

Multiparty Talks to Restore the Institutions

1. On 26 April, the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach agreed to establish a new process of political talks, involving all the main political parties in Northern Ireland, together with the UK and Irish Governments, in accordance with the well-established three stranded approach.
2. The aim of these talks is quickly to re-establish to full operation the democratic institutions of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement - the Northern Ireland Executive, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the North-South Ministerial Council - so that they can effectively serve all of the people for the future.
3. In the wake of the appalling killing of Lyra McKee, the people of Northern Ireland have made clear that they want collective political leadership and urgent political progress.
4. These talks will therefore begin today with a roundtable involving the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Tánaiste and the leaders of the five main parties. They will be short and they will be focused on the key issues that are central to restoring the institutions, with the aim of achieving rapid progress. This will be reviewed by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach by the end of May.
5. The leader-level roundtable will meet in the same format at least weekly to take stock of progress and set the agenda for talks. A series of **working groups** will be convened to discuss in detail the key issues central to making progress. As well as addressing a Programme for Government and the difficult issues which have divided the parties, there is a determination that all of the restored institutions need to operate in ways that are credible, inclusive and sustainable, in the interests of the community as a whole and learning positively from the experience of their operation in the past. These working groups will have their first meetings by the end of this week and, meeting regularly thereafter, will drive forward the detailed discussions on key issues essential to restoring all the Institutions.
6. The working groups to be established will seek to reach agreement on:
 - (a) **Programme for Government** led by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, David Sterling, covering a range of priority issues which a restored Executive will wish urgently to address, including:
 - (i) Prosperity strategy;
 - (ii) industrial strategy;
 - (iii) investment strategy;

(iv) Improving public services, including health and education;

(v) Other

(b) **Transparency, accountability and the operation of the Executive** led by the Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance, Sue Gray, building on previous discussions among the parties and also considering further reforms necessary;

(c) Reform of the **petition of concern** led by Hugh Widdis, Departmental Solicitor and former Assembly Legal Counsel;

(d) **Rights, language and identity** issues led by former Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Department of Culture, Paul Sweeney; and

(e) **Improving the sustainability, stability and operation of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement institutions as a whole**, recognising that these institutions are interlocking and interdependent, led by former Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Malcolm McKibbin.

7. The five parties in the talks will be asked to nominate three representatives to each working group. Representatives of the UK Government and Irish Government will advise and support the working groups as appropriate and in accordance with the three stranded approach, recognising that decisions on the formation, operation and programme of the Executive and the Assembly are matters for decision by the Northern Ireland parties.

8. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach will review progress made at the end of May and consider any necessary further steps.