

Evaluation Report



EXPAC

(Ex-Prisoners Assistance Committee)



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'Conflicts of Interest'

FINAL REPORT: June 2011

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INTRODUCTION

This evaluation report sets out to tell the story of the second phase of Expac's Conflicts of Interest programme. The first phase of the programme ran from September 2007 to September 2008; this second phase covers the period August 2009 to December 2011. A decision was taken to complete the evaluation report by June 2011, prior to the end of the programme, to enable Expac to draw on the findings and learning from the evaluation, and use them as a tool for future planning.

The report outlines the programme, its development and delivery. It describes the activities undertaken as part of the evaluation process. There is information about the participants and the community partners which Expac worked with in the delivery of this project. We also detail the additional developments of the second phase of Conflicts of Interest.

The achievements and positive impacts are detailed and analysed, as are the areas for learning and development. Issues around the sustainability and the future of the programme are discussed and the report closes with conclusions.

[photos]

“creating new space, on
new ground, to have a new
discourse”

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

About Conflicts of Interest

The Conflicts of Interest programme was devised by Expac to address the need for different communities to understand the views and opinions of others, in the context of the conflict centred in Northern Ireland. The programme set out to allow people to build their understanding of and explore the reasons for conflict, and to then set them within a European and global context.

Conflicts of Interest is a workshop based programme which aims to enable participants to reach a more sympathetic understanding of all those affected by armed conflict. Given the history of violence on this island, this course focussed largely on the period of the 'Troubles' but also examined similar conflicts in other parts of Europe.

The programme has involved the delivery of 8 modules. Each module comprises a DVD, visiting speaker(s), and facilitated conflict resolution training. Modules were mostly delivered on a weekly basis over 8 weeks, but occasionally on a less frequent basis over a longer timespan.

The programme is supported by a Project Co-Ordinator, Oliver Corr, and the project is part-funded by the Community Relations Council through the EU Peace & Reconciliation programme.

The second phase of Conflicts of Interest aimed to build on the successes of the first, as well as reaching out to new audiences and participant groups, and integrating the learning from Phase 1.

About Expac

Expac grew out of an initiative amongst Republican former prisoners to provide mutual support and assistance to each other and their families in the post-release period. Expac is now happy to offer help to all former prisoners and/or their families.

The mission of Expac is 'To provide an independent, quality support service for all ex-prisoners and their families and to campaign for changes which facilitate their full participation in community and economic life'.

Through the delivery period of Conflicts of Interest, Expac has grown and developed as an organisation. Its remit is now clearly expanded way beyond the delivery of support and services to ex-prisoners, and the Conflicts of Interest programme is its core activity. This is revisited in the 'Sustainability & the future' section of this report.

Programme development

The Conflicts of Interest programme was originally conceived as a peace-building programme to be delivered in the southern border counties. The programme was originally entitled Epilogues.

The original places, people and partnerships to deliver Epilogues did not materialise and so with the agreement of Border Action, Expac began to design a programme in collaboration with Universal Learning Systems to be delivered on both sides of the border.

Project Aims & Objectives

Conflicts of Interests is a community education programme and Expac intended that it became established as a model of best practice, and eventually integrated into the training portfolios of the key bodies resourced to deliver conflict transformation and community development programmes throughout the region.

The overall aims of the programme are:

- To give participants both an overview & an insight into the underlying causes of conflict
- To help develop a culture of justice & human rights
- To better equip citizens to play an active role in peace-building

[PHOTOS]

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

As with the first phase of the programme, Expac delivered Conflicts of Interest with the support of Universal Learning Systems (ULS). ULS is led by Dr Alan Bruce, an educationalist specialising in training, research and project management, with a particular focus on disability, mental health and socially excluded groups of the community.

Format

The format for each module of the course is delivered in the same way throughout the programme. Each session begins with a specially commissioned 10- 15 minute DVD on some aspect of conflict. The guest speaker then gives a relatively informal talk &/or presentation, and there is time for questions. The final part of each session is given over to conflict resolution training which was delivered by Dr Alan Bruce. This part of the module includes facilitated discussions and is highly participative.

Modules

As stated above, there are 8 modules in the Conflicts of Interest programme. They are:

- 1 The Origins of Conflict
- 2 Armed Conflict: the Balkans
- 3 Conflicts of Rights
- 4 Armed Conflict: the Iberia
- 5 Vicious Circles
- 6 European Contexts
- 7 Reconciliation & Change
- 8 Study tour, presentation & awards

The first 7 modules were 'classroom' based and delivered at the venue hosting the course in each area. The final module involved a study trip / tour or field visit. These have varied depending upon the makeup and specific interests of each group.

An additional module on South Africa was also developed towards the second half of the second phase of Conflicts of Interest.

Guest speakers

There were a number of guest speakers throughout the programme, with a number visiting most or all of the courses. The speakers were chosen for both their experience of

conflict, wide ranging backgrounds and diversity, but also for their ability to go 'beyond a script' and hold an independent opinion, regardless of how that might be received or by whom.

A number of the guest speakers were former political prisoners &/or ex-combatants. All are involved with politics, community development, peace-building and/or academia.

The speakers over the two phases of Conflict of Interest were:

Davy Adams	Journalist & former Loyalist politician
Paul Arthur	Professor of Politics, University of Ulster
Steve Baker	Lecturer, Film & Television Studies, Uni of Ulster
Tony Catney	Republican ex-prisoner
Harry Donaghy	Messines Project
Norman Earl	Loyalist ex-prisoner
Brian Feeney	St Mary's College, Belfast
Frankie Gallagher	Ulster Political Research Group
Roy Garland	Commentator
Rev Mervyn Gibson	Presbyterian Minister & ex-RUC
David Hume	Orange Order
Sam Johnston	Messines Project
Darach MacDonald	Journalist, Ulster Herald & Author
Gerry McConville	Falls Community Council
Henry McDonald	Belfast Correspondent, The Observer
Tommy McKearney	Irish Workers Unions & Republican ex-prisoner
Lawrence McKeown	Author & Republican ex-prisoner
Greg McLaughlin	Senior Lecturer in Media Studies, Uni of Ulster
Davy McMaster	Loyalist ex-prisoner
Malachy O'Doherty	Journalist & broadcaster
Tommy O'Gorman	Republican ex-prisoner
Henry Patterson	Professor of Politics, Queen's University
Eilish Rooney	Lecturer in Sociology, University of Ulster
Bill Roulston	Professor of Sociology, University of Ulster
Harry Smith	South Belfast Community Safety Network

EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Internal evaluation activities

There were 3 strands to Expac's internal evaluation activities. There was a short (4 question) questionnaire for participants with one question for each part of the course (e.g. DVD, guest speaker).

Secondly, participants were asked to write up a few of their thoughts about the programme in whatever format they preferred.

Finally, Expac collected verbal, informal and anecdotal feedback on the programme both directly from participants, and also indirectly through the community worker / leader / link for each course.

External Evaluation Activities

In October 2008, community consultancy Green Hat was appointed to undertake an external evaluation of the process.

Evaluation activities undertaken by Green Hat included:

- Initial briefing, mid-term & end of project meetings with the Project Co-Ordinator (Oliver Corr) & Expac's Director (Tommy McKearney)
- Telephone semi-structured interviews with community workers / leaders / link for several courses
- Face-to-face interview with course educationalist (Dr Alan Bruce)
- Observation of several course sessions
- Mid-term interviews with Expac staff
- Attendance at programme launch conference
- Informal discussions with community worker & participants at observed sessions
- Analysis of internal evaluation material
- Review of available internal documentation & project reports
- On-going informal discussions & interview with Project Co-Ordinator

Interview participants

Individuals from the following organisations participated in the evaluation of this programme:

An Eochair (Official IRA prisoner support group)
Armagh City & District Council
Broomhall Forum, Sheffield
Community Foundation NI: Prisoners to Peace Project
Donegal Community Workers' Co-operative
Expac
Fermanagh District Council
Independent Workers Union
Lisburn Prisoners' Support Project
Monaghan VEC
Newtownabbey Community Relations Forum
NI Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO)
North East Peace III Partnership
Omagh District Council
Rural Community Network
Sligo Rural Enabler members
Tyrone Donegal Partnership

Green Hat has maintained an on-going dialogue with Expac throughout the evaluation process.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Green Hat interviewed representatives of groups and organisations who had participated in Expac's Conflicts of Interest programme.

Phase 1 participants

In the first phase of the programme, the groups participating had largely been single identity, urban groups. There had been a particular interest from Loyalist working class areas, specifically UDA-influenced communities.

Expac worked in partnership with the community organisation, leader or link for each course it delivered. They acted as 'gatekeepers' into each community, and ensured that participants were appropriately chosen / invited and that potential barriers to participation were removed. This not only promoted safety for the guest speakers & facilitators (in issue in some but not all cases) and indeed participants themselves, but for Expac ensured that they could reach its target participants and raised the profile of the programme in communities.

Participating organisations / groups in Phase 1 of Conflicts of Interest were:

- Donegal Community Workers Co-Operative, Letterkenny
- Rathgill Community Association, Bangor
- Taughmonagh Community Forum, Belfast
- South Belfast Community Safety Network
- North Belfast Development Group (Tiger's Bay)
- West Armagh Consortium

Phase 2 participants

The second phase saw an interesting evolution in the groups undertaking the training. Most of the groups undertaking the training were of mixed, both in terms of cross-community but also cross-border in some cases. At least two groups were too young to have had much direct experience of the Troubles. Two of the groups were run exclusively with staff members of the respective organisations, as opposed to constituent members, and groups from outside the island of Ireland were also engaged. Take up of the programme by organisations based south of the Border also increased substantially.

This 'widening of the net' of participants in Phase 2 has allowed Expac to develop the range of its engagement, built the organisation's profile, enhanced its reputation and provided significant learning for the organisation across a range of areas.

Another distinction from Phase 1 was the local authority take up, and their participants were recruited through local networks and media and so came from a variety of different groups including geographical, faith, interest and single identity / cross-community. In short, participants represented the widest range of social, economic and political backgrounds.

Participating organisations / groups in phase 2 of Conflicts of Interest were:

An Eochair
Armagh City & District Council
Community Foundation NI: Prisoners to Peace Project
Drumbeg Womans Group, Lisburn
Fermanagh District Council
Independent Workers Union
John Paul Youth Club, Ardoyne / Sheffield
Lisburn Prisoners' Support Project
Local Government Good Relations Officers Eastern Cluster
Monaghan VEC
Newtownabbey Community Relations Forum
NI Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO)
North East Peace III Partnership
Omagh District Council
Rural Community Network
Sligo Community Forum
Tyrone Donegal Partnership

It should be noted that Expac had to deal with a number of cancellations postponement of programmes, mainly from local authorities. This was for reasons related to funding and re-structuring and so was out of Expac's control. Nonetheless, it impacted on their administration and project management time and effort.

PHASE 2 DEVELOPMENTS

Accreditation

The accreditation of the programme, or at least aspects of it, were recommended by Green Hat in the Phase 1 evaluation. These are detailed below. We understand that Expac had some reservations about accreditation but was also interested in exploring e-learning options (again, see below). The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Through Phase 1 of the programme, Expac explored various accreditation options for the Conflicts of Interest programme, and has looked at FETAC, Open College Network and several other accreditation bodies. As project evaluators, and also because of our experience of accredited programmes, Green Hat also researched accreditation options for Expac.

There were a number of issues for this programme with regards to most accreditation systems, in that they could cause barriers to participation not only for those engaging with this programme, but also for Expac themselves.

These issues were:

- Written work for accreditation may prevent participation & create barriers to access
- Ability to retain full control & ownership of course material
- Accreditation remains important to funders but not to all participating
- Administrative & managerial burden of accreditation
- Cost of accreditation, both initial & ongoing
- Need for accreditation on both sides of the border

The evaluation of the first phase of the programme identified that any written work involved in the course, whether for accreditation or not, would have created significant barriers to access in some cases. Some participants, particularly in phase 1, had very low levels of literacy and would have been unlikely to have even considered participating had written work been involved.

Expac rightly believed that they have an excellent programme in Conflicts of Interest and did not want the content, format or quality of it to be changed in any way to accommodate an accreditation body.

With a few exceptions, the majority of phase 1 participants the evaluation team spoke to said that it would have made no difference to them whether or not the course was accredited. Several mentioned the significance of receiving certificates and having their achievement formally recognised, but this was not directly linked to accreditation. However, the profile of participants during phase 1 was

considerably different from most phase 2 participants, and there appeared to be an increasing demand for an accreditation option including its importance as a measure of quality.

After much research, Expac have got Conflicts of Interest accredited through two different bodies. The programme is now accredited through the Open College Network (OCN) and also through Queen's University Open Learning (worth 15 CATS points).

Accreditation was taken up by approximately 20 - 30 people during the second phase of Conflicts of Interest. For the Queen's University accreditation, participants had to complete a written response of 500 words per module (total of 4,000 words) and deliver a presentation of 5 - 10 minutes at the end of the programme. The presentations were filmed and submitted as part of the external verification process with Queen's. Whilst this makes for an undoubtedly high quality accreditation, it is not for everyone and Expac's offering as accreditation as optional is sensible. There is, however, a risk of creating barriers to access by the host organisations depending upon how the accreditation is presented and 'sold' to the participants.

Development of course manual & resource pack

The course manual is now developed and will provide an excellent resource for the future, and last remaining few deliveries of the Conflicts of Interest programme.

The resource pack contains:

- DVD & manual
- Interviews with 10 expert speakers
- Essays by the 10 expert speakers
- Commentary from Dr Bruce
- Key points for learning
- Pertinent questions for discussion or thought.

It might have been useful to have this developed earlier in the delivery stage so that it could have had a wider pilot and testing phase, and more participants could have benefitted from this excellent resource. It is likely that the demand for the delivery of the programme had a negative impact on the timetable for delivery of the course manual, i.e. Expac were victims of their own success in this regard.

ACHIEVEMENTS & POSITIVE IMPACTS

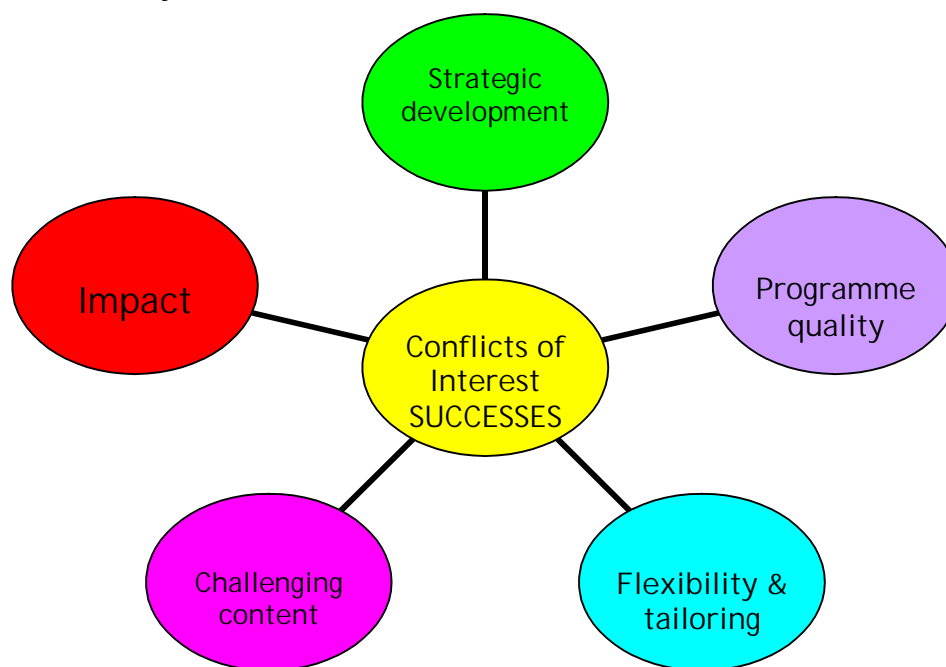
As with Phase 1 of the Conflicts of Interest programme, Green Hat has been extremely impressed with the breadth, quality and depth of engagement. It is particularly pleased to note the wider range of participants in Phase 2, and sees further potential to develop Col audiences in the future.

The success of Phase 1 of the programme enabled Expac to 'hit the ground running' with Phase 2. The brand of Conflict of Interests was already established, as was an increased network of contacts.

Many of the positive points picked up from the evaluation of Phase 1 were reiterated by participants this time around, and overall, participants were very happy with almost every aspect with the programme. Green Hat have identified below the five most important positive aspects of the programme below, and their impact on the participants and the course itself. These are:

- programme quality
- flexibility & tailoring
- challenging content
- impact beyond participants
- strategic development

We have then looked at how these contribute towards reconciliation, using Hamber & Kelly's 5 strand model.



Programme quality

Many participants, organisations and others engaging with the programme acknowledged the range of peace 'training' in the market place at present, whilst also acknowledging that not all of it was of a good standard.

The excellence of the programme was apparent through its:

- facilitator
- content
- guest speakers; &
- commitment by Expac staff

There was universal praise for the facilitator, Dr Alan Bruce from Universal Learning Systems (ULS). He provides a rare combination of academic knowledge, practical experience and skilled facilitation and interpersonal delivery. Participants were impressed by his knowledge but could also relate to him and found him very approachable. One participant said that she "never met a man who knew so much", and another commented: "I don't know how he keeps everything he knows in his head...and he is able to get it across in such a user-friendly way".

In addition to his expertise, Alan Bruce presented an alternative and unique perspective, through his background. He was seen as a "slight outsider" and this meant that participants across the board saw him as being 'neutral' and impartial. This view contributed to the sense of a 'safe space' in which frank and sensitive dialogue could take place, and helped remove some of the barriers to participation for some people. Expac's origins are rooted firmly in the Republican movement and Dr Bruce's occupation of the 'middle ground' enable the programme to move away from a "here come the Provos" perception. His personal reflection of the programme was that it was "brilliantly successful", an indication of the commitment he has given to the programme, his faith in it and his relationship with Expac.

The placing of the conflict in and around Northern Ireland into a broader context, by comparison with conflict elsewhere in Europe was regarded as unique, and very helpful. One community representative said: "I have been involved in peacebuilding as far back as 1999, and gone on many courses, and I think this is the only one that placed the conflict in the North in the global context...you can see what worked and what didn't in other conflicts, and put that against the Northern Ireland situation".

Another representative said: "The examples of conflicts they chose were more useful and helpful than we thought they would have been...At first, we thought - is that relevant, should we not do our own housekeeping first, but then, the lightbulb goes on!".

It also helped in terms of contextualising the personal experience of conflict. As one young participant put it:

“Growing up in Northern Ireland, you always think you’re worse off, but then you look at other conflicts and you realise that at least you have some rights”.

The quality and range of the guest speakers struck most representatives, giving “a richness in the programme that you don’t often get through training” . Several representatives felt that, through the programme, they were hearing from people with whom they would otherwise never have had the opportunity to engage. This was particularly the case for organisations whose staff members participated in the course - in many cases, they felt that had a “good grounding” or “significant expertise” in the historical background, but might not have had the chance for such personal contact with key players in the conflict. One community representative remarked: “I can guarantee you that none of us individually, even with all our contacts, would have had that opportunity to sit down with individuals from the furthest extremes and hear their stories across the table”.

The list of guest speakers increased in number and broadened in terms of diversity as the programme progressed. The programme enabled the academic guest speakers to come into contact with working class communities, including many individuals who had previously had no contact with a university. Expac acted as a conduit to enable universities to engage with marginalised groups, create linkages with communities and engage with businesses.

Also exposing some guest speakers to their political opposites either for first time or first meaningful time. Expac’s Director felt that the ‘political winds’ had changed during the programme and that Conflicts of Interest was able to both “have a huge impact on the ground”, but also because of its position close to grassroots political and social activists that it was able to react to these changes through the programme. The programme was also able to make and facilitate connections, contacts and relationships between individuals, informal and formal groupings particularly outside of Sinn Féin linked Republican and mainstream Loyalism.

The relationship between Alan Bruce and Expac staff, specifically Project Co-Ordinator Oliver Corr, and Director Tommy McKearney, was clearly a success factor. The three had a close working relationship, complementing each other in terms of skills, expertise and styles. They clearly enjoyed working together and all three were absolutely and totally committed to Conflicts of Interest and ensuring its success. Laura Sheppard, Expac’s Administrator was also praised for her efficient and high quality administration support of the programme.

Flexibility & tailored delivery

“I guess they have never run two exactly the same - it’s the participants and their response that shape the course”.

Community representative



Another positive aspect mentioned in the Phase 1 evaluation was the flexibility in the way in which Expac were able to deliver the course - in terms of number of days, frequency of sessions and venues for sessions. This was also commented upon positive during Phase 2. One representative said: "We started off in our own centre, then had a session in a Presbyterian church, and then in a bar with Republican leanings...This is what this course is about, that you don't have to be in a community centre to learn this stuff".

Expac were also praised for being flexible in a more fundamental way, in tailoring the programme to the participants. As mentioned above, the groups on Phase 2 were extremely diverse, and not all of them would have had direct experience of the Troubles. Despite the very different profiles of some of the groups, Expac were very skilled in tailoring the course to the needs of the particular participants.

In one case, the representative had participated on an earlier course, and had seen the opportunity to adapt it for her own organisation. She and her colleagues were clearly quite exacting, and worked with Expac for several weeks beforehand to tailor the course to their needs, but were extremely happy with the results. She outlined how, at the end of the first day, the facilitators set the group the challenge of each preparing a presentation for their peers, "because the group were well capable of it. We had to work quite hard, but we will have a product at the end of it, which will be presented to our funders". She concluded: "I don't know that anyone else could have risen to the challenge" [of tailoring it for that group]. Other groups welcomed a more packaged approach: "It was all organised for us..we could relax into the whole thing..all we had to do was listen, participate and exchange views".

Expac and ULS were also able to extend programme content to support related activities. For example, a trade union groups going to Spain on a study visit to learn about the Civil War, and the development of a module on South Africa.

Challenging content in a safe environment

"It was a provocative situation at times, but people cannot move forward unless there is that questioning of role and responsibility".

Community representative comment

Many of the representatives commented favourably on how Expac managed to "push boundaries" in addressing "contentious issues".

One group, run with young people with no direct experience of the Troubles, had chosen Expac specifically because it seemed to be "hard-hitting". The representative explained that his organisation had tried other training in this area that

had been too “softly, softly”. He explained that the participants undergoing the course were youths with difficulties, some of whom would have been in trouble with the law, and that it needed ‘shock tactics’ to get their attention.

Another representative said that some of her group were “shocked by some of the questions asked” but that it did them a lot of good because “for so long, these people walked around with their blinkers on..closing their curtains when there was something they didn’t want to see”. This is again perhaps indicative of a new generation of participants, for whom, as another representative put it, the Troubles were “the elephant in the room”.

The key to addressing challenging issues is to create a safe environment for open discussion, and according to participants’ testimony, Expac achieved this exceptionally well. While participants found the individual stories very challenging, they felt that a safe space had been created in which open discussion could take place. “Sometimes, at these things, you think ‘I’d like to know that, but I won’t ask, because I might use the wrong word, or offend in some way’. There was none of that here”. The excellent facilitation was obviously key here, as was the familiarity of the guest speakers with the course and the facilitator. “There was no special fuss created about this one or that one coming down”. Another participant commented that they felt safe because: “everything was set out and explained right from the start..there were no surprises”.

Impact beyond participants

There is much evidence through the evaluation process that the impact on individual participant has been significant; in some cases life-changing. Following participation in Conflicts of Interest, Dr Bruce received a number of phone calls and emails from people expressing a range of emotions and issues that had surfaced for them as a result of the programme, e.g guilt, remorse. However, these impacts were to be expected and whilst of course positive, were predictable and planned.

Conflicts of Interest has impacted on people and organisations way beyond those to whom the programme is delivered to. There has been a huge impact on Expac as an organisation (see below) and on its staff. There has been an impact on a number of organisations whose views on political ex-prisoners and ex-combatants have been challenged and changed, and whose views on the attitudinal effect of peace-building and conflict transformation programmes have been at least stretched. There has been an impact on a number of the individual guest speakers in ways which have challenged long-held views and opinions but also brought about incredible and highly sensitive situations. In one session, a guest speaker came face to face with a participant who had been involved in a plot to kill him.

Strategic development

The second phase of Conflicts of Interest has been marked by Expac's decision to strategically develop the programme. Sustainability was an important consideration throughout the second phase of the programme, and Expac dedicated time to thinking and planning about how Conflicts of Interest may continue or develop beyond the duration of Peace III funding.

With this in mind, Expac began to target host organisations who would have the ability to pay for the programme in the future, so that it continue to be delivered without support from funding. This relationship building with target organisations has included local authorities, statutory bodies and regional development and delivery agencies.

Expac are also very sensitive to political and economic changes to the context in which the programme is being delivered. This should come as no surprise given the political and academic expertise involved. The growing interest in other [geographical] areas of conflict outside of this island is increasing as the Irish peace process is seen to be imbedded, and this is creating new opportunities for Conflicts of Interest. Dr Bruce is able to respond to new, emerging and current global conflict issues e.g. Egypt through the facilitated discussions.

There have been several spin off activities which have come out of Phase 2 of Conflicts of Interest. There is a planned study trip to Bologna, Italy linked to Expac's new social enterprise (see next section).

Through Alan Bruce, links have been made to the Creanova project, a pan-European research project examining creative learning environments. The project is a partnership between University of Edinburgh, University of Tallinn, Educodes, University of the Basque Country, University of Applied Sciences Finland, along with partners in Italy, France and Germany & Universal Learning Systems. Conflicts of Interest was cited as an example of best practice as part of this research.

A link has also been made to the European Distance & E-learning Network (EDEN) of which Dr Bruce is Vice President. EDEN's 2011 annual conference was held in Ireland for the first time. Held in Dublin, the conference was entitled Learning & Sustainability - The New Ecosystem of Innovation & Knowledge and was attended by Expac staff. Through this they were able to further develop their networks in this field and find out more information about the programme's potential to become a distance &/or e-learning model.

Finally, another European link was made to Greece. Costas Antoniou, Director of EU Affairs at the Directorate of Education visited Expac with a view to learning about Conflicts of Interest. Mr Antoniou's department and colleagues are working on a distance learning system using modern technology.

Five strands of reconciliation

With reference to Hamber & Kelly's 5-strand model of reconciliation, this evaluation has considered each strand in the context of the Conflicts of Interest programme. The five strands are:

1. Developing a shared vision of an interdependent & fair society
2. Acknowledging & dealing with the past
3. Building positive relationships
4. Significant cultural & attitudinal change
5. Substantial social, economic & political change

This evaluation concludes that this programme genuinely contributes to all five strands, and that the achievements, benefits, successes and positive impacts as detailed above illustrate this. In particular, we believe that strands 2, 3 and 4 have been significantly addressed through Conflicts of Interest.

Developing a shared vision of an interdependent & fair society has been contributed to through the programme's exploration of the reasons for conflict, its impact and legacy. This has been through the facilitated discussions sessions and reconciliation training. Developing the shared vision has also been explored through the interaction with the guest speakers. This impact has been two ways with the shared vision being developed by both participants as well as some of the guest speakers.

The very presence of so many ex-combatants and ex-prisoners is in itself an acknowledgement of & dealing with the past. That these participants were 'ex' and were engaging with a reconciliation programme is surely an indication of commitment by individuals to deal with the past, and through promoting the programme by Expac as an organisation. Loyalist and Republican ex-combatants were brought face-to-face as course participants and guest speakers. Interaction with the guest speakers and finding out about some of their experiences and projects has also provided case studies with a range of ways of acknowledging & dealing with the past, e.g. Messines Project. Indeed for some of the guest speakers, they have had a chance to acknowledge and deal with some issues from the past.

Building positive relationships has happened in a number of different ways. Firstly through bringing 'unlikely' people together in the same room to participate in a community education programme has been an achievement. For example, the council-hosted programmes brought together people involved with community work, many of whom did not know each other prior to the course. [Omagh and Fermanagh District Councils are working together to run Conflicts of Interest jointly for their constituent community representatives, targeting eight participants from each district.] The interaction between the guest speakers and participants, also, has opened up new channels of communication and enabled new dialogues to begin.

Bringing about significant cultural & attitudinal change has again come about through the interaction of participants and guest speakers, through facilitated and open discussions, where perceptions and stereotypes were able to be challenged, and issues around conflict explored. By setting the programme in a European context, Col allowed participants to see the Irish conflict from a wider perspective and so help create attitudinal change.

This programme could not claim to have in itself created substantial social, economic & political change. However, it is playing a part. It is successfully engaging with working class communities many of whom have little or no experience of training and education, lack community and political leaders and are in desperate need of a confidence boost. By creating positive impacts at both individual and community levels, Conflicts of Interest is actively contributing to the transformation of communities through encouraging social, economic and political change.

Finally, as an organisation, and particularly through Tommy McKearney's leadership of it, Expac has itself demonstrated considerable courage, leadership and risk-taking in developing, promoting and delivering Conflicts of Interest. The credibility of Expac and its personnel amongst the community partners and participants was an important success factor for this programme.

The willingness of Expac to take an active part in ongoing peace-building research such as Border Action's Respect, Protect & Fulfil: A Human Rights Approach to Peacebuilding & Reconciliation and to share its own concerns, expectations and learning so openly has demonstrated the organisations' commitment to community peace-building and the reconciliation process. Indeed the strategic development it has undertaken over the last couple of years underlines its commitment to a long-term process, and to taking Expac as an organisation beyond its initial remit.

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The evaluation team found no serious challenges, difficulties or issues with the programme during its first phase. Perhaps the biggest challenge for Expac was the programme changes at its embryonic stages, and whilst there was an impact in terms of a longer development period and so a shorter delivery period, the organisation coped well in 'catching up'.

The evaluation team found that there were just two key areas for learning and development for Expac from Phase 1. They were:

- Marketing & communication
- Systems & procedures

Green Hat made recommendations about increasing the quality of the marketing and communications of the programme and to putting in place internal evaluation processes. Expac addressed both of these issues in part.

Presentation folders have been produced, the website has been very well developed with information, photos, audio and video. In addition, Conflicts of Interest was officially launched at Farsett International, Belfast (on the Springfield Road interface) with a well-attended and diverse audience. Expac have developed several different informal ways of evaluating the programme.

It was quite difficult to identify any major challenges or difficulties with the second phase of the programme, as the feedback was universally positive. As one representative put it: "I tend to be quite honest about courses, as I think that criticism can be constructive, but I have nothing but praise for Conflicts of Interest".

As such, the issues identified are relatively minor, given the overwhelming success of the programme as a whole.

These issues are:

- Marketing & communications
- Optimal course delivery
- Internal evaluation

Marketing & communications

Whilst marketing activities for Conflicts of Interest were significantly more and of a higher standard during Phase 2 of the programme than in the first phase. There is a mismatch between the quality of the programme marketing and the programme content and delivery. A programme leaflet and brochure could have designed,

produced and circulated. However, resources for this marketing and communication activities, including the time to deliver them, would have had to have been built into the programme from the outset and this was not the case. As a result, Expac did not have the additional resources necessary to have built further on the marketing offering. It may be possible to draw more on Laura's excellent organisational skills in the future for marketing and communication activities.

There was scope for Expac to present a more public face and this could have promoted the programme more widely. Conflicts of Interest met all its target numbers and more so there wasn't an issue of attracting more people, but rather raising the profile of the programme and the organisation behind it. This might have helped with Expac's strategic development in terms of where it might go post-funding. However, this 'softly softly' approach to delivery has enabled Expac to engage with some individuals, groups and organisations that might not have been comfortable with (or even able) to engage with it (as an organisation that emerged from the Republican movement) had it been high profile. Expac did benefit from excellent recommendations made by word of mouth and this was obviously extremely helpful in term of spreading the word, but it (word of mouth) cannot be relied upon to reach new audiences.

There could also have been improvements in the follow up with individuals and organisations post-programme, the collection & maintenance of data, and consistency of approach. These are very minor details and what Expac lacked in a formal communications strategy, they made up for in charm and friendliness.

Optimal course delivery

One of the very positive aspects of Expac's delivery - their ability to tailor the course to the needs of the participants - may also have a slightly negative aspect. Expac's preferred delivery method is eight modules over eight weeks, but most of the groups attending had negotiated for the course to be delivered in longer sessions over four, three, or even just two days. One representative who had negotiated for the course to be held over three days, felt in retrospect that it was 'too compressed' and difficult at times to keep the young participants' attention. A participant in another group, held over four days, felt that it was 'a lot to take in' and that he personally would have preferred to have it run over eight weeks. The course was in fact delivered over eight weeks to just one group, who were very happy with this form of delivery - the representative said that 'we would have been happy for it to go on for another ten weeks'!

While the compressed timetabling undoubtedly was convenient for participants, and in some cases was the only option, Expac might consider strengthening their recommendations for the eight week delivery model, on the basis of this feedback. This may not always be feasible, given the travel time required by the

facilitator. Where the programme is run in day-long blocks, a staggered approach might be considered, where the programme starts in the afternoon, allowing participants time to reflect before a day long session the following day.

Internal evaluation

If Conflicts of Interest continues to be delivered - either in its present or a developed form - Expac need to develop an evaluation framework. Whilst Expac collect internal evaluation information from individuals and organisations, this is mostly collected anecdotally. There is virtually no written evaluation documentation, with the exception of both external evaluation reports. The three main personnel involved in the delivery of the programme, have all had numerous conversations, feedback, discussions and informally collected empirical and anecdotal evidence, this has not been collated and formally documented. Green Hat's report have fulfilled this function for both phases of Conflicts of Interest, but if the programme is going to be delivered in a sustainable way, then it is unlikely that an external evaluation will take place on a regular basis.

Green Hat believes that evaluation is particularly important for this programme, given the potential for huge impact on individuals' perceptions, attitudes, views, relationships and ultimately behaviour. It is important that Expac is able to demonstrate the successes, benefits and positive impacts of this programme beyond this point.

An evaluation framework for Conflicts of Interest might include pre-programme attitudinal questionnaire, structured feedback form, audio / video testimonials, development of case studies, Plus / Delta evaluation discussion, collection of anecdotal & empirical evidence and post-programme attitudinal questionnaire.

SUSTAINABILITY & THE FUTURE

Issues around sustainability and future developments of the Conflicts of Interest programme have been touched on elsewhere in this evaluation report. The issues detailed here are the most important - and challenging - for the future of the programme.

Course ownership

Dr Bruce is clearly an exceptional facilitator and the relationship with Expac is not only effective, but complementary, trusting and meaningful. However, if Conflicts of Interest continues to expand and develop, Expac need reduce their over-reliance on one individual. Even from a practical point of view (e.g. sickness, holidays, general availability) there is little room for manoeuvre in terms of delivery. Inevitably, participants strongly identify the course with Dr Bruce as facilitator and whilst this brings many benefits, it also brings challenges.

'We were meant to run the programme earlier in the year, but the facilitator was not available...I said we'd hang on for him, I'd done the course with him, and I knew how good he was...I wanted to be able to stand over the course quality.'

Expac have built some internal capacity but now needs to look some 'train the trainer' activities. There appears to be a need to develop a team, however small, to deliver Conflicts of Interest, if it is going to be sustainable. This will be extremely difficult to do, not least as while Expac own the copyright of the programme, it would not have been possible without ULS and the relationship between the two is exceptionally strong and close. Bringing in any new personnel or developing a formal Service Level Agreement or other contractual arrangement would need to be handled with exceptional sensitivity. However, a formal structure, partnership or memorandum of understanding is needed to give clarity and protection for both parties.

Future audiences

The second phase of delivery has seen an evolving role for the Conflicts of Interest programme, from working predominantly with single identity groups with direct experience of the Troubles, to working with a very diverse set of groups, including staff of community development organisations, younger participants with no direct experience of the Troubles, and with more middle class participants (some of whom would have started from the premise that the conflict was 'nothing to do with them').

It is safe to assume that this wider diversity of audience will grow into the future, as memories of the Troubles continue to recede. However, as one participant put it: 'It's important to revisit what made our communities what they are now...you can't just say, this is the year dot and we start from here.'

In addition to the wider demographic spread, there is a wider geographic spread, with Conflicts of Interest running in groups in Southern border counties. While participants here may have lived through the conflict, they have a very different experience of it. There are the displaced families, who left Northern Ireland during the Troubles..they don't belong there, and they don't belong here, and no-one asks the question about why did they move..and there is a strong Protestant minority, who find it easier to keep the head down and say nothing..they are fearful, people have actually used that word 'fear' in conversation with me, and recently too.'

The engagement with the group of young people from Broomhall Forum (Sheffield) who had a particular interest in inter-community conflict within the UK is of particular significance for the future development of Conflicts of Interest. This would mean moving the programme beyond the projected audiences of those with an interest in the Irish conflict to those with an interest in different types and arenas of conflict.

Expac is currently looking at other geographical areas including Scotland, which currently has high profile sectarian issues. There are also strong links with curriculum topics on both sides of the border such as active citizenship.

There appears to also be scope to deliver the programme further afield, both in terms of the rest of Ireland including beyond the southern border counties building on the north / south dimension. In addition, there is potential, as demonstrated by the Sheffield group, to develop the programme on an east / west basis as well.

Green Hat recommends that the key players, i.e. Expac and ULS, have structured discussions around the future of this programme before the end of December 2011 to agree a course of action.

Organisational development

The future of Expac and its organisational development is outside the scope of the evaluation brief. However, the future of the organisation now appears to be inextricably linked with the future of Conflicts of Interest or a development of it.

As it stands at present, if funding is removed from the programme, Conflicts of Interest would have to be mothballed as a project. Should they be successful in being awarded a funding extension through the second phase of Peace III, Expac will have

some breathing space until 2014 to revisit its mission, develop an organisation strategy and implement a plan.

To date, Expac is considering four areas of potential future development:

- 1 E-learning
- 2 Social economy business
- 3 Delivering services to third level institutions & business
- 4 Consultation service

The development of an e-learning version of Conflicts of Interest would enable Expac to deliver to more geographically dispersed groups, new audiences such as employee training as well as being sustainable. The need for a critical mass of participation, availability of Dr Bruce, travel and venue expenses would all be easily dealt with. However, considerable expertise in this area would be needed. ULS are well placed to support Expac on this although as detailed above, the relationship and arrangement needs clarification and formalising.

Over the last six months, Expac have established a social enterprise company called Northern New View (NNV) with support from Invest NI. Governed by a Community Interest Company structure, NNV is considering potential twinning with Dundalk IT or other development company or partner, possibly with a link to Scotland. NNV could deliver the Conflicts of Interest programme or a variation of it. Dr Bruce has been involved in the development of NNV and so clarification issues around the relationship need to be addressed here too.

Expac are also exploring delivering services to third level institutions and businesses. This might include providing orientation &/or briefing beyond the current context of the conflict to provide information on the social, economic, cultural, historical contexts and nuances of both jurisdictions on this island for foreign businesses, visiting academics etc.

Finally, Expac are considering what consultancy services they might offer and be able to deliver. Expac might decide to develop options around one or more of these options.

What seems clear, is that Expac now need to complete a reinvention of themselves as an organisation. It needs to revisit its mission, constitution &/or Articles of Association and develop a new, long-term strategy to ensure its survival. There may be a need to recruit new board members &/or advisors. The perception of it by the outside world is less as a Republican ex-prisoner group and more as a conflict transformation and social justice organisation, although Expac's will always - to a greater or lesser extent - have Republican and socialist politics at its heart. Its distance from Sinn Féin has, in the view of Green Hat, helped give it a more independence and integrity as it doesn't have party political influence.

Helped by Alan Bruce, Expac has made substantial links into the world of academia. The evaluators believe that this should continue as well as developing strategic partnerships with other organisations focussing on conflict transformation, social justice and equality e.g. Committee on Administration for Justice (CAJ), Pat Finucane Centre, Community Foundation NI.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, Conflicts of Interest has been an excellent programme, which has exceeded expectations of all concerned, had a major positive impact on individuals and organisations, created new networks, links & relationships, made a genuine and lasting contribution to peace-building on both sides of the border and in short 'punched way above its weight'.

Through its links (via Dr Bruce) to EDEN and Creanova, Expac has also contributed towards what is becoming known as 'peace learning', that is playing a role in sharing the experience, expertise and knowledge gained through peace-building activities with both those on this island as well as elsewhere in the world.

The second phase of Conflicts of Interest programme has, like Phase 1 played a major role in peace-building and conflict transformation in the communities in which it has been delivered. We summarised this in our first evaluation report and will say it again here: It is independent, interactive community education which has integrity, engagement and empowerment at its heart.

As evaluators of this programme, Green Hat has been hugely impressed with the quality of the programme, the dedication, expertise & commitment of Expac and ULS in delivering it, and the genuine impact on individuals engaging with it.

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