

Evaluation Report



EXPAC

(Ex-Prisoners Assistance Committee)

‘Conflicts of Interest’



Conflicts of Interest was funded through Border Action & part-financed by the European Union's Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and the Irish Government under the National Development Plan, and managed for the Special EU Programmes Body by Border Action

Evaluation Report by



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SUMMARY

This evaluation report sets out to tell the story of Expac's *Conflicts of Interest* programme.

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.

The achievements and positive impacts are detailed and analysed, as are the areas for learning and development. The issues around accreditation are examined and finally, the report presents conclusions and recommendations.

"It's been a remarkable programme"

Community Partner, Belfast

"Conflicts of Interests enabled us to realise that we have more shared experiences than divided ones"

Course participant, Letterkenny

"It made a major contribution to peacebuilding in our community"

Community Partner, Armagh

"The course was invaluable and rewarding"

Course participant, Belfast

"The course gave me the opportunity to question many of my own preconceptions"

Course participant, Armagh

ABOUT THE PROJECT

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 then 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 Border Action through the EU Peace & Reconciliation programme.

About Expac

Expac - the Ex-Prisoners Assistance Committee - 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'.

Programme development

The *Conflicts of Interest* programme was originally conceived as a peacebuilding 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 peacebuilding

Contribution towards Measure 2.4

Through their *Conflicts of Interest* programme, Expac set out to meet the two objectives of Measure 2.4 Pathways to Inclusion, Integration and Reconciliation of Victims, viz:

- To build the capacity of individuals & communities to deal with the transition to peace by identifying and providing for skills gaps which may impede the transition
- To promote a labour market open to all by continuing the work started under the Peace I programme, promoting the re-socialisation, integration and inclusion of target groups

Expac sought to contribute towards the meeting of these objectives by:

- Targeting not only Peace II groups for participation on the programme, but the *Conflicts of Interest* programme itself was a compilation of interviews with representatives from these and other people directly affected by the conflict. As such, it provided a platform for them to relate their experiences and views and to have them heard by others who would not normally have the opportunity or inclination to listen or hear
- *Conflicts of Interests'* innovative use of new media and individual stories set out to engage participants' interest in exploring fundamental questions that pertain to democracy. The workshop education programme will deepen the experience by asking participants to reflect not only on their own perspective but from the perspective of the 'other'. It also equipped them with a methodology, structure and language to grasp the nettle of the conflict, and better aid them to understand it from all perspectives. In doing so, it left participants better able to understand the progressive spirit that underpins the peace process and play a proactive role in the promotion of reconciliation and peace-building
- Given the polarised reality in the north and lack of awareness in the Republic, without such innovative resources civil society will not move forward and Northern Ireland and the border region will continue to be parochial, divided and entangled in its past. It is only when the spirit of the new democratic context is understood and embraced that it can engender a more outward and forward looking view in the citizens of the region

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Expac delivered *Conflicts of Interest* with the support of Universal Learning Systems (ULS). ULS is led by Dr Alan Bruce, a 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 was delivered in the same way throughout the project. Each session began with a specially commissioned 10- 15 minute DVD on some aspect of conflict. The guest speaker then gave a relatively informal talk / presentation, and there was time for questions. The final part of each session was given over to conflict resolution training which was delivered by Dr Alan Bruce. This part of the module included facilitated discussions and was highly participative.

Modules

As stated above, there were 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. To date, virtually all of these sessions have brought together two or more of the groups participating in the *Conflicts of Interest* programme. For example, the Bangor and Taughmonagh groups came together to visit the Linen Hall Library. The visit included a short play about the 1907 Lock Out, which briefly united more than 5,000 Catholic and Protestant dockers in Belfast.

Guest speakers

There were a total of 17 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 prisoners &/or ex-combatants. All are involved with politics, community development, peacebuilding and/or academia.

The speakers were:

Davy Adams	Journalist & former Loyalist politician
Steve Baker	Lecturer in Film & Television Studies, University 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
David Hume	Orange Order
Sam Johnston	Messines Project
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, University of Ulster
Davy McMaster	Loyalist ex-prisoner
Malachy O'Doherty	Journalist & broadcaster
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 March 2008, community consultancy Green Hat was appointed to undertake an external evaluation of the process.

Evaluation activities undertaken by Green Hat included:

- Initial briefing meeting 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 one course sessions
- Informal discussions with community worker & participants at observed session
- Analysis of internal evaluation material
- Review of available internal documentation & project reports
- On-going informal discussions & interview with Project Co-Ordinator

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Community links

Expac worked in partnership with a 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
- Expac could reach its target participants
- Potential barriers to participation were removed
- Improved safety for guest speakers & facilitators
- Raised profile of the programme in communities

In many cases, the community organisation also provided the venue for the programme. These community partners were:

- Rathgill Community Association - Bangor
- Taughmonagh Community Forum - Belfast
- Donegal Community Workers Co-Operative - Letterkenny
- South Belfast Community Safety Network - Finaghy / Benmore
- West Armagh Consortium - Armagh
- North Belfast Development Group - Tiger’s Bay

Specific communities

The focus of the programme shifted as Expac had originally planned on delivering the *Epilogues* programme (devised in Northern Ireland) to the Republic. However, the partnership did not develop as planned and *Conflicts of Interest* was developed in its place. Expac planned to deliver this throughout Northern Ireland and the border counties, and the programme remained open to any and everyone throughout its duration. However, the delivery of *Conflicts of Interest* has emerged as predominantly single identity and urban.

One course was delivered in Co Donegal, and drew participants from both sides of the border. This had a degree of focus of a rural perspective, and was the most ‘mixed’ of the groups in terms of age, gender and employment status and one member of the group was from a minority ethnic community. The group was described as being a largely Nationalist group and the host organisation wasn’t aware of any ex-combatants or ex-prisoners.

The course hosted by Taughmonagh Community Forum brought together members from individual community groups who had previously had little or no interaction with each other. Their community worker said that he could not think of another training programme which would have brought so much diversity into the room.

Another course was run in Armagh City, and this was a single identity Republican group. The other four courses were urban, single identity Loyalist groups.

Interestingly, the strongest interest in the programme was from working class Loyalist areas, particularly those which would have been / are strongly influenced by the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). Four programmes have been delivered for these communities in the greater Belfast area.

Participant profile

The West Armagh Consortium

The host group in Armagh city is an umbrella organisation for community groups in the Callenbridge, Drumarg and Mullacreevie housing estates in west Armagh. These are areas, which have been identified with social exclusion and deprivation. They would be regarded as strong Republican / Nationalist areas.

Donegal Community Workers Co-operative

The Donegal CWC was formed in 1994 by a group of local community workers and activists seeking to influence social change and currently has 81 members. Donegal Community Workers Co-operative carries out policy analysis and strategies at local level and feeds these into the national structures. The isolation caused by the border and its remoteness from Dublin has led to Donegal being one of the poorest counties in Ireland. Donegal is largely rural and suffers from high levels of poverty, deprivation and unemployment. The county has significantly higher levels of unemployment and early school leavers than the national average.

Tigers Bay

A Unionist / Loyalist area of north Belfast. It is situated between Duncairn Gardens and the Limestone Road, just off the Shore Road, and close to the Nationalist area of New Lodge. This area is a flashpoint during times of trouble. The participating group has strong links with the UDA.

Rathgill

Rathgill Housing estate is situated off the Baloo road in Bangor. The estate was built by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the late 1970's and contains approximately 533 dwellings. Rathgill was identified by the North Down Local Strategy Partnership and several other agencies as an area with pressing social needs as a result of social deprivation: high unemployment, anti social behaviour, social exclusion, and high levels of drug and alcohol abuse. It is exclusively a Loyalist estate.

Taughmonagh Community Forum

Taughmonagh is a small estate in South Belfast in Northern Ireland. It consists mainly of a Protestant population. When the area was first built, the houses consisted of very basic, small, tin bungalows. The area was regenerated and there are now approximately 2,000 houses, which were previously built for the army. These houses are owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but within recent years many of the residents have bought these houses making it more of a private housing estate. The area would be identified as a UDA stronghold.

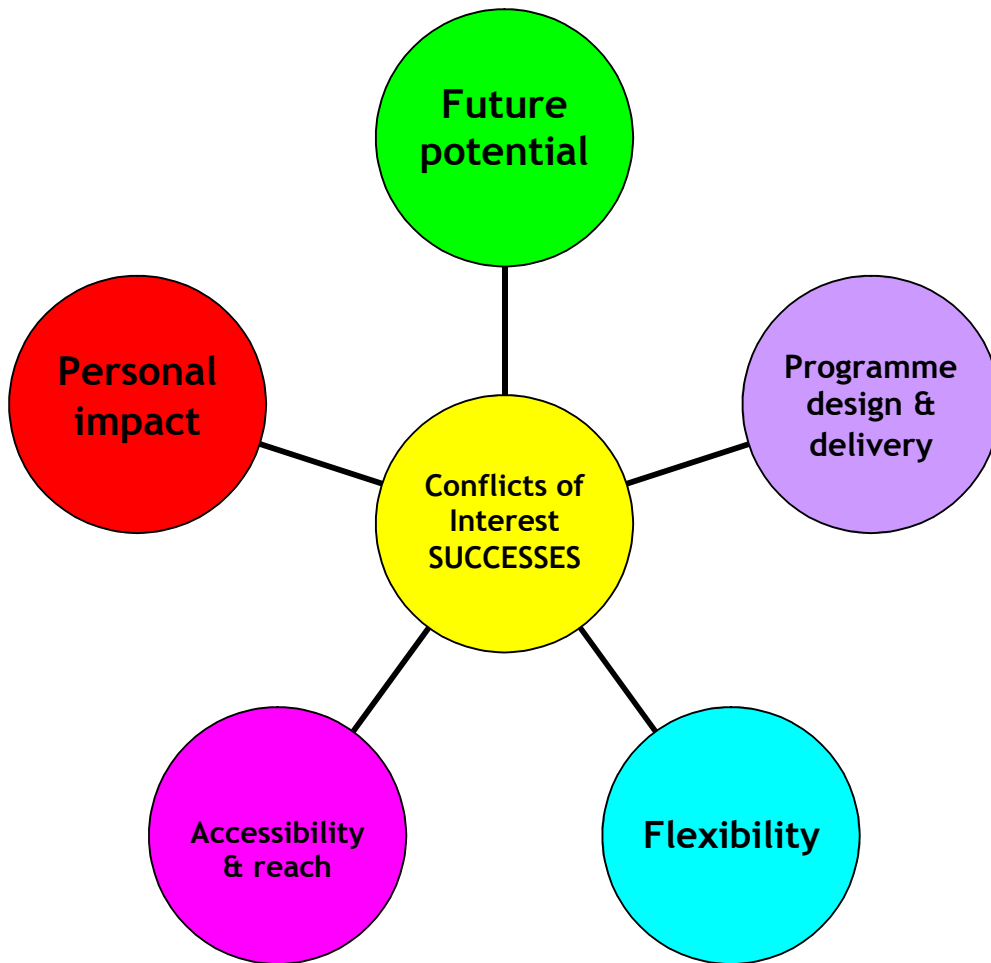
Finaghy / Benmore

This group is involved with work on the interface area at Finaghy Crossroads which has been the scene of much sectarian tension over the years. Finaghy, Benmore and Ladybrooke areas would be Loyalist with a strong UDA influence.

ACHIEVEMENTS & POSITIVE IMPACTS

The strengths, positive impacts, benefits and achievements of *Conflicts of Interest* (Col) are genuinely widespread and significant. The evaluation team has been impressed with the impact that this programme has had in such a short time.

These can be categorised as follows:



Programme design & delivery

There was significant positive feedback about the format and design of *Conflicts of Interest*. Universal Learning Systems were instrumental in this and as a result played a major role in ensuring the success of the programme. The quality of the programme is high and the restriction of numbers to 8 - 15 per delivery is an indication of this commitment.

The feedback from community contacts, many of whom were participants, was that by looking at conflicts in Europe and beyond allowed people to consider the nature of conflict in a broader context, and not just focus on Northern Ireland. This allowed participants

to think through and beyond the ‘Orange & Green’ and to look at the origin of conflict, particularly with a political or ethnic dimension. It also encouraged the participants to look beyond - but be able to draw on - their own personal experience and consider the ‘bigger picture’.

This broader picture was a realisation for some that in a worldwide context Northern Ireland is a tiny place and our conflict relatively small. As one participant remarked “we’re not special or unique in our conflict”, and that throughout the Troubles we constantly engaged in ‘naval gazing’.

The other aspect of programme design that was very effective was the format of the sessions. Again, a number of the community contacts felt that the combination of DVD, guest speaker and facilitated conflict resolution training & discussion provided a really good balance which kept participants’ attention and catered for different learning styles and preferences. There was also a range of delivery tools and materials. The programme design provided opportunities for participants to learn in both a passive and active way, which was highly appropriate (and necessary) given that a number of participants had little or no experience of any kind of community training or education programmes, and had considerable suspicion and reservations about peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives.

Finally, the facilitation of Dr Alan Bruce of ULS was cited as major strength of the programme. There was much feedback about his approachable and informal style, but also his knowledge and expertise in conflict and resolution. All the community leaders who contributed to the evaluation said that Dr Bruce was excellent, and that his input played a big part in the success of the programme for their group.

Flexibility

The way that Expac was able to deliver Col was extremely flexible. Community organisations could host the modules as daytime or evening sessions. Most organisations choose to have the sessions on a weekly basis, but some choose to run it monthly. It was also available as a residential programme, and Expac were more than happy to consider alternative formats.

In addition to flexibility of when, where and what time the course was delivered, Expac delivered the workshops in a venue of the community partners choosing.

This flexibility increased the programme’s accessibility, and enabled groups to ensure that Col fitted in with existing group meetings, community education or training programmes or tailored specifically to suit participants.

Accessibility & reach

The accessibility and reach of Expac’s programme has been hugely significant and arguably the biggest single achievement of this project. Although, as stated above, the *Conflicts of Interests* programme was offered to all community groups or organisations, the take up for the course was particularly high in working class Loyalist areas, specifically those influenced by - or formerly influenced by the UDA.

The Col programme has managed to connect with some of Northern Ireland's most marginalised communities. Community leaders in working class Loyalist areas often make reference to the lack of positive impact of the peace process on their communities, and ongoing major social issues such as unemployment, drug abuse and anti-social behaviour which have yet to be adequately addressed and resourced. Such is the marginalisation of these communities, that they have been referred to as 'white trash'.

Within these UDA-influenced areas, there is shortage of confident, articulate and visible community leaders and spokespeople, and a genuine lack of confidence in speaking on behalf of their own communities. There are generally low levels of educational attainment, often poor literacy, and a lack of political engagement and representation. For many participants on Col, this was the first time that they have ever engaged in any kind of community training or education.

In addition to significant engagement with working class Loyalist communities, *Conflicts of Interests* also involved a number of ex-combatants and ex-prisoners. On some of the courses, all the participants were from one of these two groups, and on most of the rest, the majority of participants were either ex-combatants or ex-prisoners (both Loyalist and Republican).

Across all the courses, the links with individuals were made through the community gatekeepers. This personal encouragement and contact gave individuals confidence to be able to engage with Col, many of whom might not otherwise have.

The support, integrity and approach of the Project Co-Ordinator played an important role in removing barriers to access and extending the reach of the programme. There was considerable acknowledgement of Oliver's contribution to the programme's success from feedback to this evaluation.

Furthermore, the lack of entry requirements and written work removed a major barrier to accessing the programme. A number of the community leaders told us that had there been written work, many of the participants would not have even considered taking part in *Conflicts of Interest*, let alone fully engaging with the course and completing it.

Personal impact

The programme produced a number of positive impacts for individuals. The programme gave individuals confidence and this came about through engagement with new or 'estranged' people - both other participants and guest speakers. For some, confidence came through participating in their first training / education programme, whilst for others it came through the discussions and finding their own voice or being able to ask questions of themselves and others.

Many participants had never had the opportunity to engage in 'difficult conversations', and whilst a number of ex-combatants and ex-prisoners had had contact with the 'other', most had not had an opportunity to hear their stories or reasons for becoming actively involved in the Irish conflict. This had considerable impact in terms of exploding myths, challenging perceptions and stereotypes and building knowledge. Many community leaders

acknowledged that these difficult conversations provided many challenges for both the participants and themselves, but that the groups enjoyed meeting these challenges.

For some participants, the course was an affirming action in confirming that the community development, equality work or peacebuilding activities that they were involved with in either a paid or voluntary capacity were the 'right' path to be following.

Future potential

In terms of the sustainability of *Conflicts of Interest*, a major strength is the potential for the future which is demonstrated. This programme has whetted the appetite of those who have participated, and genuinely left many hungry for more. There is a clear need to continue both the existing programme, but also to develop and deliver a follow-up programme, possibly a cross-community one which will allow communities to start to have the difficult conversations outside of their own single identity groups.

There is considerable potential in this programme in terms of generating confidence in working class Loyalist communities, both through its own delivery and also through linking it to community leadership, communication, media & PR and other community-based training. There is also potential to expand the programme to include more field trips, project visits &/or areas not normally visited.

It is the view of this evaluation that the *Conflicts of Interest* programme is transformative and can play a key role in helping communities build confidence, identify & develop community leaders, explore issues of identity and ultimately contribute to grassroots peacebuilding.

Furthermore, Col offers Expac a vehicle with which to expand its current activities beyond supporting and servicing the needs of the ex-prisoner community, but whilst staying close to its core aims and objectives. This broadening of activities will help increase Expac's sustainability.

All the community leaders / partners we spoke to as part of this evaluation said that they would recommend the programme to others, and all would host it again.

Additional outputs

Dr Alan Bruce, with input from Tommy McKearney and Oliver Corr, wrote a conference paper entitled 'Innovative Intercultural Learning in Post-war Environments: Conflict Transformation Education in Northern Ireland'. This paper is being presented at the European Distance & E-Learning Network (EDEN) conference in Lisbon in June 2008 by Alan and Oliver.

The paper is an additional and unplanned output from the programme and one which Expac hopes will make an impact at the highest level.

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 Col.

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.

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.

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, in Armagh *Conflicts of Interests* brought together mainstream and non-mainstream Republicans together for the first time since the Good Friday Agreement which had split their thinking. In Letterkenny, the programme brought together people involved with community work in Co Donegal, many of whom did not know each other prior to the course. Furthermore, the interaction between the guest speakers and participants 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 another success factor for this programme.

The willingness of Expac to take an active part in ongoing peacebuilding 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 peacebuilding and the reconciliation process.

Horizontal Principles

Expac's *Conflicts of Interest* programme contributed towards two key horizontal principles of Peace II:

- Targeting social need / impacting poverty
- Balanced intervention / Equal Opportunities

Targeting Social Need / impacting poverty

Through *Conflicts of Interest*, Expac have provided training and increased employability of all the participants on the programme. A number of participants had not undertaken any education or training activity since leaving school, and so this programme was a major undertaking for them.

All workshop programme deliveries were in areas of high deprivation &/or key TSN areas. These are documented further in the section above and in the participant profiles.

Individual participants came from these areas and from a number of disadvantaged communities. In particular, former Prisoners and their families, communities containing displaced persons, communities affected by the conflict, young people and other Peace II funded projects.

Balanced intervention / Equal Opportunities

A member of the Irish Human Rights Commission sits on the Expac Executive Committee and provided ongoing advice to *Conflicts of Interest* on all matters relating to equal opportunities, human rights and their best practice.

Expac's staff has a good gender balance and its Management Committee has achieved a positive gender balance in favour of women. Expac staff have also undertaken equality awareness training during the programme.

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The evaluation team found no serious challenges, difficulties or issues with the programme. Perhaps the biggest challenge for Expac were 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. They are:

- Marketing & communication
- Systems & procedures

Marketing & communication

The marketing of *Conflicts of Interest* could have been more widespread and proactive. Expac used their existing contacts as well as developing new ones to promote the programme and this proved highly effective in terms of engaging with the groups that it delivered to. However, perhaps more use of organisations involved in working on peacebuilding programmes, e.g Healing Through Remembering, Rural Development Council, Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation and Farset International could have been used to promote Col.

More sophisticated marketing material could have been developed, perhaps along with a website which could have later been developed into an online resource, blog and noticeboard. The evaluators understand that there were early plans to develop a website, but that a lack of resources prevented this plan from becoming a reality.

There could also have been newsletters (either printed, electronic or both) from Expac during the programme to provide a continuous stream of information, mark achievements, act as ongoing publicity and to raise the profile of both *Conflicts of Interest* and the organisation.

The evaluation team also feels that there have been some missed opportunities in terms of publicity, profile and PR for Expac. We believe that a number of [external] organisations, funders, potential partners and others might be surprised by an ex-prisoner organisation having the capability (and possibly inclination) to deliver this kind of high quality training across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties, much less so that it available to everyone and particularly that the take-up by working class Loyalist communities has been so significant. We appreciate that media coverage might have created issues for some participants, but that these could have been overcome, particularly given the opportunity to challenge perceptions and assumptions about organisations like Expac and the wider ex-prisoner community.

That said, we appreciate that *Conflicts of Interest* was run on a relative shoestring and that because of the delay in the development stage, time resources were particularly tight and so some of the marketing and communication planned might have been put to one side to focus on the delivery itself.

Systems & procedures

There appears to be scope for the development of more robust systems and procedures within Expac for this kind of project. There was no formal data collected on participants, even anonymously, which would have been useful in providing evidence to current and future funders, as well as being able to accurately profile those Expac is engaging with. This included information on religious or political practice, age, gender, ethnicity, geographical area or other Section 75 grouping (Equalities & Good Relations Duties as defined in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, part of the GFA). There was also little written information on the community partners and their organisations. The evaluation team understands that some of the above kind of data has been collected informally and verbally.

Similarly, there are opportunities to develop more substantial internal evaluation practices. A short feedback sheet was designed, distributed and collected from some participants although it was basic and didn't really give much insight into the hugely positive impact that the programme has been having. There were also several written submissions from participants which provided more detail, but weren't able to illustrate the transformative nature of *Conflicts of Interest*.

There were also a few other minor systems and procedures which might have added some value to the programme and given a more professional image to the training, for example providing all the participants with a course folder or resource pack.

These suggestions for development are minor and probably part of Expac's learning curve in terms of developing and delivering a community training programme, and it building its in-house skills, expertise and knowledge. However, building on these areas for development will contribute to Expac's transparency, credibility and good practice principles.

Other issues

A number of participants commented that they would have liked to have had more time with the speakers, and a few indicated that they would have liked more time for discussions. However, all the feedback indicated that the length of each session was about right, so any extra time on one section would have to be at the expense of others.

There were two issues for development proposed by the Project Co-Ordinator, but were not raised as areas for development by either participants or community partners. Oliver was keen to see greater involvement & engagement with security forces personnel as guest speakers. However, it was clear that considerable work had been done to try to forge links, relationships and partners with organisations supporting current or former security forces personnel, but that they were unwilling to engage with the programme at this time.

Also there was some scope to further develop the DVD's, which although credited as being an extremely valuable resource, were put together with a lack of time and budget.

ACCREDITATION

Expac has been exploring 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 has also been researching accreditation options for Expac.

There are 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 are:

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

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

Expac rightly believe that they have an excellent programme in *Conflicts of Interest* and would 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 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. It is our experience that the drive for accreditation of community education and training programme comes directly from funders not participants, trainers or delivery organisations.

Expac are a small organisation whose funding has come almost exclusively from EU Peace funding. They are not resourced to be able to deal with the administrative and managerial burden that accreditation can bring. As an organisation, they have limited resources in terms of time and no track record of delivering accredited training, so possibly face a steep learning curve.

The cost of accreditation, both in terms of initial assessment and registration and the ongoing costs involved are also a consideration. The cost of many accreditation processes is not inconsiderable both in terms of upfront cash payments, fees and charges but also in terms of staff time to pull together new and existing documentation for the accreditation body.

Finally, Expac are delivering *Conflicts of Interest* on both sides of the border and so would either need accreditation which was recognised on both sides of border or would need two accreditation bodies, one for each jurisdiction.

Taking the above into account, Green Hat is recommending that Expac explore getting accreditation through the Institution of Leadership & Management (ILM). ILM accreditation has the following benefits:

- Accreditation is internationally recognised & so works for both sides of the border
- Development Awards involve no assessment whatsoever
- Endorsed Awards involve assessment determined by Expac (& so wouldn't necessarily have to involve written work e.g. assessment could be through participation in activities and discussions)
- Development & Endorsed Awards could be offered within the same delivery / group
- Programme would be recognised as a community leadership programme
- Registration processes & External Verification are relatively straightforward
- ILM fees & charges are relatively low cost
- Expac would become an ILM Recognised Provider & so could develop a suite of related training in the future, should it wish to do so
- Fast turnaround time (ILM can turnaround an application to become a Recognised Provider in less than 3 weeks if required)

The cost of becoming an ILM Recognised Provider, which Expac would need to successfully apply for to deliver either Development &/or Endorsed Awards, is €865. This fee allows for 4 years' approval and up to 4 programmes can be submitted for this cost.

Green Hat has Recognised Provider status with ILM and has offered to support Expac through the ILM accreditation process should this be an option they pursue.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

As evaluators, Green Hat have been extremely impressed with the project, particularly Expac's success in engaging with marginalised Loyalist communities. The *Conflicts of Interest* programme has played a major role in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in the communities in which it has been delivered. It is independent, interactive community education which has integrity, engagement and empowerment at its heart.

Conflicts of Interest is worthy of continued funding at an increased level (this programme was delivered 'on a shoe string'), and we urge Expac to do everything in its power to secure funding for future deliveries of the programme. We believe that the services of ULS should also be secured for future deliveries as their input was integral to the success of the programme.

There is also an opportunity to develop a follow-on training programme, possibly bringing together single-identity groups to facilitate cross-community conversations. If carried out with groups of ex-combatants and ex-prisoners, the positive impact in terms of shared vision, building relationships, dealing with the past and creating cultural, political and attitudinal change would be even more significant.

In the light of funders' attitude towards accreditation, we recommend that Expac seek accreditation at the earliest possible opportunity. We further recommend that ILM is the best accreditation body given the needs of Expac and the programme. All the community partners we spoke to as part of this evaluation supported accreditation with either an alternative to written assessment (e.g. participation in discussions) or with no assessment.

We also recommend that the two key areas for learning and development be addressed, i.e. marketing & communication and systems & procedures. This may involve some capacity building and staff development, but will create benefits for both individuals and Expac and provide a more robust foundation for the future of *Conflicts of Interest*.

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