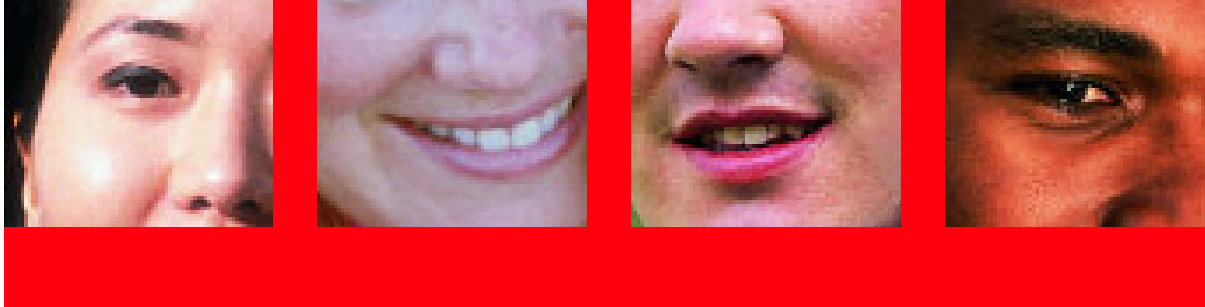
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81. The Common Funding Scheme provides proportionately more funding to those schools with large proportions of their pupils from the more deprived areas of Northern Ireland. This is achieved by allocating funding for the social deprivation element of New TSN with weightings applied to the per pupil funding: one for average and below levels of pupils with free school meals and two equal bandings for above average levels of free school meal pupils.
82. In promoting equality in access to education and breaking down barriers to learning, a policy for children and young people for whom English is an additional language is being developed. Funding of £175,000 from the Children and Young People's package will be used to establish access to interpreting services and provide key documents in various languages which will assist both pupils and their parents.
83. "Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy" - the Careers Service are currently developing an all age careers education and guidance strategy jointly with the Department of Education. This will enable all citizens in Northern Ireland to become effective career planners.
84. "Further Education Means Business" Strategy - in recognition of the importance of further and higher education to progressing our children and young people up the skills ladder, the "Further Education Means Business" Strategy is driving forward a number of reforms for 14-19 year olds. These reforms will develop collaborative models between post primary schools and FE colleges to implement the Entitlement Framework as outlined in the post primary Review. This will make available a balanced academic and professional and technical curriculum offered to all 14 to 19 year olds by September 2009. Through more coherent provision for 14 to 19 year olds, it is intended that qualification outcomes at Levels 2 and 3 will be improved.
85. "Aimhigher" is a partnership between the Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning and Ulster Bank, and takes the Aimhigher message directly to young people in schools and FE colleges. "Aimhigher" is a communications campaign that aims to provide clear information about the routes to Higher Education (HE) for young people in Year 10.



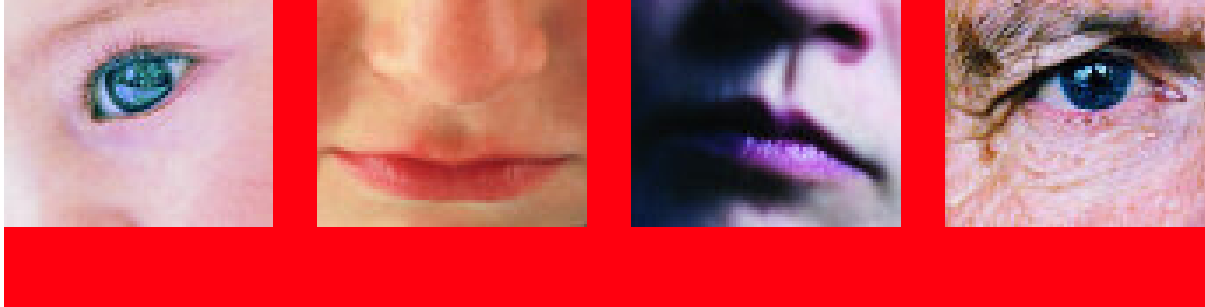
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86. Curriculum Review On Financial Education - in recognition of increasing levels of debt in Northern Ireland the curriculum review on financial education will include a new emphasis on making children financially literate giving them the knowledge to make sound financial decisions when required. The revised curriculum will be phased in from September 2007.
87. In providing tailored services to meet the needs of our children and young people, it is important that their environment is a healthy and supportive one. Government has provided a range of health and social care supports, ensuring that our children and young people are healthy and receive the appropriate financial assistance when required.
88. In addressing the problems associated with teenage pregnancy and parenthood, the "Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Strategy and Action Plan", was published in November 2002. The strategy focuses particularly on areas of social deprivation where rates of teenage pregnancy are highest. Action taken by departments and their agencies working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, include the provision of accessible sexual health services tailored to the needs of young people, community based teenage personal development programmes, courses on parent/child communication and training for teachers, youth workers and health care staff working with young people. Good progress is being made towards the targets in the strategy to achieve a reduction of 20% in the rate of births to teenage mothers by 2007 and a reduction of 40% in the rate of births to teenage mothers under 17. Rates have fallen from 19.5 per thousand mothers aged under 19 years (baseline 1998-2000) to 16.5 (2002-2004).
89. The School Aged Mothers (S.A.M) Project was established to support young women who are pregnant or who have had a baby whilst of compulsory school age, which is up to the end of Year 12. In 2004/05 some 243 young women were referred to the SAMs Programme, and of these some 233 received support. The young women ranged in age from 14 to 18 years, were first time referrals and others 're-referrals' from previous years for continued support. Support ranges from single consultation with a Project Worker through to full-time alternative education provision with childcare.



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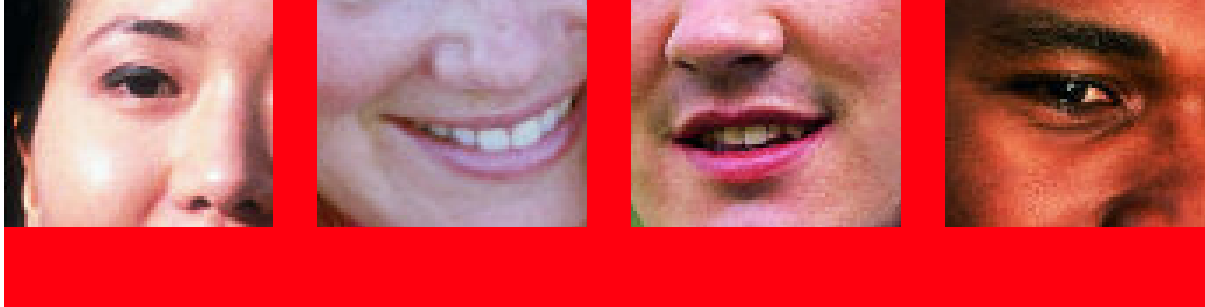
90. The “Fit Futures” Taskforce was set up in 2004 to consider and evaluate options for tackling overweight and obesity in children and young people. Obesity, poor nutrition and inactivity are major risk factors for chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, cancer and diabetes. A Public Service Agreement (PSA) target has now been set to stop the rise in obesity in children by 2010.
91. In terms of nutrition and physical activity, which are the underlying causes of overweight and obesity, there is clear evidence that some groups within the population eat a less nutritious diet and undertake less physical activity.
92. The Ministerial Group on Public Health will be producing a response to the Fit Futures report, including a cross-departmental implementation plan, before the end of 2006. Ensuring that obesity prevention contributes to tackling health inequalities will be a key feature of the plan.
93. The Northern Ireland Tobacco Action Plan also identifies children and young people as a target group. It highlights the need to promote and enhance young people’s self esteem, knowledge and decision making skills in order to equip them with confidence to resist starting to smoke.
94. The “Skills Strategy” - to lay the foundations for a highly skilled workforce of tomorrow and in turn help secure Northern Ireland’s place within a global marketplace, government published The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland in February 2006. This sets out government’s long-term vision for skills in Northern Ireland in improving the quality and relevance of education and training and breaking down the barriers to employment and employability.
95. In creating a well trained workforce and ensuring that Northern Ireland takes its place within the global market, the Skills and Science funding package will support better collaboration between schools, colleges and training organisations, as well as local collaboration between FE colleges and schools to provide a much wider range of vocational education for the 14 -19 year olds as outlined in paragraph 84 above. The package will also cater for the development of a new Pre-Apprenticeship Programme for 14-16 age groups and an initiative to encourage entrepreneurship in



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people of all ages. All these programmes and activities will focus on those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

96. Jobskills - in encouraging young people to build up their range of skills and therefore enhance their employability, 6,600 young people embarked upon the Jobskills training programme during 2005/06. Overall, a total of 9,800 people accessed the programme which consists of Access, Traineeship and Modern Apprenticeship Training. The programme pays a weekly training allowance or a wage while the participant acquires the skills, qualifications and experience to find a job, it is managed by a network of around 70 Training Organisations.
97. The Modern Apprenticeship strand is open to young people age 16 - 24 who are entering full time employment, or meet specified criteria for existing employees. Apprentices follow a training framework developed with the relevant industry, which includes attainment of a National Vocational Qualification at Level 3, a technical certificate and specified key skills. There are around 6,400 Modern Apprentices currently in training in Northern Ireland. They are employed by over 2,000 companies and training delivery is managed by a network of over 70 training providers.
98. A new Professional and Technical Training Provision designed to replace the Jobskills programme, is to be introduced during 2007. It is structured to encourage young people in employment or seeking employment to maximise their skills potential through both an increased range of apprenticeship provision and training designed to tackle barriers to employment.
99. In recognising the skills of many young people and in enhancing their employment opportunities, Invest NI continues to promote entrepreneurship among young people through collaboration with the Prince's Trust and Shell Livewire on youth enterprise programmes. The number of young people registering an interest in enterprise in 2006/07 was 5789, exceeding expectations.

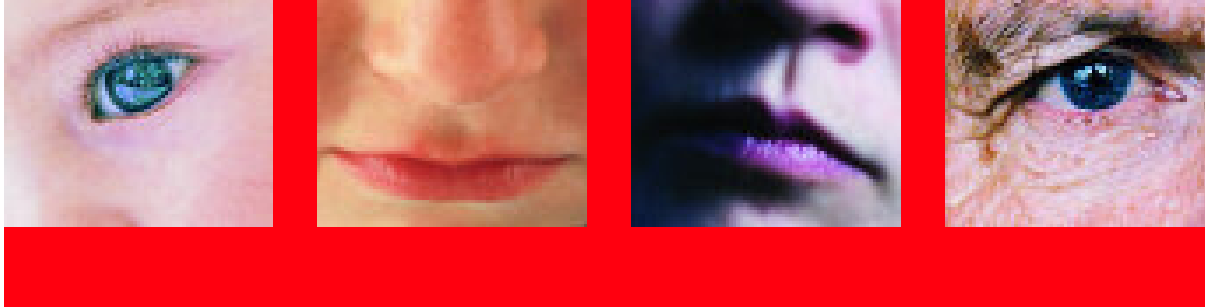


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100. As well as policy and programmes focused on their needs, children need legislation, focused on their rights. A range of legislative instruments have been implemented to safeguard these.
101. The Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002 and its accompanying Regulations came into operation on 1 September 2005. The Act provides a new legal framework for leaving and after care services. Its main purpose is to improve the life prospects of young people who are looked after by Health and Social Services Trusts as they make the transition to independent living.
102. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 provided a framework to give effect to, amongst other things, the Curriculum Entitlement Framework. This new development will guarantee all pupils greater choice and flexibility by providing them with access to a wide range of learning opportunities suited to their needs, aptitudes and interests, irrespective of where they live or the school they attend.
103. The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 and the National Minimum Wage Regulations 1999, came into force on 1 April 1999. As from 1 October 2006, the minimum wage for young people (those older than school leaving age and younger than 18) is £3.30 an hour.

Challenges

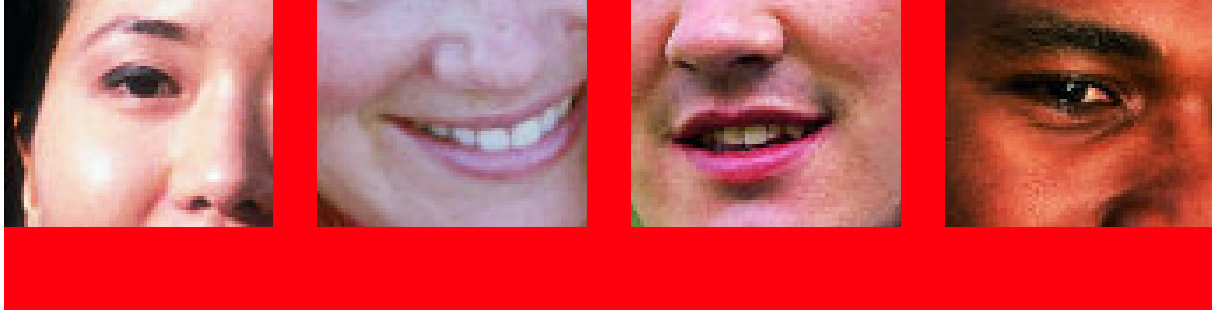
104. At mid year 2004, about one in five people in Northern Ireland (18%) were aged between 5 and 16. In the period 2004/05, almost one quarter (24%) or 76,000 of these children lived in relatively poor households.
105. Research shows that chances of escaping from poverty are greatly improved by educational attainment. Therefore the focus is and will remain on breaking the link between poverty and educational underperformance. We must fund schools in a way that takes account of the disadvantaged backgrounds of their pupils and the extra needs associated with this. Allocation of additional funding to schools and programmes in more deprived areas and initiatives to address low achievement are



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high priority for children and young people. This has particular relevance to Neighbourhood Renewal areas where educational aspirations and attainment are much lower than other parts of Northern Ireland.

106. Parents also have a vital role to play in this process and need to have the skills and support to assist their children in maximising their experience of the education system. Additional emphasis for children and young people should also be placed on children's psychological and physical wellbeing. This includes programmes which encourage healthy eating and exercise habits, particularly for those children who are most at risk of poverty.
107. Services for children with disabilities as well as for ethnic minority groups and those with additional needs require targeted measures to ensure they do not suffer inequalities and become excluded adults later in life.
108. In the transitional period between the ages of 5-16, it is vital that children and young people are given the opportunities to develop and enhance skills that will equip them for employment and provide them with a solid foundation for full and meaningful participation in society.
109. In recognising the complex needs of children and young people, we must focus not only on education and skills but also on the array of health and social care supports in place, to ensure that a tailored package of services is available to this age group.
110. Against the backdrop of an increasingly globalised age, it is vital that our provision of education and skills responds to the demands and expectations placed on our children and young people. In improving life chances for this age group, through the provision of services tailored to their social and economic needs, we will help nurture global citizens of tomorrow.



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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Goal

Our goal is to ensure all children and young people experience a happy and fulfilling childhood, within a safe environment, while equipping them with the education, skills and experience to achieve their potential to be citizens of tomorrow.

To end child poverty by 2020-based on the estimate of approximately 130,000 children in Northern Ireland in relative income poverty in 1998/99, this means lifting 65,000 children out of poverty by 2010 on the way to eradication by 2020.

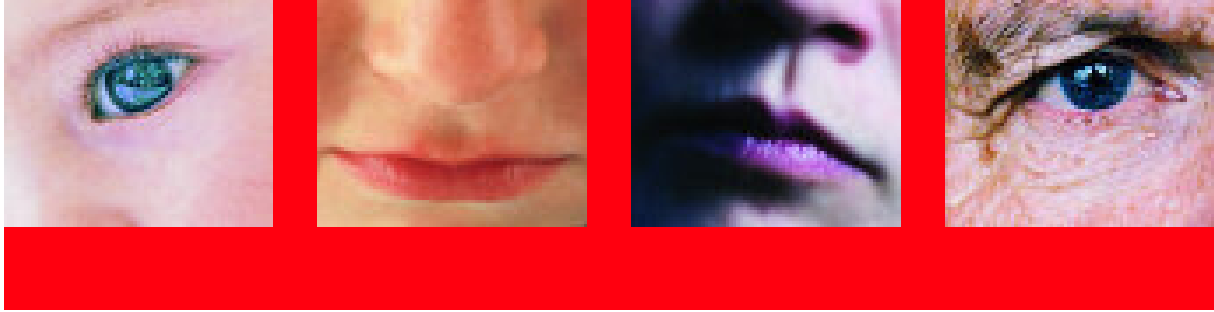
By 2020, to ensure that all children fulfil their potential to obtain basic numeracy and literacy levels before they leave school and, ensure that every young person can enter further education, training or employment.

By 2020, to ensure schools become established centres of the community offering services and learning opportunities before and after the traditional school day, in an environment that provides for regular and consistent contact with others from different community, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

By 2020, to ensure the provision of childcare to a professional standard to be available to all, beginning in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

By 2020, to have substantially improved the educational attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, including looked after children at both primary and post-primary levels.

To have improved the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged between 16 and 24 by a fifth, between 2001 and 2025 as measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) 12 Score.



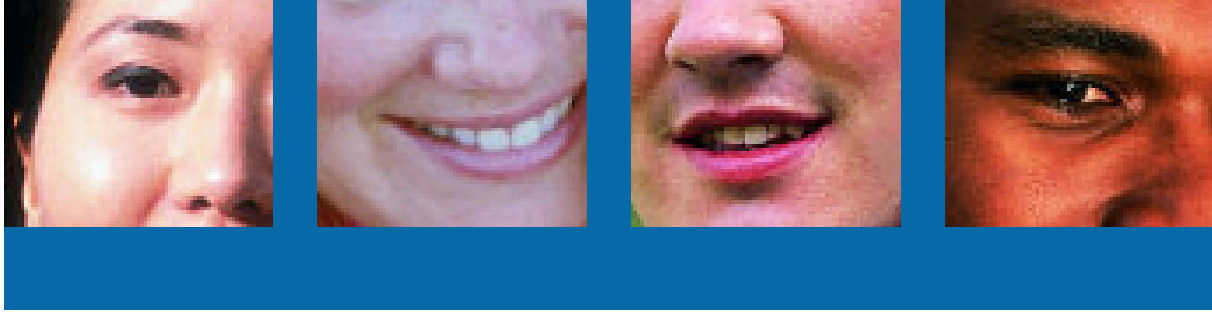
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Provide opportunities for children and young people of all ages in rural areas to benefit from the Rural Development Programme through projects and schemes, such as improving access to ICT and increasing accessibility through rural transport routes and positively benefiting the lives of farm families as well as seeking to improve their overall quality of life.

By 2020, government will support every local authority to identify and address gaps in provision of services for children and young people in rural areas.

By 2020, ensure every child and young person will live in decent, warm homes and in a safe environment that provides access to cultural and recreational activities.

By 2020, reduce disability and long-term health problems and increase life expectancy by promoting road safety.



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4. WORKING AGE ADULTS

Our goal is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life.

111. It is generally accepted that employment is the best route out of poverty for people of working age and we want to ensure those people who can work have access to employment. However government also recognises that for some people work is currently not an option and support through the benefits system is needed until they are in a position to enter employment.

Progress so far

112. Real progress has been made helping more people to access and find employment. The UK now has one of the highest employment rates in its history - in 1995 the working age employment rate was 71%. By 2000 this had risen to 74% and the corresponding figure for 2005 was 75%. The most recent figures for 2006 show the employment rate remaining at 75%.

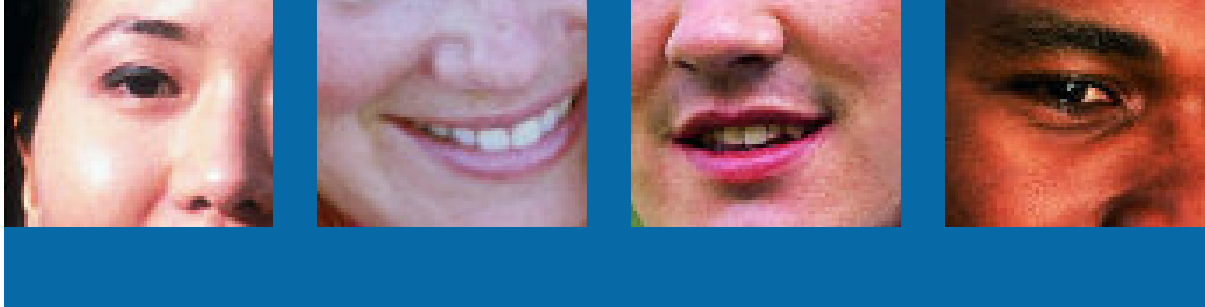
113. In Northern Ireland the working age employment rate in 1995 was 63%. This increased to 65% in 2000 and 69% in 2005. The most recent figures for 2006 show the working age employment rate is now 70%.

114. Through the National Minimum Wage and tax credits (which in Northern Ireland expenditure amounts to £550 million per annum) we have ensured that people will be better off in work than on benefits. In order to deliver specific commitments of enhancing childcare, improving skills, addressing economic inactivity and increasing employment, government, in line with recent announcements on budget priorities, will increase current spending in these areas between now and 2008.



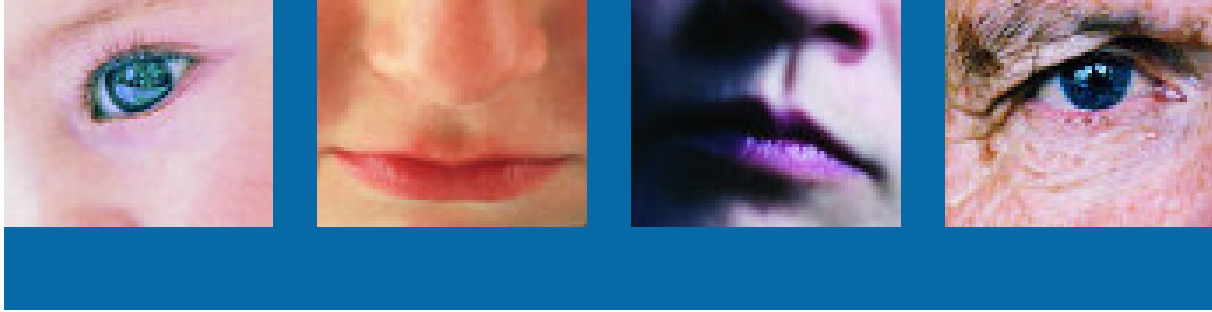
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115. Government has made a major investment in programmes designed to assist and support individuals to move towards and into work. For example, since the introduction in 1998 of the New Deal programme, unemployment in the main New Deal groups (i.e. 18-24 age group and 25+) has reduced. Additional provision is also available through New Deal 50+, New Deal for Lone Parents, New Deal for Disabled People, New Deal for Partners and New Deal for Musicians. Currently, some £23.4m per annum is available for these programmes.
116. Government has recently begun to pilot assistance for people on Incapacity Benefits to assist them to move towards and into work. Evidence from pilots in GB is that this approach is having a positive impact on numbers moving from incapacity from the pilots. In NI indications are that similar increases in movement into work are occurring. Since the end of October 2006, one-third of annual on-flow to incapacity benefit has access to the Pathways initiative in NI, matching the GB position. By the end of September, 363 individuals had found work.
117. Support is also available for individuals who face particular barriers to work. Drug and alcohol misusers, ex-offenders and ex-prisoners or people who are homeless face significant barriers to entering and progressing in the labour market. The progress2work(NI) Pilot Initiative aims to assist up to 300 individuals to overcome these barriers to employment and will run until March 2007 when it will be evaluated. An additional package of support measures for Lone Parents will be piloted in 4 areas in NI from January 2007 with resources obtained through the Skills and Science Fund. Again, using resources from this Fund, mandatory participation for those aged 50+ in New Deal 25+ is being piloted so as to provide additional assistance for individuals in this age group to enable them to enter/re-enter the labour market.
118. Bridge to Employment provides customised training for unemployed people and in particular long-term unemployed to provide skills to ensure they can compete for new employment opportunities on an equal basis with others. By March 2007, 400 unemployed people will have been assisted into employment representing a placement rate of 80% of those who successfully completed the training course.



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119. The Essential Skills Strategy is a vital tool in ensuring that adults have the basic foundational skills necessary for increasing their employability. The strategy has played an important role, in raising the foundation of literacy and numeracy skills within the Northern Ireland workforce. The strategy provides support to enable 18,500 Essential Skills qualifications to be achieved by 2007.
120. By 2007 through the Rural Development Programme and Peace II measures, £100 million will have been invested into rural communities. As a result, a net increase of 700 full time equivalent jobs will have been created and 2200 farmers or farm families assisted in securing alternative income or business benefits.
121. The Rural Development Programme's successor will constitute a major rural strategy, worth approximately £85 million to rural areas. The LEADER+ programme supports the growth of micro businesses and job creation with a view to contributing to the economic development of rural areas. There have been significant improvements in the rates of the working age population without formal qualifications. In 1995, 33% of the working age population had no formal qualifications. By 2000, this had fallen to 27% and the corresponding figure for 2005 was 24%.
122. In building up a skilled workforce within the agri-food sector, the College of Agriculture, Food and Enterprise provides Further and Higher Education Programmes and Industry training needs for those entering and working in the industry and to assist the development of competitive and sustainable agri-food businesses. In the current year, CAFRE aims to have 15,500 participants on its programmes against an allocated budget of £20.4 million.
123. To help tackle the problems associated with financial hardship, action is being taken to provide those experiencing consumer indebtedness with a comprehensive support service. A contract involving the provision of 12 advisors to give face to face debt advice in local advice offices throughout Northern Ireland will run through to March 2008. Work on the development of a debt advice action plan is also underway. Public consultation on the draft action plan was completed on 10th November 2006 and the final action plan will be published later this year.



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124. In addressing the health needs of the working age population, there are a range of measures which have been introduced to tackle specific issues pertinent to this group. The New Strategic Direction on alcohol and drugs contains a range of activities aimed at providing treatment and support to all problem users. The New Strategic Direction also aims to reduce by 5% the proportion of binge drinkers by 2010, from the 1999 baseline.

125. Improving the health of all our people and tackling health inequalities in society are the main aims of the Investing for Health strategy. The Tobacco Action Plan 2003-2008 aims to prevent people from starting to smoke, helping smokers to stop and provide tailored advice to various key target groups of people, one of which is disadvantaged adults who smoke.

Challenges

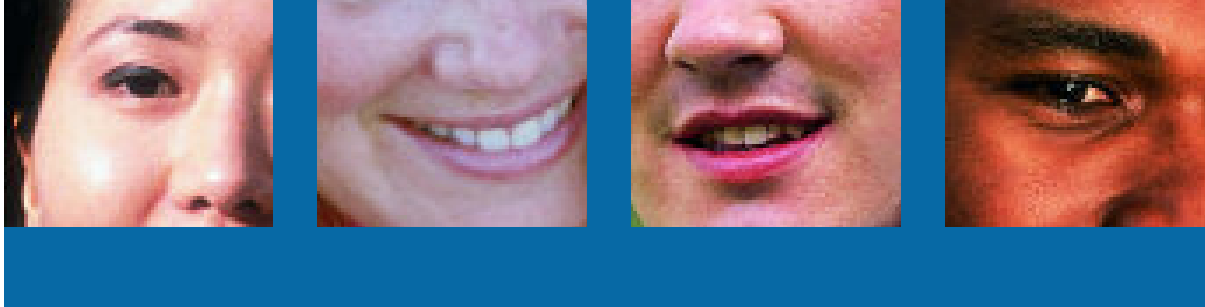
Get Heard⁵ participants highlighted:-

“We need more drop-in study centres where we can learn at our own pace and fit study around other demands on our time, including work.”

“The training courses are just enough to get you off the ground, not enough to make a real difference to getting properly paid work”, and “this programme only trains to NVQ Level II, but the real skills shortage in the construction industry in Northern Ireland is at NVQ Level III.”

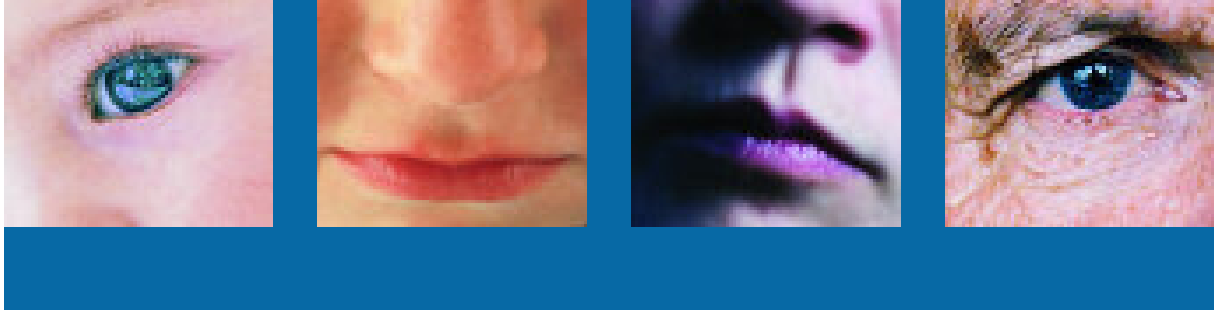
More support with costs for older students seeking training in particular skills or with going to college, both when unemployed and when in low paid work: “I want to train as a plumber, but at the local college I had to pay and I can't”.

5 'Get Heard' – See Chapter 6 paras 163-164



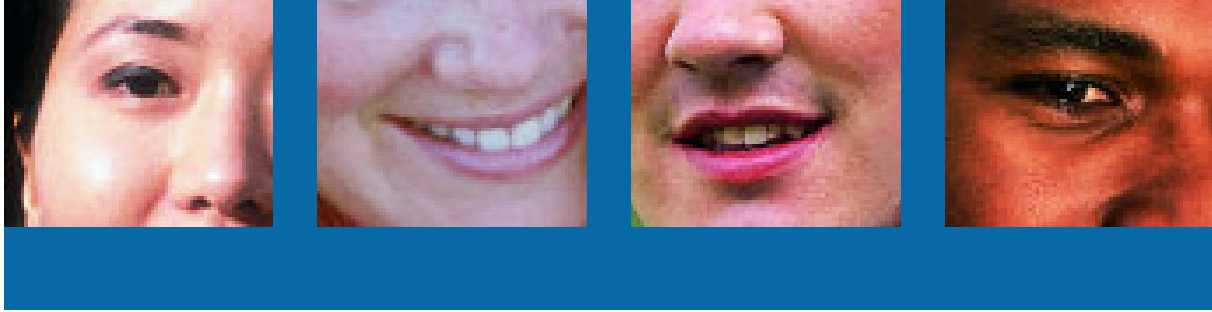
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126. Working age adults currently comprise 62% of the population and by 2020 there will be 1,096,000 people of working age. In 2005, 18%, or 171,000 people of working age lived in relatively poor households.
127. Many working age adults face significant barriers and require information and support to learn, accessible training and affordable childcare. We will continue to focus on how best government can provide this. More specifically and more immediately, we need to commit to **work towards providing support to address barriers to employment for every unemployed or every economically inactive person who wants it.**
128. The lack of economic opportunities, networks and access to training infrastructure are seen as particular problems for lone parents and women and young people in more remote areas. In addition those with disabilities who wish to enter employment may have particular needs and require customised additional support in order to compete for employment opportunities.
129. We also need to help people avoid problem debt and better manage their finances as well as providing early health interventions in relation to alcohol and drugs. Access to decent and affordable housing for everyone is central to enabling individuals and families to live a secure, stable life.
130. The curriculum of Further Education colleges is central to providing individuals with the skills required by employers. Through the FE Strategy, the curriculum offered by FE colleges will be aligned increasingly to the regional and local priority skills needs of the economy, employers and individual learners. This will contribute to an improvement in qualification levels in Northern Ireland, and will improve individuals' chances of gaining employment. A particular problem is the number of adults who have no qualifications. To help to address this issue, under the FE Strategy, FE colleges will develop learner programmes that encourage and support progression, particularly for those learners who have low or no qualifications, those who are furthest from the labour market, and those who are reluctant to make use of conventional FE provision. The aim will be to enable learners to progress to at least Level 2.



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131. In general, therefore, our goals and targets for people during their adult working lives are to do with maximising opportunities to participate, and removing barriers which exclude people from the benefits of being fully included in the economic, social and cultural life of Northern Ireland.
132. Increasing productivity levels remains a key challenge for the Northern Ireland economy. This is reflected in the Economic Vision for Northern Ireland and the forthcoming Regional Economic Strategy. The economy is currently in transition and needs to focus more on higher value added sectors, particularly in tradable services such as business services. It is within this area that Northern Ireland is significantly under-represented relative to the UK.



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WORKING AGE ADULTS

Goal

Our goal is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life.

Contribute to the UK Employment Rate Aspiration of 80% by 2050. Subject to economic conditions make progress on increasing Northern Ireland's employment rate by 2008 and contribute to an overall UK Lone Parent employment rate target of 70% by 2010.

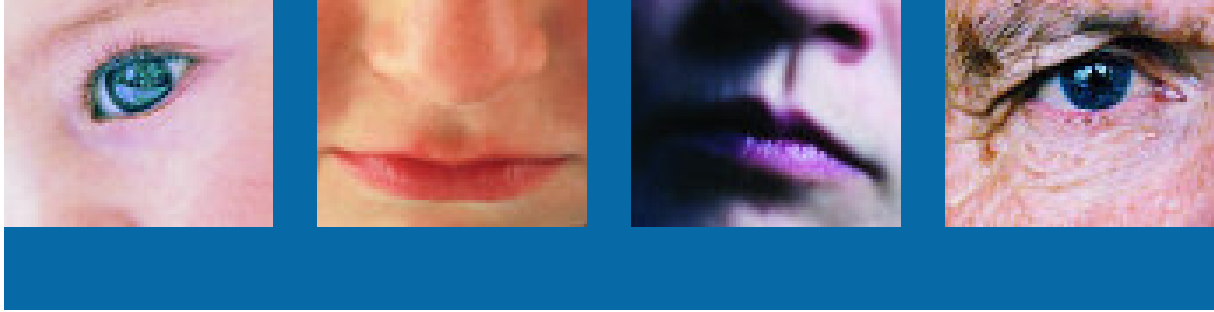
To achieve employment, or other social participation, including cultural and sporting activities for all, particularly where constrained by caring responsibilities, disability or discrimination.

By 2020, to double the percentage of young people who have left care and are in employment, higher or further education or training at age 19.

Through the Skills Strategy, by 2015 ensure the workforce is literate and numerate and has good Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Skills.

By its actions and interventions, DEL will contribute to the overall government aim of reducing the percentage of adults with no formal qualifications to 18% by 2014 and to 15% by 2020.

Provide opportunities for people of all ages in rural areas to benefit from the Rural Development Programme through projects and schemes that enhance their working lives and also aim to encourage a return to the workplace. These include providing childcare facilities, improving access to ICT, increasing accessibility to the job market through rural transport routes and schemes that benefit the lives of farmers and farm families.



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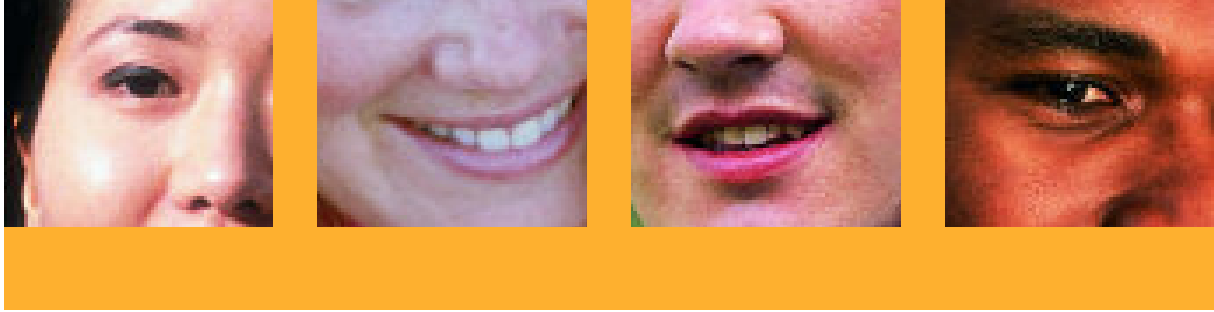
By 2020, to equip NI farm businesses to adjust to greater trade liberalisation and, help to realise the development potential of the food production, processing, fishing, forestry, horticulture, equine, amenity and leisure sectors.

By 2015, to ensure that the needs of rural communities are met by equitable access to public services and programmes, and through programmes which enhance economic opportunities in rural areas and which strengthen and enhance their social infrastructure.

Provision of and access to a decent fuel efficient home including social housing in a safe environment, free from the fear of crime, attuned to individual and household need by 2020.

To target 75% of first time inward investment projects towards disadvantaged areas, to ensure that all areas can benefit from sustainable economic growth and high value added employment.

By 2020, reduce disability and long-term health problems and increase life expectancy by promoting road safety.



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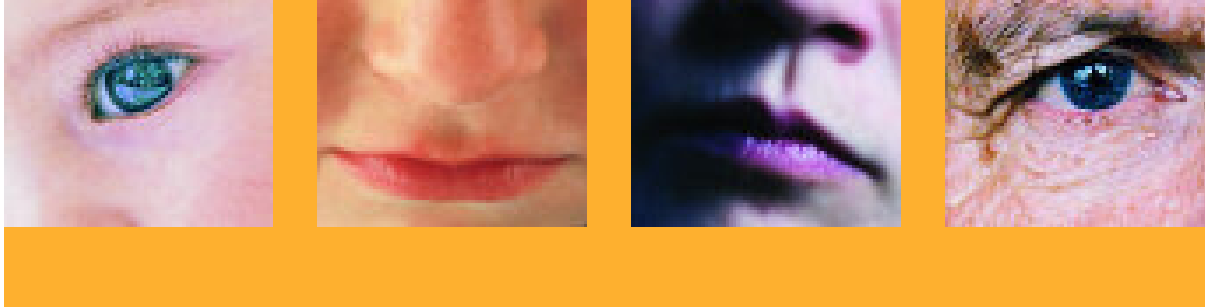
5. OLDER CITIZENS - BEYOND WORKING AGE

Our goal is to ensure older people are valued and respected, remain independent, participate as active citizens and enjoy a good quality of life in a safe and shared community.

133. For some older people who choose to remain or re-enter the labour market, government is committed to tackling age discrimination so that these people can make this choice.
134. However for some, as economic activity reduces, employment is less relevant as an insulator against poverty. For these older people, the emphasis must be on having sufficient income to meet needs, including through increasing awareness and take-up of financial entitlement, particularly for those reliant on benefit income.
135. The priority must also be on reducing financial burdens as far as possible where these are imposed as part of public service provision. This may be through, for example, water affordability tariffs, reliefs and concessionary travel fares.
136. It is important also to help older people maintain an active and healthy lifestyle and thereby prevent social isolation and exclusion. In addition accessibility of public services, including access and provision to decent housing is central at a time where many may experience health problems or have difficulty with mobility.

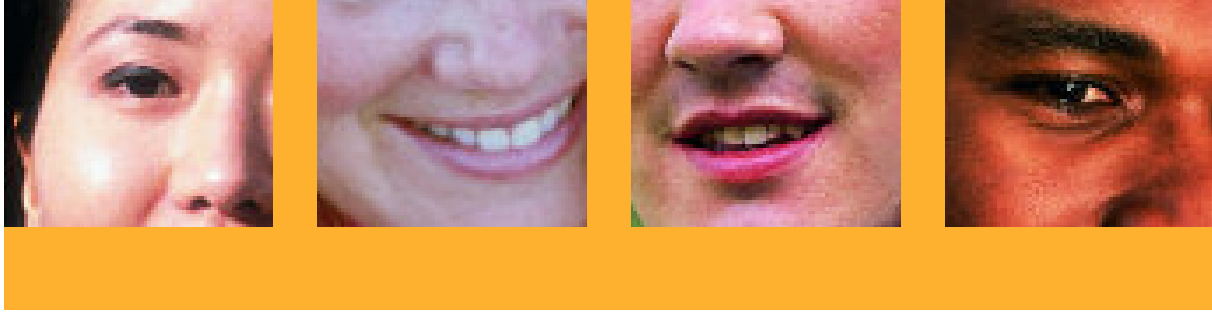
Progress so far

137. Older people know exactly what they need and have been fully involved in the development of "Ageing In An Inclusive Society", government's Older People's Strategy. Its first published Action Plan aimed to ensure that older people are able to fully participate and play an active role in society and have access to the financial and economic resources they need to lift them out of exclusion and isolation. Government must continue to build on this work and monitor progress.



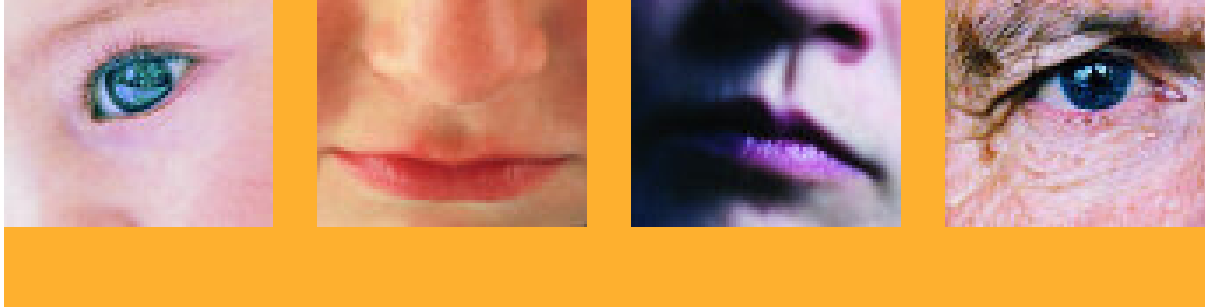
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138. Older people need to have access to financial and economic resources to lift them out of exclusion and isolation. Within the Benefit Uptake Programme, the Social Security Agency, working in partnership with the independent advice sector, is delivering 4 benefit uptake exercises primarily aimed at older people. These include a geographic exercise targeting 3,283 pensioners across 100 most deprived areas, both urban and rural; the identification of 2,766 Pension Credit / State Pension clients over 75 years who are not in receipt of Attendance Allowance; and 2,736 clients, including pensioners, to encourage greater uptake of Carers Allowance or disability benefits; and 12,041 female pensioners, predominantly single on low income, will be targeted for full benefit assessment.
139. Government has included in its range of substantial social security payments and tax credits benefits system, comprehensive support for those less well off, or for those who have reached retirement age and have decided to stop work, or are unable to work:
- Social Security Agency in Northern Ireland has a network of locally based Pensions Advisers who identify the full range of pensioners' needs. At the end of September 2006, the latest available data showed that approximately 112,518 customers received Pension Credit;
 - The Winter Fuel Payment Scheme goes some way to help older people deal with either their rates bill or to meet additional living expenses. Expenditure on Winter Fuel Payments for 2005/06 was £50.2m and payments were made to 205,324 households in Northern Ireland. The number of individuals who benefited from a Winter Fuel Payment was 286,086. Last year, the Winter Fuel Payment Scheme was supplemented with a one-off age related payment, valued at £50 - £200, depending on circumstances. Age related expenditure for 2005/06 totalled £24.868m;
 - Alongside the introduction of water and sewerage charges in April 2007 the government will provide financial assistance in the form of an Affordability Tariff for low income customers as well as the option of metering for older people;



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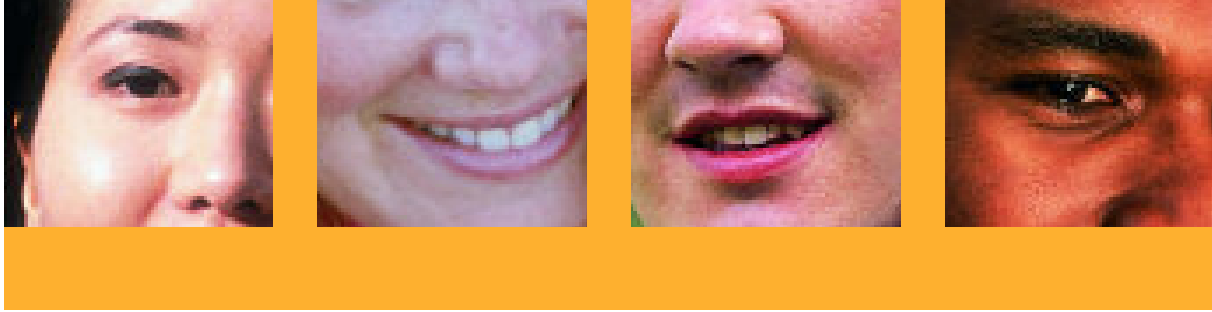
- By April 2007 government will:
 - introduce a low income rate relief scheme providing assistance beyond that awarded through the existing statutory Housing Benefit system. A power has been included in the legislation to allow relief to be directed towards particular groups and adjust the level of assistance provided;
 - simplify the existing Disabled Person's Allowance scheme and allow a 25% reduction in rates where a property is occupied by a person with a disability and which has been modified because of this; and
 - have in place an enabling power in legislation to introduce a scheme allowing pensioners to choose to defer their rate payments over their lifetime. The government is not introducing the measure at this time but it will be left to a future Executive to implement it if they so wish.
140. Housing is an important area of support for older people and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has, within its Supporting People Scheme related support services that enable just under 16,000 vulnerable people including 9,400 older people to live as independently as possible in their community.
141. Additionally, the Pensions Service has taken forward a specific exercise to maximise the take-up of housing benefit to further enhance its role to reduce pensioner poverty by targeting customers of Pension Credit.
142. The Investing for Health Strategy aims to improve the health and well being of all the population. Specific programmes have been developed to support older people to live healthy and active lives including home safety clubs, falls prevention and physical activity.
143. Caring for older people and the delivery of health and social care for older people remain central to the business of the Health and Personal Social Services.
144. Targets have been set to provide people with modernised acute hospital services to deliver high quality treatment, substantially reduce waiting times and meet peak demands without postponing normal activity. There are also proposals for the



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development of integrated primary and community care services that prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, promote faster recovery from illness, supply timely discharge and maximise independent living in accordance with the principles of 'People First'.

145. A Lock Out Crime Scheme (LOCs) aims to improve home security for older people in approximately 23,000 homes across Northern Ireland. All the letters of offer to those eligible for the Scheme have been issued and by end August 2006 over 11,000 people have benefited from LOCs. This Scheme is due to cease in March 2007. A Help the Aged 'handy van' scheme is operating in the Greater Belfast area for the next 3 years and aims to deliver 600 home security improvements annually. A pilot project tried in the Newry & Mourne District Council area is also being progressed to tackle doorstep crime committed against older adults.
146. The Accessible Transport Strategy, published in 2005, aims to have an accessible transport system that enables older people and people with disabilities to participate more fully in society, enjoy greater independence and experience a better quality of life.
147. The Mobility Inclusion Unit (MIU) in the Department for Regional Development was created to manage effectively the transition to a fully accessible transport system to maximise the benefits for older people. MIU funds and works closely with the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee, which was established as a main source of independent advice to service providers and departments on all transport matters that affect the mobility of older people and people with disabilities.
148. The Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme, provides free travel on public transport services for residents aged 65 years and over. 103,937 Senior SmartPasses were used at least once in 2005-06; this represents 44% of all those aged 65 and over, based on 2005 mid-year population estimate (236,000).
149. Plans are also advanced to introduce an All Ireland Free Travel Scheme for older people. Due to become operational in April 2007, this will enable Northern Ireland residents to travel for free on public transport throughout both parts of the island.



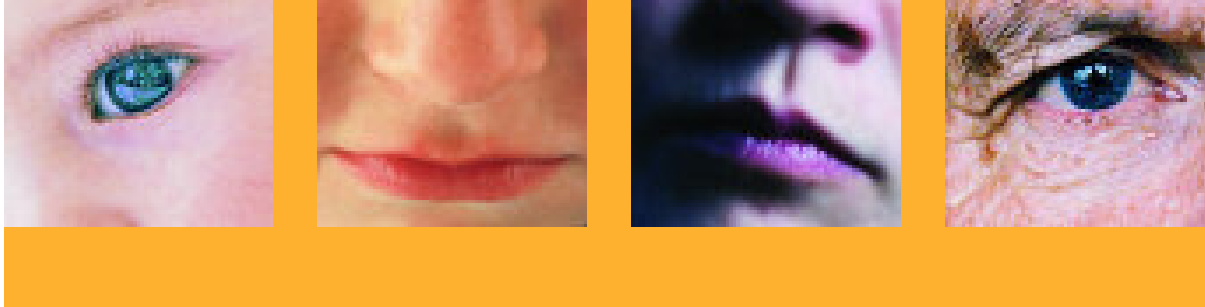
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150. Also, door-to-door transport services for people with disabilities and those who find it difficult or impossible to use public transport will be available in all of the NI urban areas with a population in excess of 10,000.
151. Rural community transport partnerships provide travel opportunities in 95% of Northern Ireland's rural areas which greatly improves access to services for many older people in remote areas.
152. In promoting inclusion and encouraging participation and involvement amongst older people in the local community, young people have been encouraged to consider issues affecting older citizens. This has been assisted through the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 which includes provision for the revised curriculum and took effect from August 2006. The revised curriculum will be phased in from September 2007 and includes Citizenship education, which will cover diversity, inclusion, equality, social justice, human rights and social responsibility. Young people will consider issues such as identity, difference and inequality and how to address it – for example age or disability.
153. Legislative measures have been brought into force on 1 October 2006 to prohibit age discrimination in employment and vocational training. These new NI Regulations (The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006) will have far reaching consequences to prevent unjustified direct and indirect age discrimination; and all harassment and victimisation on grounds of age in employment and vocational training, which is applicable to individuals in work, seeking work or access to training, and all providers of vocational training.

Challenges

Many older 'Get Heard'⁶ participants were in their 50s and keen to get back into work; they clearly identified the barriers to getting back to work and the help they need. They want:

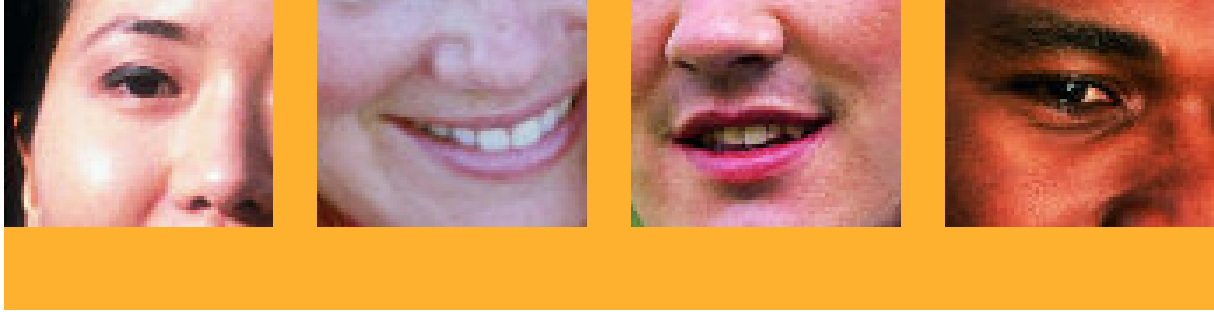
6 'Get Heard' – See Chapter 6 paras 163-164



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- an end to age discrimination;
- enforcement of the forthcoming legislation; and
- increased availability of better paid jobs for older workers; more support for part-time work.

154. In the period 2004/05, over one in five (21%) or 54,000 people over pension age lived in relatively poor households.
155. Census-based population projections indicate that the proportion of the population for this age group will rise to 18% by 2010 and to 21% by 2020. That is by 2020, there will be 381,000 people of retirement age.
156. The experience of older people should be positive. We are living longer and healthier lives with more opportunities for positive ageing through improvements in incomes and homes. Trends in Northern Ireland show overall improvements in the social conditions of older people who make up a smaller proportion of those living in poverty in Northern Ireland than they did 15 years ago. However there is concern that persistent pensioner poverty has not been reduced quickly enough. Certainly older citizens remain significantly at risk of poverty in Northern Ireland and particularly in rural areas where around 33% are living on income poverty. Those living in poverty are more dependant on public services, therefore the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy puts the delivery of more effective public services at the top of government's agenda.
157. People in later life have a right to a secure and safe life, in the knowledge that support will be provided when needed; and also that they have the choice to continue to work should they wish to do so, and to have the responsibility to plan and save for when they do decide to retire.
158. In general, clear goals and targets for older citizens must be about providing the longest possible enjoyment of independent living.



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OLDER CITIZENS – BEYOND WORKING AGE

Goal

Our goal is to ensure older people are valued and respected, remain independent, participate as active citizens and enjoy a good quality of life in a safe and shared community.

Reduce gap in life expectancy between those living in the fifth most deprived areas and the Northern Ireland average by two thirds for both men and women between 2000 and 2025.

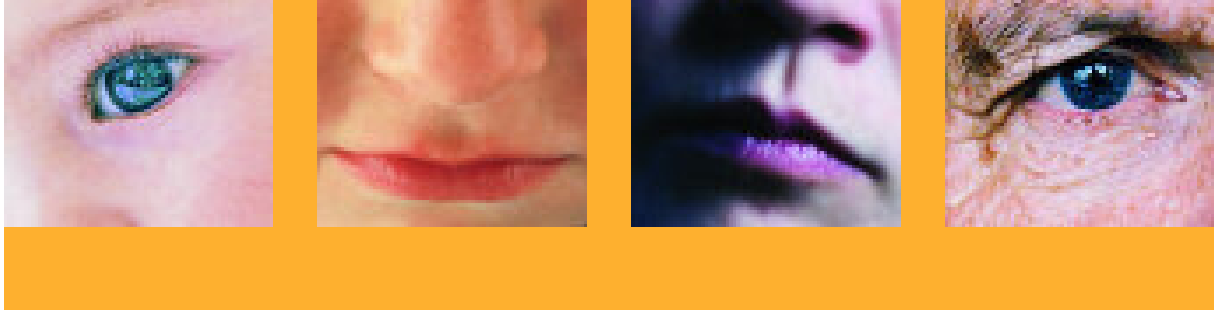
By 2020, all older people will enjoy security and financial independence through increased provision of opportunity to remain in work and, maximum uptake of their eligibility to pensions and benefits.

By 2020, flexibility of choice over retirement age, including flexibility of working patterns and helping older people remain in employment if they wish.

By 2020, ensure that every pensioner lives in a decent, warm, secure home in a community where they experience reduced levels of isolation and loneliness.

By 2020, through integrated partnerships, every older person has access to the full range of support services, social networks and cultural and sporting activities available in their area, to ensure they have a satisfactory standard of living and guaranteed financial inclusion.

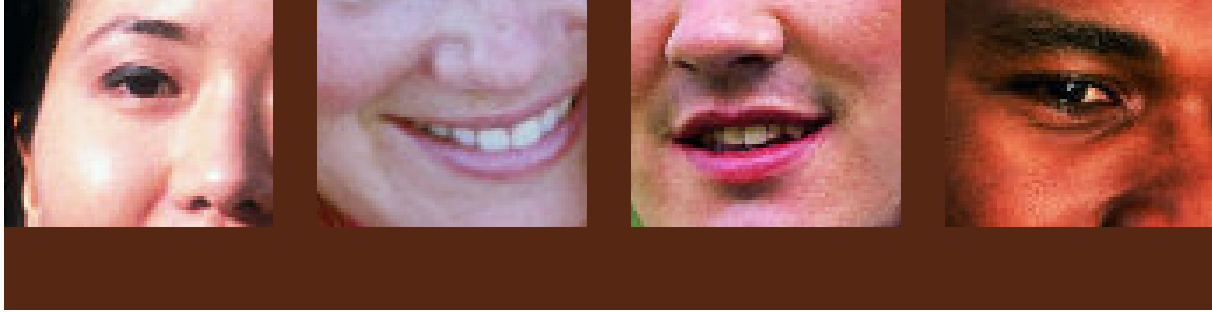
By March 2010, improve the quality of life and independence of people in need, so that 45% of all who require community services are supported as necessary, in their own homes.



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By 2020, to provide opportunities for older people in rural areas to benefit from the Rural Development Programme by increasing accessibility through rural transport routes, projects that encourage social participation and inclusion and aim to positively benefit the lives of older farmers and their families.

By 2020, government will support every local authority to identify and address gaps in provision of services for older people in rural areas.



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6. MAKING IT HAPPEN

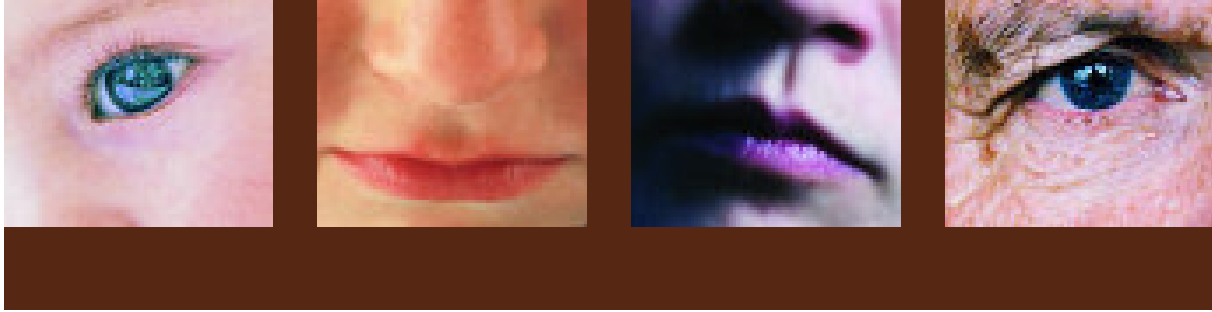
159. This Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy, outlines a set of ambitious and challenging long-term goals and targets to work towards eliminating poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland by 2020. But we need to start making progress now and to secure the necessary resources. At the end of the day, policy is important but it is action that will make the difference in people's lives.

160. The first step is to ensure that poverty and social inclusion are given due consideration in the public expenditure planning process. This has already happened in the current Comprehensive Spending Review, which will set spending levels for all government programmes up to 2010/11. The Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy is one of a number of cross-cutting priorities identified within the Comprehensive Spending Review, although it is anticipated that final decisions as regards spending priorities and plans will be made by a returning devolved administration. Consequently, departmental spending plans and resources will take into account the delivery of commitments in the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy. Furthermore the departments will make provision within their budgets for work currently being undertaken through the Children and Young People's and Skills and Science Funds.

161. On the completion of the Comprehensive Spending Review, policies needed to take the strategy forward, including new policies, the resources and Public Service Agreements (short to medium term targets) for meeting the commitments within the strategy will be published. Progress against agreed indicators will be published periodically thereafter.

Ministerial-led Poverty Forum

162. To underscore our top level commitment to achieving the objectives and targets outlined in Lifetime Opportunities, the process will be led at Ministerial level. This recognises that government cannot deliver on its own and needs to work in partnership with the social partners and representatives of those experiencing



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poverty and social exclusion. We will therefore establish a Ministerial-led “Poverty Forum” to oversee the process and monitor progress. The Forum will bring together relevant stakeholder groups including local politicians, employers, representatives of trade unions, the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, social economy and individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The terms of reference for this forum are available at www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/central-anti-poverty-unit

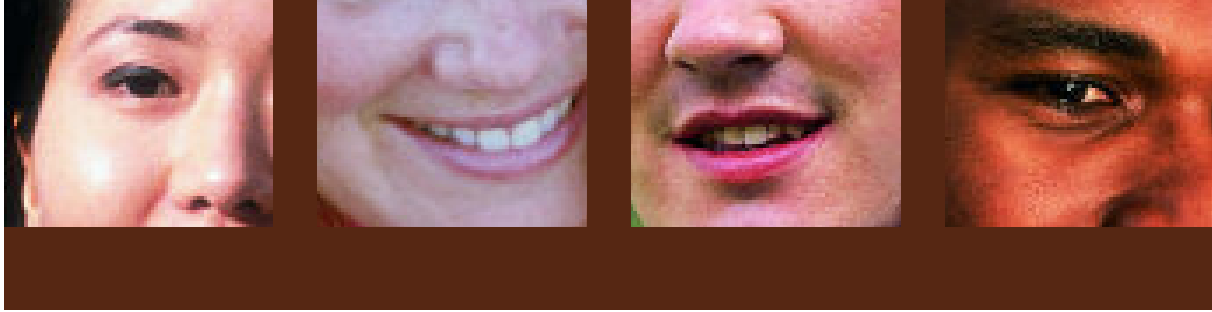
‘Get Heard’

163. In the UK, the National Action Plan (NAP) process has led to a number of clear achievements, in particular in facilitating dialogue between government and civil society on social inclusion issues and allowing for the exchange of information across government. There is greater awareness now of the value of participation for the process of developing strategies and policies – as well as the opportunities it offers for strengthening civic engagement and individual confidence. The Get Heard toolkit www.dwp.gov.uk/nap has offered engagement with a wide range of people who would not otherwise have been involved in the NAP.

164. A toolkit to enable ‘grassroots’ organisations to gather opinions on social inclusion to inform the development of the 2006 NAP, was developed. The toolkit, badged ‘Get Heard’, was published in the Autumn of 2004 by Oxfam. A total of 146 ‘Get Heard’ workshops have been held around the country: including 14 in Northern Ireland.

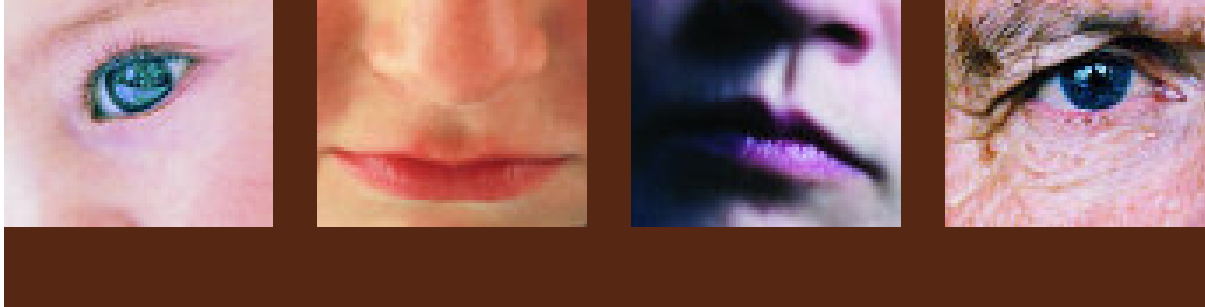
Working With Other Jurisdictions

165. Many of the causes of poverty such as poor education and low skill levels are common across Member States. This is why the EU has established common objectives and agreed a set of indicators of progress. This common approach provides scope for shared learning and joint working across national boundaries. It also benefits from the support of other trans-national work in the field of social inclusion.



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166. Social inclusion is at the heart of the UK government's agenda, and this commitment is fully reflected in strategies at devolved, regional and local level. Rigorous planning and clear targets are central to the UK's approach to strategy and, at central government level, a concern for social inclusion is clear in the Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets agreed by each government department. The link between central and devolved government has less in the way of formal control systems, but there are two forums in which poverty and social exclusion issues are discussed – the Joint Ministerial Committee on Poverty and the British-Irish Council.
167. The British-Irish Council forms a basis for co-operation between Northern Ireland, Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey on matters of common concern. Through the Council we have been able to discuss different approaches to tackling social exclusion. Work to date has focused on financial exclusion and the barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing employment. This work continues with the Council agreeing now to look and compare approaches to policies to reduce child poverty with a focus on lone parents.
168. There is further institutional provision for North/South co-operation, through the North/South Ministerial Council set up under Strand 2 (North/South Relations) of the Belfast Agreement. This body facilitates co-operation between the two jurisdictions in a range of areas including health and education. The EU funded Peace Programmes in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland have also provided significant opportunities for innovative and cross-border initiatives. Opportunities to promote North/South consultation, co-operation and common action in areas of mutual interest will be further explored.
169. The development of National Action Plans (NAPs) facilitates practical co-operation between the Member States. This approach provides scope for shared learning, exchanges of best practice and joint working across national boundaries.
170. Poverty and social exclusion affects the quality of life of families and communities across the island of Ireland. Creating a more inclusive society by alleviating social exclusion, poverty and deprivation is a continuing challenge for administrations in



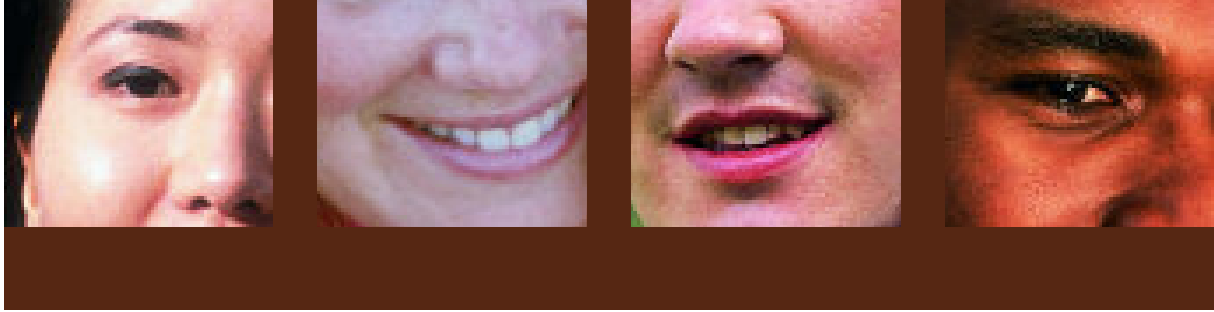
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Northern Ireland and Ireland. There are strong commonalities shared by those communities which have facilitated the establishment of a number of areas of cross-border co-operation. Progress has been significant in recent years, particularly through the work of the North/South Ministerial Council and EU funded Peace Programmes in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland.

171. The Irish and UK governments are committed to developing and promoting further North/South consultation, co-operation and common action concerning policies on poverty and social exclusion over the period of this plan. To this end, a report outlining common and current areas of cross-border work and initiatives between Northern Ireland and Ireland will be prepared. Potential areas suitable for further cross-border co-operation will be identified as will the mechanisms by which this work could be undertaken and delivered.

Central Anti-Poverty Unit

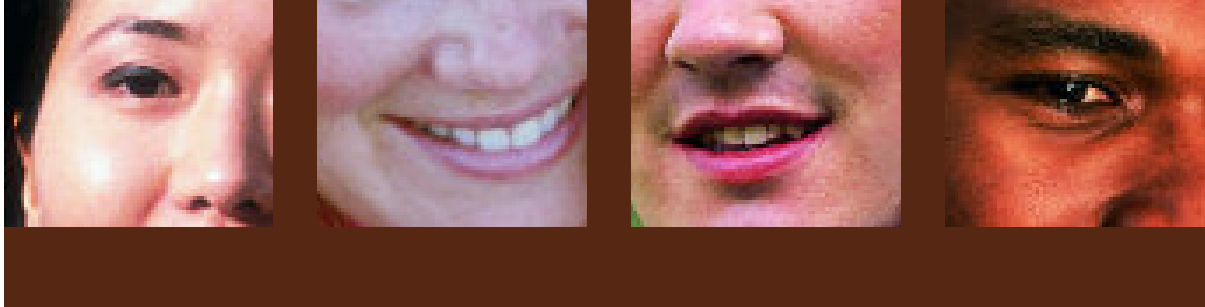
172. The Central Anti-Poverty Unit (CAPU) within the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the overall impact of the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy. This Unit will also provide the secretariat to the Ministerial Poverty Forum.
173. An Inter-departmental Equality and Social Need Steering Group which is chaired by a senior official in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister will be the principle mechanism for co-ordinating, monitoring and evaluating across departments and Agencies. Members of this group will also represent their department on the Ministerial-led Poverty Forum. The Central Anti-Poverty Unit will also provide Secretariat support to the Equality and Social Need Steering Group.
174. The Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion strategy, retains the key principle of New Targeting Social Need which is to direct resources within government programmes at those areas, groups and individuals in greatest objective need. For some programmes, such as Neighbourhood Renewal, this is done through the use of objective indicators of need. For others, including those involving significant



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spending on roads, education or health infrastructure, the process may be less straightforward and guidance will be provided particularly when these programmes are being delivered through Public Private Procurement initiatives.

175. Similarly, it is important that the principles of the strategy are reflected in the policies and programmes of the new organisations, including District Councils, that will be established through the Review of Public Administration. For that reason, sponsoring departments of these organisations will ensure that the principles are firmly embedded in the business plans of the new organisations. In doing so, these organisations will contribute to government making its anti-poverty and social inclusion targets and consequently, where appropriate, Neighbourhood Renewal targets more explicit.



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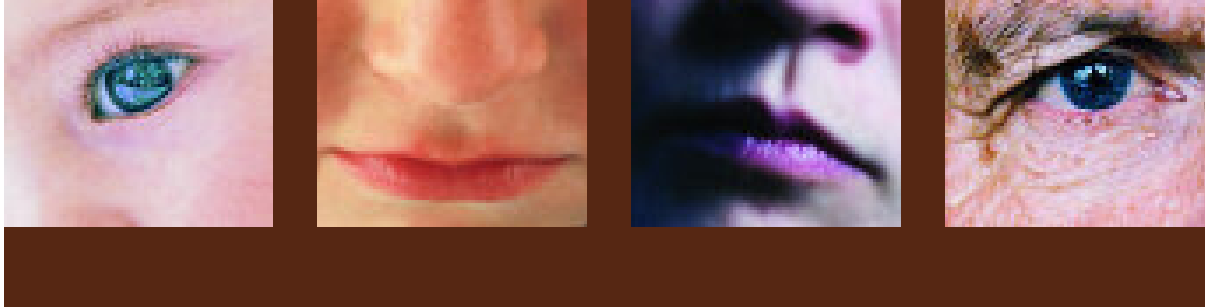
7. CONCLUSIONS

176. This Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy – Lifetime Opportunities is the result of a commitment by the previous Executive to review the New Targeting Social Need policy which led in turn to evaluation, analyses and extensive consultation.

177. **From the evaluation** it was evident that policy to tackle poverty and social exclusion was being driven through largely separate departmental programmes with little evidence of a joined-up approach at departmental level being reflected in co-ordination of services at a local level. Strategic objectives were missing and those objectives which were set reflected departmental priorities rather than any overall government commitment to reducing poverty. Monitoring arrangements therefore, while rigorous, did not serve to adequately reflect and measure progress against the broad objective of reducing poverty and social exclusion.

178. **From the quantitative analysis** it was evident that there had been much progress in reducing socio-economic differentials between the two main communities, which had been an explicit objective of New Targeting Social Need. However, despite the steady growth in the Northern Ireland economy and corresponding growth in employment, levels of income poverty have remained persistently high and labour market inequalities remain. Economic inactivity and benefit dependence in Northern Ireland are higher than in any other region in the United Kingdom and lone parents and people with disabilities have emerged as groups significantly more at risk of poverty now than previously. The risk of poverty is higher in rural areas and in urban areas experiencing multiple deprivation. In addition while certain areas show the benefits of intervention, other areas have become more deprived and in a core of neighbourhoods, multiple deprivation has persisted over a long period of time. The Neighbourhood Renewal strategy, based on partnership and joined-up working is now government's key vehicle for tackling these ingrained problems in the most deprived urban areas.

179. **Consultation** has provided an opportunity for a range of interested parties to make a valuable contribution to the development of policy priorities. Not surprisingly there was considerable divergence of thinking on the detail of what is needed but



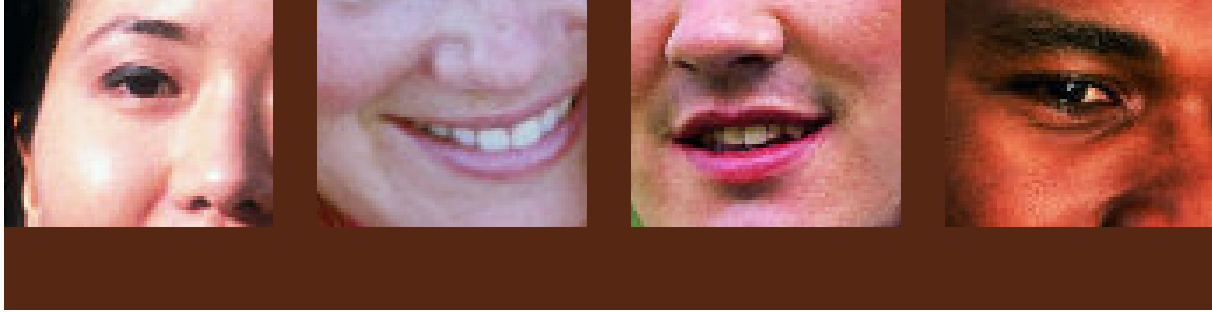
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there was however broad consensus about the need to prioritise child poverty, maintain a focus on promoting social inclusion, committing to long term targets, with resources allocated to meet these, working in partnership with other public agencies outside government departments along with the voluntary and private sectors and driving the process at Ministerial level.

180. Government has committed significant resources and effort to tackling the causes of poverty and social exclusion with, for example, a range of programmes aimed at improving early years experience, educational performance, capacity to compete in the labour market and improving the lives of older people. It has also taken forward an extensive programme of legislation, including equality legislation, to safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable such as people with disabilities. It has 'championed' at Ministerial level the interests of children and older people.

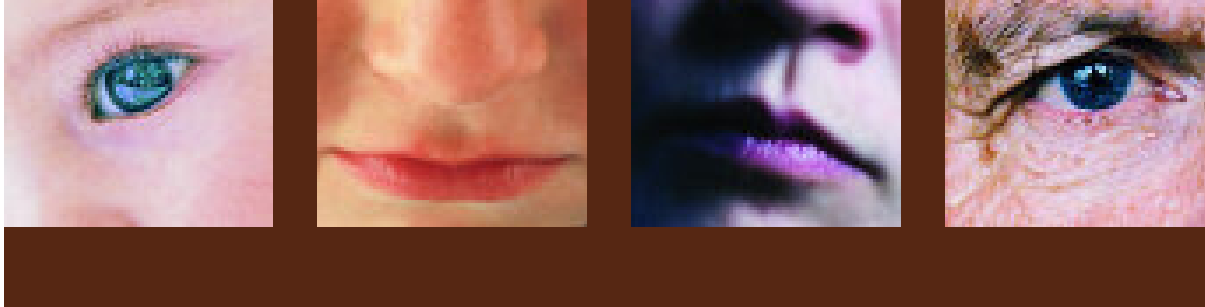
Challenges

181. However significant challenges remain, particularly if government is to meet its objective in Northern Ireland of working towards eliminating poverty and social exclusion by 2020. Building on the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy model for tackling deprivation and disadvantage, we need for example to focus on early intervention programmes to ensure that the early experience of young children promotes healthy social, psychological and educational development. We need to therefore continue to expand pre-school and day care provision and provide parents, particularly lone parents with the help and support they need.
182. We need to break the link between educational underperformance and social disadvantage. This means supporting schools who work with the most disadvantaged children to work in partnership with parents and other service providers. The challenge is to make school years as rewarding and enjoyable as possible with a clear prospect of good qualifications and skills for all relevant to the needs of a growing and modern economy.



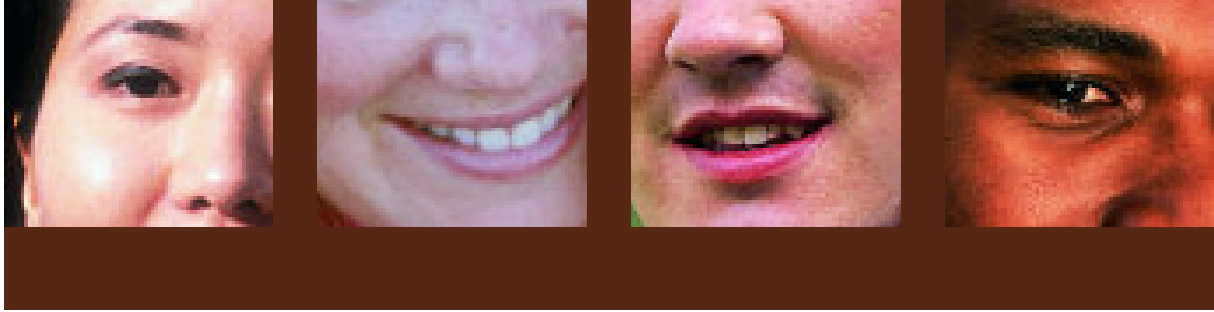
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183. The challenge is also to divert children from crime and substance abuse, to provide a supportive and understanding environment focused on enhancing the potential of children, more so than on criticising their shortcomings. We need to recognise the difficulties faced by children, particularly those with disabilities and special educational needs, in transferring into the world of work by offering proper advice and support throughout this critical time.
184. For those who have made the transition into adulthood, our priority must be to provide everyone with the opportunity to access well paid employment. This means removing the barriers to employment, including lack of skills and education. It also means providing access to childcare for those who need it. Finally, for older people, the key challenge is to ensure that they have every opportunity to live longer, more independent, healthier and safe lives in the comfort and security of their own homes.
185. This Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy sets out what government has achieved, the continuing challenges and a clear statement of what government aims to achieve. It gives particular priority to the needs of children and young people but also identifies the critical importance of early years experience, the importance of employment and decent earned income as the best welfare during people's working lives and the vulnerability and needs of older citizens. This strategy recognises the interdependence with other government actions to tackle deprivation and disadvantage such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.
186. Goals and targets are therefore set against each of these life cycle stages as shown below with a clear focus on respectively:
- ensuring that every child should have a chance to develop to their full potential in infancy regardless of social background;
 - ensuring all children and young people experience a happy and fulfilling childhood, while equipping them with the education, skills and experience to achieve their potential to be citizens of tomorrow;



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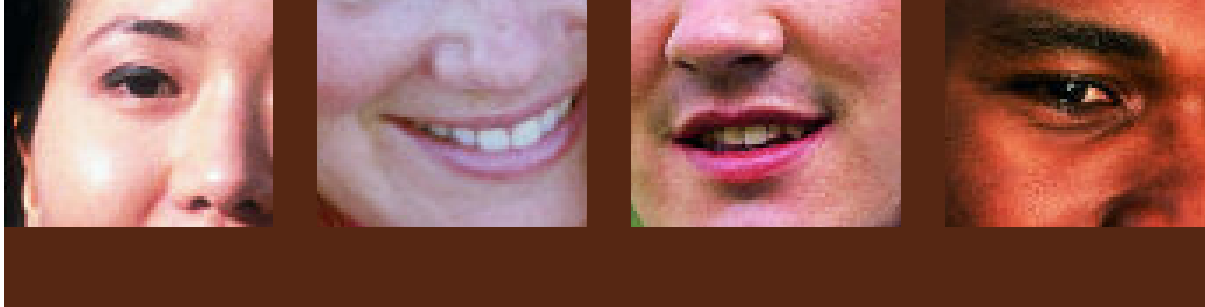
- ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life; and
 - ensuring older people are valued and respected, remain independent, participate as active citizens and enjoy a good quality of life in a safe and shared community.
187. Clear targets are set against each goal reflecting and addressing the key challenges which must be addressed if we are to eliminate poverty and social exclusion completely.
188. Together these goals and targets represent a way of reducing the risk of poverty and providing those who are in poverty, with a route out. They also aim to break the cycle of poverty which is often transmitted from one generation to the next.
189. To make this happen, government has made the strategy one of the key cross-cutting priorities within the current Comprehensive Spending Review. Consequently, departmental spending plans and resources will be directly linked to the delivery of commitments in the strategy.
190. Furthermore, government will work to provide a children's centre in disadvantaged areas throughout Northern Ireland as a means of providing a better focus for the integration and co-ordination of support services for children and their parents, where they are most needed. To help those unemployed and economically inactive, we will work towards providing support to address barriers to employment for every unemployed or economically inactive person who wants it.
191. Progress against goals and targets will be monitored by a Ministerial-led Forum which will bring together the main stakeholders including individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion, along with those responsible for policy and delivery. We will benchmark what we do against other jurisdictions, and, where appropriate, work in partnership with them where it makes sense to do so. We will provide guidance where necessary when strategic investment decisions need to maximise the social benefits of significant public expenditure. We will ensure that those



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organisations which emerge from the Review of Public Administration also adopt the principles and priorities within this strategy and demonstrate transparently, the outworking of these in their business plans and programme delivery.

192. Government is determined to eliminate the scourge of poverty which blights the lives of so many people in Northern Ireland. The Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion strategy aims to build on progress to date and address continuing challenges. It recognises different priorities at different stages in people's lives and the need for policies and programmes to be tailored to these specific needs and targeted at those in greatest objective need. It must also insulate people from becoming poor and socially excluded, as well as providing routes out of poverty for those who do. With continued economic growth and political stability, there is perhaps the best opportunity yet to achieve this objective.



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ANNEX 1: Strategic Equality Impact Assessment

Defining the aims of the policy

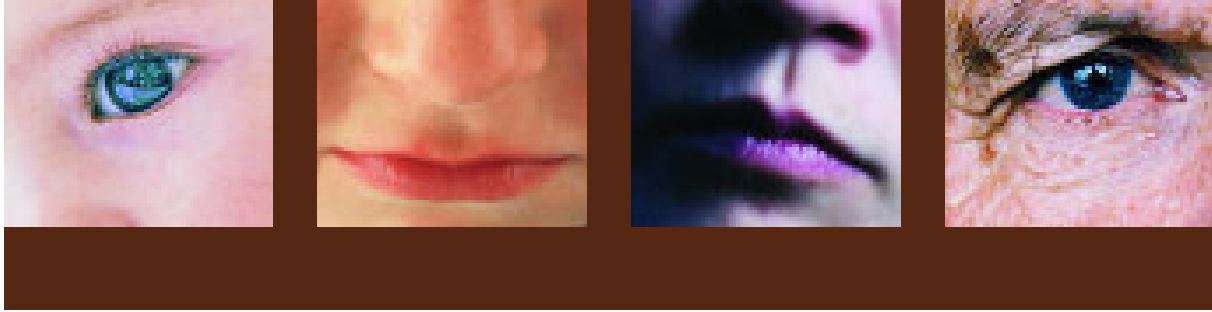
'Lifetime Opportunities' – Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy

outlines what will be done by the Northern Ireland departments and the Northern Ireland Office over the course of the next fourteen years in working towards its overall objectives of: working towards the elimination of poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland by 2020; and halving child poverty by 2010 on the way to eradicating child poverty by 2020. The strategy is structured into four key life stages – Early Years (0 – 4), Children and Young People (5 – 16), Working Age Adults and Older Citizens. Each of the life stages is expressed in terms of an overarching goal followed by a series of long-term targets that will work towards achieving the goal. These challenging and ambitious goals and targets set the framework for government to achieve its overall objectives. The strategy, while recognising the progress already made, also acknowledges the challenges for the future and outlines what government will strive to achieve within the next fourteen years.

Consideration of available data and research

Throughout the development of Lifetime Opportunities, considerable work has gone into collecting relevant data and researching available sources of evidence about the lives of children of all ages, working age adults and older people living in poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland. In drawing on evidence from a variety of sources including the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey, the Family Resources Survey and the Households Below Average Income Survey, it has been possible to build up a picture of the extent of poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland. Further socio-economic data can be found within the paper 'Social Change in Northern Ireland' which can be accessed at www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/central-anti-poverty-unit.

In addition, Lifetime Opportunities has been developed against the backdrop of European policy on poverty and social exclusion and further developments in other parts of the United Kingdom. It seeks to mirror the UK government's strategies for tackling poverty and social exclusion, which are outlined in 'Opportunity for All' and 'Reaching



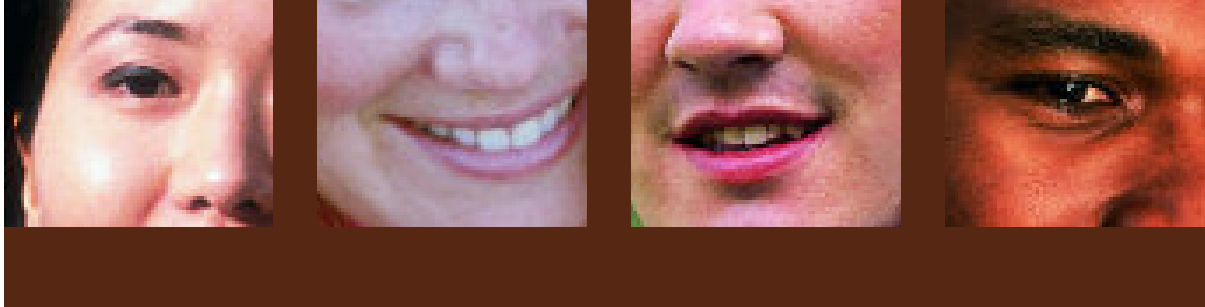
Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland

Out, An Action Plan on Social Exclusion'. These documents can be accessed via the following websites: **www.dwp.gov.uk/ofa**; and **www.socialexclusion.gov.uk**.

The development of 'Lifetime Opportunities' marks the outcome of a long and comprehensive process, initiated by a formal, independent evaluation of New Targeting Social Need in 2002, followed by a number of other assessments and evaluations subsequently carried out by the Civic Forum, the Queen's Institute of Governance and voluntary and community sector organisations. The outcomes of this evaluative work, coupled with the responses from two comprehensive periods of consultation as part of this strategic equality impact assessment, have made a valuable contribution to the policy development process. The responses to both phases of consultation were collated and analysed and can now be accessed via the Central Anti-Poverty Unit's website at: **www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/central-anti-poverty-unit**.

Some of the key messages from the two consultation periods can be summarised as follows:

- The need for a dedicated budget to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland;
- Targeting those in objective need should be retained as a central principle;
- There should be clear linkages with the development and sustainability of the economy;
- Rural poverty should be given prominence;
- Clear output related targets should be developed;
- Government needs to work in partnership with others;
- There should be a cross-border dimension to the strategy;
- Tackling Child Poverty should be a priority; and



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- Promoting Social Inclusion should be retained as a vehicle to deal with particular groups of people experiencing particular poverty and social exclusion issues.

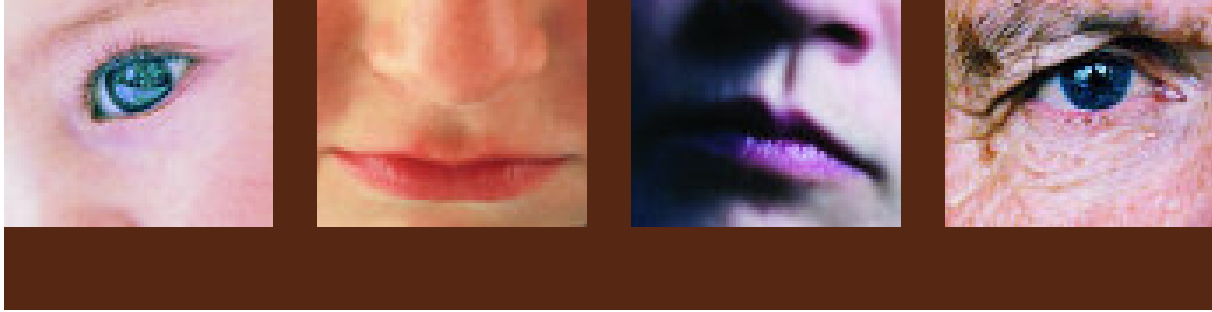
Examples of the research and data used to inform the development of this strategy are referenced in the document. From the data, it is evident that for a variety of reasons, not all people in society in Northern Ireland have the same opportunities to participate in economic and social life, not least due to the inequalities deepened by poverty and social exclusion. To this end, we have endeavoured to identify the key issues and barriers facing individuals across the four life stages. These issues and experiences are echoed throughout the document through direct quotes from the Get Heard workshops.⁷ These quotes represent the real, everyday accounts of people living in poverty and social exclusion. Our key challenge will be to ensure that the particular problems or negative impacts affecting people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are addressed by the targeted departmental responses outlined within Lifetime Opportunities, and consequently translated into opportunities for all age groups to access services tailored to their specific needs.

Shared Future

Within the context of an increasingly intercultural society, Lifetime Opportunities recognises the value of mainstreaming the principles of a Shared Future throughout its framework. It is undoubtedly true that many of the areas which suffered as a result of the long years of inter-community conflict are now characterised by poverty and social exclusion.

Therefore in developing this strategy, we have sought to ensure that the principles of a Shared Future are mainstreamed into our efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion and where appropriate given particular emphasis within specific goals and targets. Where appropriate, we have striven to reflect adequately the value of a shared, safe community at all stages of life in promoting opportunities and tackling social exclusion.

⁷ Please see paragraphs 163-164 for more detail on the 'Get Heard' process



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When monitoring the impact of the strategy, we will also take care to ensure that Shared Future principles continue to be mainstreamed in future targets and actions that will contribute towards the main objectives of “Lifetime Opportunities.”

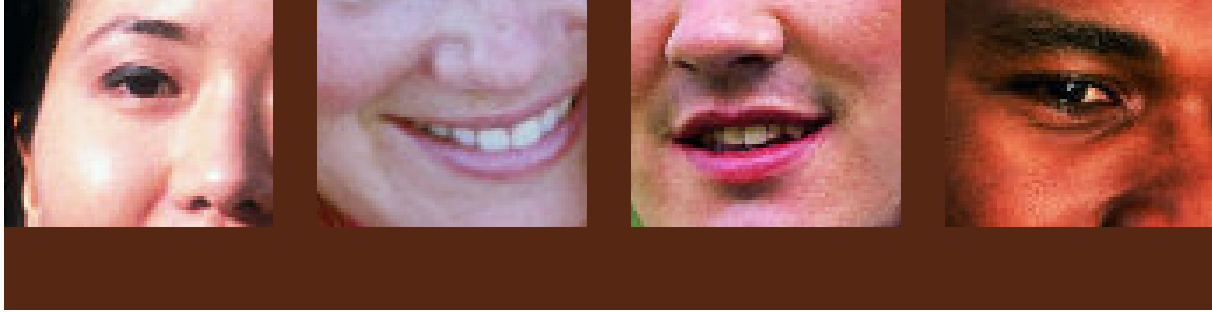
Rural Proofing

Rural Proofing is a process to ensure that government policies are examined carefully and objectively to ensure that they treat rural dwellers fairly and in particular to make public services accessible on a fair basis to people wherever they live in Northern Ireland.

The ethos of Rural Proofing is to ensure that the needs and special considerations of rural communities and areas are routinely and objectively considered as part of the policy development process. The first Programme for Government outlined government's commitment to Rural Proofing to ‘ensure that the rural dimension is routinely considered as part of the making and implementation of policy.’

The aim of effective Rural Proofing is that all significant policy proposals, consultative papers and proposals for new legislation which are submitted to departmental Ministers for endorsement, specifically identify any likely impact which that policy might have on rural areas or communities, and offer an assessment of how any differential impact can be addressed.

In recognising that poverty and social exclusion can often be manifested in different ways for people living in rural areas, we have worked closely with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to ensure that the specific issues pertinent to each life cycle group were reflected and addressed within the long-term targets. For example, transport within rural areas is an important issue in terms of access to services and facilitating social inclusion across all age brackets. However, there are various aspects to transport provision and individually these may impact differently on each life stage. For early years, the provision of accessible transport vehicles is an important consideration while for working age adults, the paramount priority is accessibility to a variety of routes rather than the issue of vehicle accessibility. Certain



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needs of people living in rural areas have been highlighted as key issues to be addressed and so have merited specific targets within each life cycle. Nonetheless, the targets within the strategy and the subsequent monitoring procedures put in place will implicitly address the needs of people living in rural as well as urban areas.

From the data available, it is evident that poverty is a particular issue for pensioners living in rural areas. In recognition of the social exclusion and isolation experienced by many rural pensioners, we have worked with colleagues in DARD to ensure that this is addressed in an appropriate target (chapter 5), which seeks to ensure that older citizens can enjoy life in a more inclusive and less isolated environment.

Gender Proofing

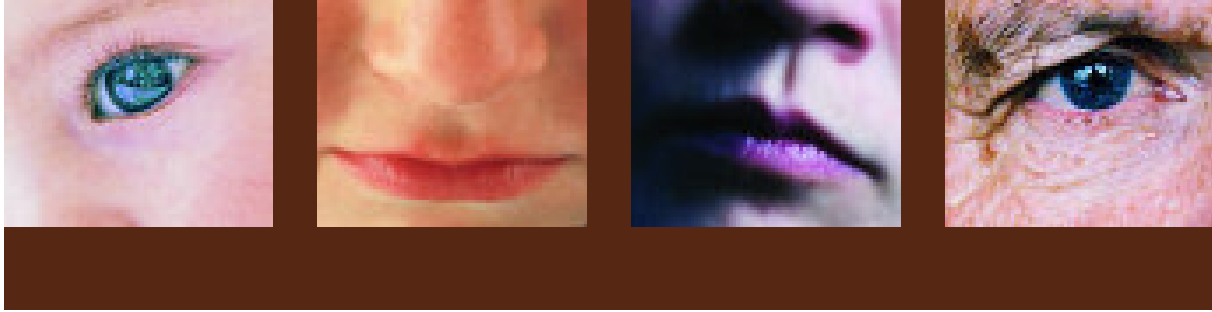
Overwhelming evidence shows that women suffer disadvantage and discrimination disproportionately, whilst recognising that men too can be disadvantaged. There are gender differences in labour market participation and pay, family and caring responsibilities, in leisure participation, health needs, educational achievement, in transport needs, in domestic and community safety issues. For example women carry the major responsibility for caring, including childcare, as well as trying to earn a living; women are frequently in low-paid, part-time jobs and are more likely to be subjected to violence in their own homes.

There are two main tools to assist departments with gender proofing of policies and strategies:

- gender mainstreaming; and
- gender action measures, which include positive action as provided for within the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976.

Ensuring Gender Mainstreaming

As a tool for achieving gender equality, gender mainstreaming involves a process of incremental change in policies, strategies and activities. The long-term objective is that



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attention to gender equality will pervade all policies, strategies and activities so that all women and all men influence, participate in, and benefit equitably from all interventions. It challenges decision-makers to question the assumption that policies and programmes affect everyone in the same way. Treating men and women the same will not ensure equal outcomes because of the different experiences of women and men and the different economic and social positions which they occupy.

In developing targets for Lifetime Opportunities, we have consulted closely with colleagues in the Gender, Age and Sexual Orientation Equality Unit to ensure that issues affecting both women and men are taken into account. For example, in recognition of the fact that the majority of carers are women, we have worked with colleagues to ensure that the targets reflect both the need to break down the barriers to employment that exist for individuals in a caring role but also the valuable social contribution that women (and men) in a caring role make to society.

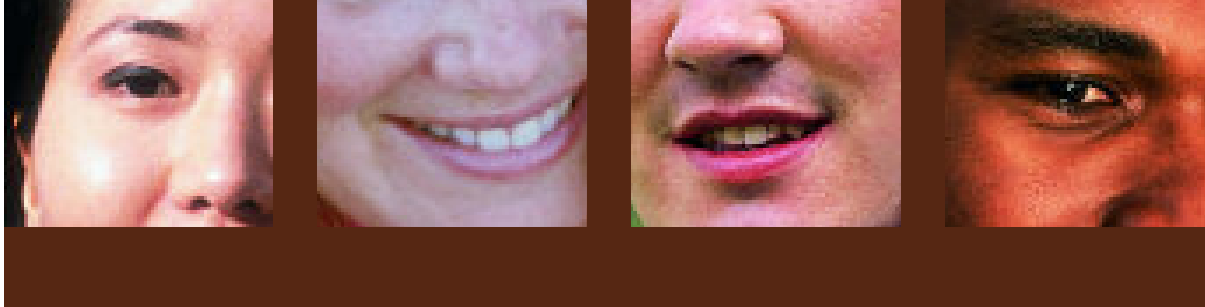
In addition to this, we have introduced a Promoting Social Inclusion priority to consider and work towards addressing the particular issues faced by Lone Parents, 90% of whom are women. Within the strategy, we have also recognised the important role of parents (both women and men) within society and have worked closely with colleagues in DHSSPS to reflect the much needed support that parents require in order to provide their children with the best chance in life.

Human Rights

No Human Rights have been engaged in the development of this strategy. Therefore no Human Rights implications have been identified.

Consultation

Lifetime Opportunities has been developed using an open and inclusive process, involving all eleven Northern Ireland departments, the Northern Ireland Office and colleagues from the Department for Work and Pensions.



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During both periods of consultation, there was opportunity to consult with key stakeholders, experts in the field of poverty and social exclusion and political parties. The two phases of consultation provided an open arena for representatives from key stakeholder organisations and those likely to be affected by the policy to voice their views and inform the policy development process.

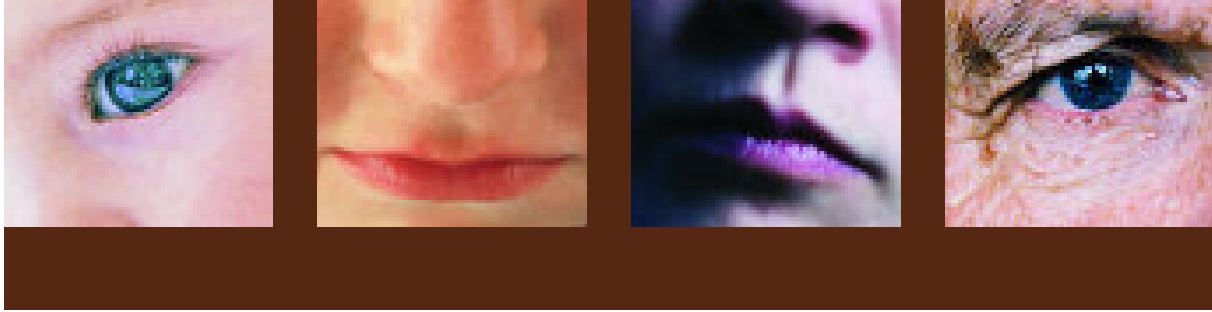
In addition, there is now greater awareness of the real value of participation in the process of developing policy. Individuals and groups have reaped the benefits of strengthened engagement and personal fulfilment, afforded by the 'Get Heard' toolkit. This is a direct consequence of the UK National Action Plan process and has offered a wide range of people the unique opportunity to engage with government and exchange information on issues surrounding social inclusion. The toolkit was published in Autumn 2004 and has resulted in a total of 146 workshops throughout the United Kingdom, including 14 specifically in Northern Ireland.

During the development of Lifetime Opportunities, the Queen's University of Belfast's Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research hosted a special seminar, attended by academics, representatives of government departments and members of the voluntary and community sector. This event made an invaluable contribution to the further development of the strategy and was characterised by an open discussion on the key issues surrounding poverty and social exclusion.

Children and young people were also afforded the opportunity to participate in the process, through a specially organised workshop in conjunction with the Derry Children's Commissioner. This event allowed a wide range of children and young people from areas of disadvantage within Derry to offer their views on the development of the strategy and helped identify the real issues facing children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

All these individuals and groups were involved in the development of the strategy and had further opportunity to comment throughout the two periods of consultation.

The results of the consultation exercises were given due consideration and used to inform the final strategy. An analysis of all responses is available on the Central Anti-Poverty Unit's website at: www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/central-anti-poverty-unit.



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Monitoring of the Strategy

As detailed in chapter 6 of the strategy, the effectiveness of Lifetime Opportunities will be monitored and evaluated through a range of mechanisms:

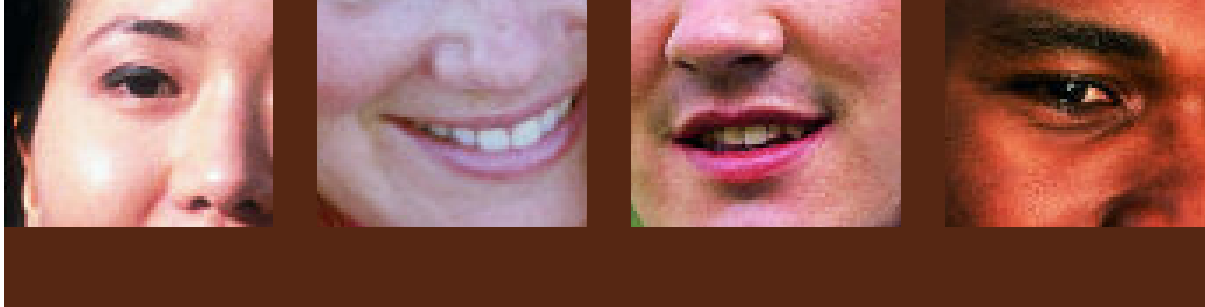
- The Ministerial Poverty Forum;
- The Central Anti-Poverty Unit;
- The cross-departmental Equality and Social Need Steering Group;
- Annual monitoring arrangements and reporting procedures; and
- Continuing to commission research on poverty and social exclusion.

Assessment of impacts

The development of Lifetime Opportunities has spanned a number of years and involved a wide section of individuals and groups, ranging from academic to voluntary and community sector backgrounds. Seminars conducted during the consultation period were attended by a wide range of people, covering a broad range of interests. The views of all consultees were welcomed and taken into account throughout the development of the strategy.

Lifetime Opportunities establishes the strategic framework that aims to eliminate poverty and social exclusion, with a particular focus on eradicating child poverty but it is much more than a policy within the responsibility of one individual department. Recognising the overarching nature of Lifetime Opportunities, a Strategic Equality Impact Assessment was conducted to identify the particular impacts on all groups of the two overall strategic objectives of:

- To work towards the elimination of poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland by 2020; and
- To end child poverty by 2020 – based on the estimate of approximately 130,000 children in Northern Ireland living in relative income poverty in 1998/99. This means lifting 65,000 children out of poverty by 2010 on the way to eradication by 2020.



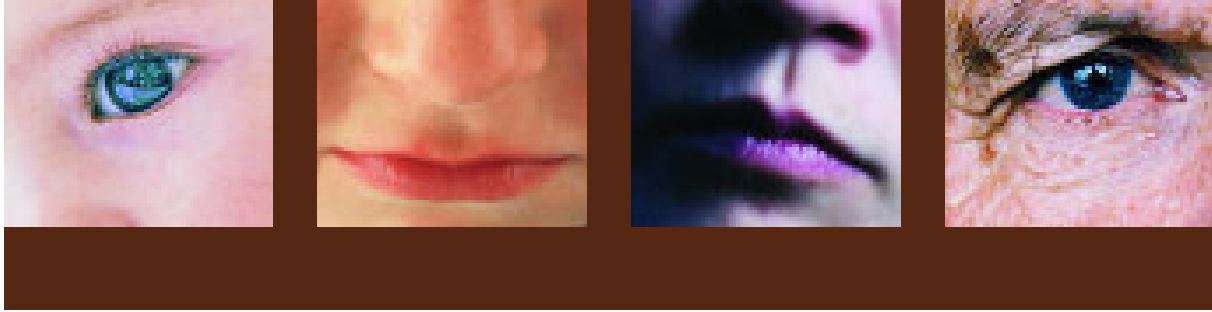
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This strategic equality impact assessment is summarised below.

Strategic Objectives

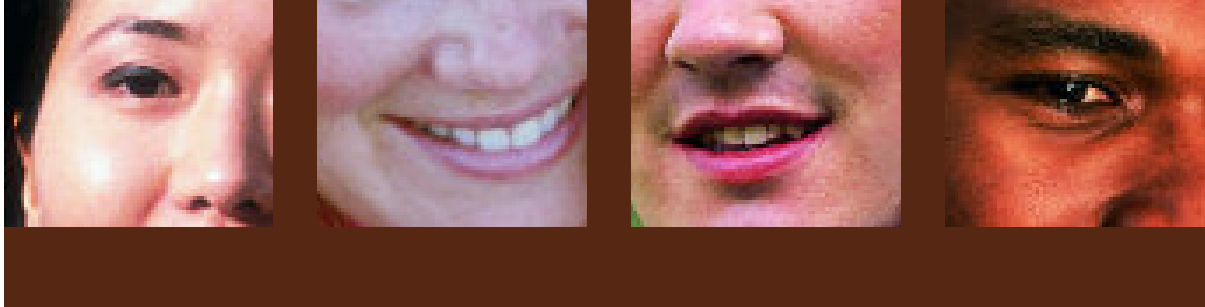
All people: Work towards the elimination of poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland by 2020.

Section 75 Group	Poverty positive reduce differentials for;	Rationale
Religious belief	Roman Catholics	Greater risk of poverty for Roman Catholics than Protestants
Political opinion	Nationalists and those not stating a political preference	The Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey NI (PSENI) indicated that the persons with the referenced political affiliations had the highest rates of poverty
Racial group	Ethnic minorities / Irish Travellers	Data from GB indicates that ethnic minorities are at high risk of poverty. There is no comparable NI data Irish Travellers have high levels of disadvantage in for example employment, economic activity, and accommodation needs
Age	Younger people (with children)	Have a high risk of poverty
Marital status	Divorced/ single/ separated (with children)	Association with lone parenthood and high risk of poverty
	Divorced/ single/ separated	Family breakdown is also an indicator of future financial hardship



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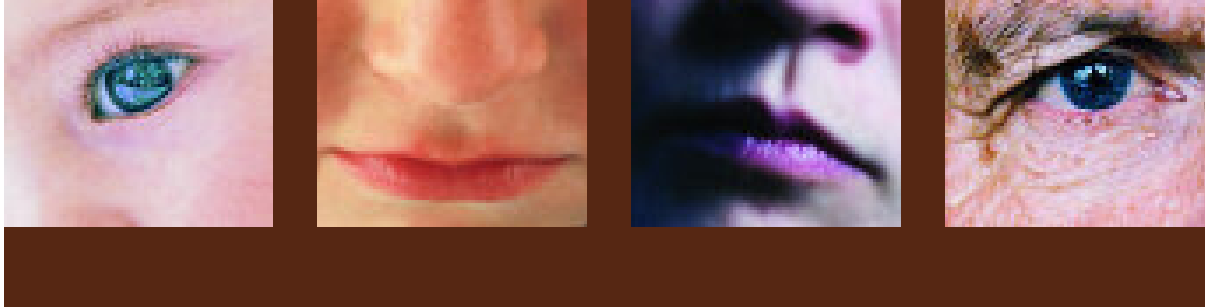
Section 75 Group	Poverty positive reduce differentials for;	Rationale
Sexual orientation	Unclear however equality impact is likely to range from neutral to positive	Data for poverty by sexual orientation not available
Men and women generally	Females	Evidence suggests that females have a higher risk of poverty
Persons with a disability and those without	Persons with a disability	Persons with a disability have among the highest risk of poverty, and significantly higher than those persons without a disability
Persons with dependants and those without	With dependants	Larger families and lone parents have higher risks of poverty



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For Children: Baselined at 1998/99 to halve child poverty by 2010 on the way to eradicating child poverty by 2020.

Section 75 Group	Poverty positive reduce differentials for;	Rationale
Religious belief	Children in Roman Catholic households	Due to larger family sizes and higher risk of poverty than the population as a whole and Protestants as a direct comparator
Political opinion	Children in nationalist households and in households that did not state a political preference	The Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey NI (PSENI) indicated that the persons with the referenced political affiliations had the highest rates of poverty
Racial group	Children in ethnic minorities / Irish Traveller households	Data from GB indicates that ethnic minorities are at high risk of poverty. There is no comparable NI data Irish Traveller households have high levels of disadvantage in for example employment, economic activity, and accommodation needs. If the household is economically disadvantaged children within the household are likely to be disadvantaged.
Age	Children in households headed by younger people	Young persons with children at higher risk of poverty. Households with children at higher risk of poverty
Marital status	Children in single / widowed / divorced households	Children in lone parent households at high risk of poverty



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Section 75 Group	Poverty positive reduce differentials for;	Rationale
Sexual orientation	Unclear however equality impact is likely to range from neutral to positive	Lack of data
Men and women generally	Children in households headed by single females	Lone parents
Persons with a disability and those without	Children with a disability	High risk of living in a household in poverty
Persons with dependants and those without	Not applicable	As target relates to dependants

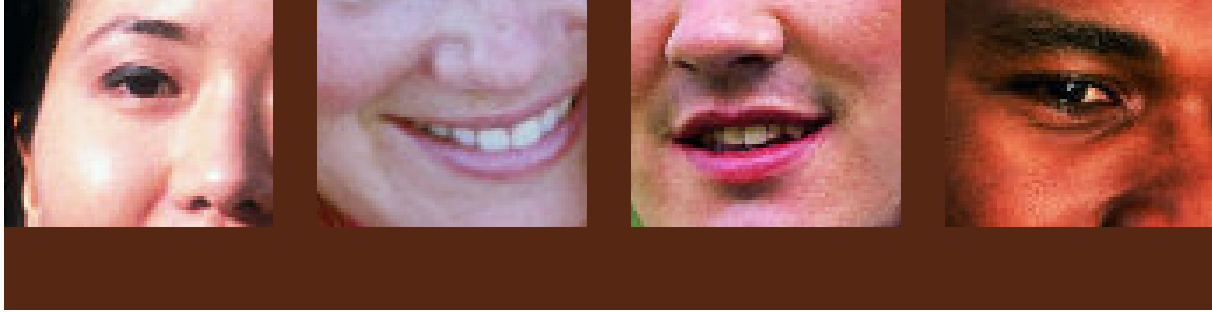
In order to deliver on the commitments given within Lifetime Opportunities, it requires a range of policies and strategies across government to tackle the broad spectrum of issues impacting on people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Therefore we must continue to build on the data and research available and to ensure that it is used in screening and where appropriate also in the EQIA process. It is the responsibility of every department to apply the EQIA and rural proofing processes to their own policies and actions contributing to the achievement of the targets listed in Lifetime Opportunities.

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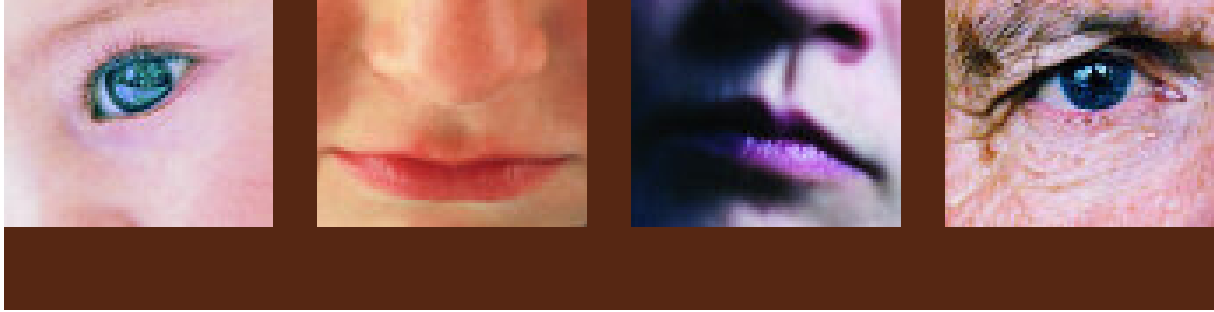
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Information Sources; Internet

NI Departmental websites.

www.jrf.org.uk

www.nisra.gov.uk

www.nicensus2001.gov.uk

www.statistics.gov.uk

Additional copies of this document can be obtained by contacting the following address or telephone number.

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