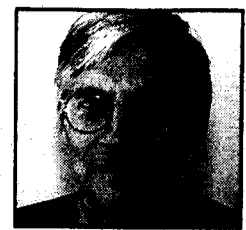


Today, the Belfast Telegraph publishes the first of a two part **EXCLUSIVE** Queen's University/Rowntree Trust opinion poll on the implementation of the Belfast Agreement. With March 10 set as the date for devolution, and the process deadlocked over decommissioning, **Dr Colin Irwin (right)** reports on the findings of his research.



# 93% SAY: MAKE THE AGREEMENT WORK

**BEFORE** the Belfast Agreement was signed by the parties at the Stormont Talks a group of them tested a possible 'Comprehensive Settlement' in this series of public opinion polls.

On March 31, 1998, the result was published in the Belfast Telegraph. Seventy seven per cent of the people

of Northern Ireland said Yes. For many different reasons the politicians who brokered the Agreement did not back the Yes campaign as rigorously as they could have with a united campaign. The No campaign, however, was well coordinated and effective.

Subsequently, on May 22 last year, 71% of the people of Northern Ireland voted

Yes in the referendum and in the Republic 94% of the electorate gave their support to the Agreement.

In this, the latest poll in the series, 93% of the people of Northern Ireland said Yes when asked if they wanted the Belfast Agreement to work, ranging from a high of 98% for Alliance and SDLP voters to 96% for Sinn Fein, 94% for the UUP, 84% for

the PUP and 73% for the DUP.

By now everyone knows what the Belfast Agreement is, so these results should be taken seriously and the conclusion to be drawn is that the people want their political leaders to do what is necessary to achieve a successful outcome.

**QUESTION: Do you want the Belfast Agreement to work?**

**EDUCATION** and Health are the number one priorities. Fifty nine per cent said these departments were *very important*. The department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment came in third at 52%.

DUP supporters took more interest in the departments of Agriculture and Rural Development and Environment than their counterparts in the UUP, SDLP and Sinn Fein. The Sinn Fein electorate expressed the most interest in the department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

In the New Northern Ireland Assembly the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister will have special responsibility for equality. But some parties wanted a separate ministry to deal with this issue.

With this point in mind everyone interviewed for this poll was asked if they thought it would be better if the new Northern Ireland Assembly had a separate Department of Equality. Sixty two per cent said Yes, ranging from a high of 78%

for Sinn Fein supporters to a low of 48% for Alliance voters.

Perhaps they take the view that the establishment of such a department is potentially contentious. Critically, 56% of Protestants said Yes, rising from a low of 52% for the UUP, to 58% for the DUP and 65% for the PUP.

### THE CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

**NORTH/SOUTH** bodies is the 10th item on the Protestant list of priorities and again the joint second choice of Catholics. But attitudes seem to be changing. Only 13% of Protestants considered them to be of *no importance at all*.

But it is now known what the North/South bodies will be and what powers they will have. Under the terms of the Belfast Agreement it has been decided that six implementation bodies will be established to manage inland waterways; Food Safety; Trade and Business

Development; Special EU programmes; Language (Irish and Ulster/Scots); Aquaculture and Marine Matters in the North and South of Ireland.

Additionally there will be six areas for more general co-operation between the Republic and Northern Ireland — Transport, Agriculture, Education, Health, Environment and Tourism.

Again people were asked how important they considered each one to be.

With just one exception a majority of Protestants considered all these new institutions of government to be *very important* or *important*, ranging from a high of 84% for co-operation on Transport to a low of 54% for implementation of Aquaculture and Marine Matters.

A minority, only 36%, thought the implementation body for Language (Irish and Ulster Scots) was *very important* or *important*. Between 85% and 90% of Catholics thought all these bodies were *very important* or *important*.

Because the SDLP and

Sinn Fein would like these bodies to have more powers people were asked which ones should eventually become matters for implementation in both the North and the South.

Catholics said Yes to every possibility, ranging from a high of 83% for Tourism to a low of 66% for Health. Protestants were not nearly so enthusiastic about such developments ranging from a high of 47% for Tourism to a low of 19% for Education.

Given the importance the people of Northern Ireland place on the need to create new jobs perhaps Tourism will eventually become a matter for both co-operation and implementation along with Trade and Business Development.

But whatever the detail of these statistics might be, one thing is clear. Protestant resistance to the establishment of North/South bodies is no longer a serious problem. Indeed, most Protestants think they are *very important* or *important*. The political landscape of Northern Ireland has changed.

	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	PUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	93%	89%	97%	73%	94%	84%	98%	98%	96%
No	7%	11%	3%	27%	6%	16%	2%	2%	4%

WITH this principle as a guide all the elements of the Belfast Agreement will be explored.

What do people consider to be most important, what will they accept and what will they not accept under any circumstances?

**But Who Wants What?** Although 93% of the people of Northern Ireland want the Agreement to work, it is important to remember that the Agreement makes many compromises and contains elements that have been included for one community or the other in the hope that the overall package might eventually lead to peace.

In today's poll the elements of the Belfast Agreement are similarly ordered. This time people were asked to indicate which ones they considered to be *very important*, *important*, *of some importance*, *of little importance* or *of no importance at all*.

The table of priorities needs little explanation. However, it is important to note that the 'Decommissioning of paramilitary weapons' remains the No 1 concern for Protestants while police reform, equality and rights issues continue to be the top priorities for Catholics.

Decommissioning is 10th on their list. Clearly all the parties to the Agreement would do well to remember these facts and try to understand where the other parties are coming from as they approach the problem of setting up the Executive.

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	Protestant	Very important	Catholic	Very important
1st	Decommissioning of paramilitary weapons	69	The reform of the police service	56
2nd	The New Northern Ireland Assembly	42	The Equality Commission	52
3rd	The Commission for Victims	39	The New Human Rights Commission	52
4th	All parts of the Agreement together	38	The new Northern Ireland Assembly	52
5th	A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland	36	North/South bodies	52
6th	Changes to the Irish Constitution	36	The reform of the justice system	52
7th	The Equality Commission	31	All parts of the Agreement together	51
8th	The New Human Rights Commission	31	A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland	48
9th	The demilitarisation of Northern Ireland	24	The demilitarisation of Northern Ireland	46
10th	North/South bodies	21	Decommissioning of paramilitary weapons	42
11th	The British/Irish Council	20	The British/Irish Council	40
12th	The reform of the justice system	19	The Commission for Victims	39
13th	Changes to British constitutional law	19	Changes to British constitutional law	38
14th	The reform of the police service	15	The early release of prisoners	37
15th	The early release of prisoners	14	Changes to the Irish Constitution	27

### EDUCATION, HEALTH AND JOBS

The New Northern Ireland Assembly is the second item on the Protestant list of priorities and joint second on the

Catholic list. Again this enthusiasm for the devolution of powers to Northern Ireland is nothing new, as was shown in a

poll in this series last year.

But it has now been decided what the devolved

departments are going to be so it was possible to ask the people of Northern Ireland how important they considered each one to be.

Very important	All NI	DUP	UUP	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Agriculture and Rural Development	41	43	36	37	37
Environment	42	41	38	40	39
Regional Development	44	42	36	44	40
Social Development	44	40	37	47	42
Education	59	55	55	65	47
Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment	59	54	56	62	48
Enterprise, Trade and Investment	52	47	49	52	51
Culture, Arts and Leisure	33	31	24	32	38
Health, Social Services and Public Safety	59	57	55	61	54
Finance and Personal	43	39	40	42	41

### CEASEFIRES, PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY AND DECOMMISSIONING

THE Belfast Agreement requires a "commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means" and for "all participants . . .

to use any influence they have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years . . ."

The implementation of these parts of the Agreement can be undertaken in a number of different ways. In practice it means maintaining ceasefires, bringing paramilitary activities under control and

decommissioning. Which is more important? And, more particularly, how do the Ulster Unionists, Progressive Unionists and Sinn Fein supporters regard these critical matters?

Very important	All NI	UUP	PUP	Sinn Fein
The maintenance of the IRA ceasefire	84	85	89	70
The maintenance of the UVF ceasefire	83	84	63	70
An end to all paramilitary beatings and violence	79	88	75	42
An end to all paramilitary recruiting and targeting	78	87	61	46
An end to all other paramilitary activity	80	86	55	53
The start or act of 'token' decommissioning undertaken by the LVF last year	64	69	35	39
A start or act of 'token' decommissioning by the IRA	72	84	86	35
A start or act of 'token' decommissioning by the UVF	71	82	35	38
For Sinn Fein "to use any influence they have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years"	74	83	85	39

Generally speaking the people of Northern Ireland consider the ceasefires to be most important with 84% saying the IRA's was *very important* and 83% for the UVF's.

Second came an end to paramilitary beatings and violence (79%), recruiting and targeting (78%) and all other paramilitary activities (80%).

The efforts of Sinn Fein "to use any influence they have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years" came next at 74% and then the efforts of the PUP at 73% followed closely by a start to IRA decommissioning at 72% and UVF decommissioning at 71%.

Finally 64% of those interviewed considered the LVF start to decommissioning to be *very important*.

With the exception of the efforts of the LVF to decommission the Ulster Unionists considered all of these issues to be almost equally important with an end to paramilitary beatings and violence at the top of their list at 88% *very important*.

The Progressive Unionists

ranked the IRA ceasefire as their first priority at 89%, *very important*, followed by a start to IRA decommissioning at 84% which stood in contrast to LVF efforts to decommission at only 35%.

Sinn Fein supporters considered both ceasefires to be equally important (70% *very important*) followed by an end to various paramilitary activity — between 42% and 53% *very important*. For them the various aspects of decommissioning were least important — between 35% and 39% *very important*.

For most of the people of Northern Ireland the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons is undoubtedly very important indeed. But not as quite as important, it would seem, as the silence of their guns.

### BRITISH SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS AND POLICING

With regards to policing, the Patton Commission is to make recommendations for the establishment of a new "police service that can enjoy widespread support from, and is seen as an

integral part of, the community as a whole".

Catholics continue to put police reform at the top of their list of priorities. When the question was asked again here 56% still considered this provision of the Belfast Agreement to be *very important*.

This percentage dropped to 31% for Alliance voters, 17% for Ulster Unionists, 16% for Protestants as a whole, 12% for DUP supporters and 7% for Progressive Unionists. The SDLP and Sinn Fein came in at 55% and 56% respectively.

"Consistent with the level of threat" the Belfast Agreement also requires the British Government to deal with security arrangements in a number of different ways. They are:

- the reduction of the numbers and role of the Armed Forces deployed in Northern Ireland to levels compatible with a normal peaceful society;
- "the removal of security installations";
- "the removal of emergency powers in Northern Ireland"; and
- "other measures appropriate to and compat-

ible with a normal peaceful society."

On average 64% of Sinn Fein supporters considered this part of the Belfast Agreement to be *very important*. For Catholics as a whole it was 56% again, 49% for SDLP supporters, 22% for Alliance, 12% for Ulster Unionists, 10% for the Democratic Unionists and 5% for Progressive Unionists.

Perhaps the important point to be noted here, when it comes to dealing with the problem of decommissioning, is the fact that Sinn Fein supporters put the maintenance of the ceasefires at the top of their list at 70% *very important*, followed by a rundown of British security arrangements at 64%, then the policing question at 56% followed by an end to paramilitary activities and finally decommissioning.

With the exception of a need to maintain the ceasefires, this is not what Unionists want at all, but it is these realities that have to be confronted and dealt with — the separate priorities, concerns and fears of the two communities.

## TOMORROW: Can a peace package be made to work?

■ The research was undertaken by Dr Colin Irwin of the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University, in collaboration with representatives of the Progressive Unionist Party and Sinn Fein. The project was independently funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The public opinion survey work was conducted by Market Research Northern Ireland between February 12-19 to produce 1000 'face to face' interviews that represented a cross section of the adult population of Northern Ireland in terms of age, gender, social class, religious affiliation and geographical area. In all respects the poll was undertaken within the guidelines set out by the Market Research Society (UK) and in accordance with their code of conduct.