



# **INTERNATIONAL PEACE EDUCATION RESOURCES LTD (IPER)**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025**

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## Chairperson's Preface



I joined the IPER Board during 2024 because I believe that the disempowered in our society have a right to a life safe from violence. If society is to change for the better, they need to have a voice and a pathway to inclusion in decisions effecting their lives. Among the channels helpful to this process are Community Development and networking between grass roots, civic society and leaders.

IPER previously focused on peace education for both local people and for visiting international students and volunteers and had built a programme of learning from theoretical models and also from the experience of people who had been through the period of conflict known as 'The Troubles' here in Northern Ireland. Through this work, they already had a range of partners and contacts working to ensure that fair and peaceful relations are embedded across all of society.

The essential focus on stability, freedom from political violence and criminality and access to a democratic voice for all underpins this work. My background in Community Development and Reconciliation work in the voluntary and community sector and as a volunteer in various Quaker and peace organisations over the last 50 years has given me a useful basis to support this initiative during my retirement.

The networking that IPER promotes has been important in bringing together government agencies, voluntary sector players and communities to find solutions together. It has been good to see the range of people prepared to work across barriers to promote positive relationships between legal and civic authorities and communities and groups affected by

I would like to thank Professor Marie Breen Smyth, our intern Katherine Fynes, and the many volunteers for their continuing field work, as well as Board members, both local and international, who have contributed their expertise to our discussions, and also a range of funders who have shown support for this innovative project. This work is quiet and away from the headlines and I continue to hope with Quaker Rufus Jones,(1863-1948): 'I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles in which vital and transforming events take place'. The local contributes to the national and international and all are connected.

Felicity McCartney

Chair IPER

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1. IPER’s Vision and Mission

1.1 Vision

IPER’s vision is one where effective partnerships with academics, communities, police, government agencies and voluntary bodies work together with combatants, former combatants and communities affected by paramilitarism to create pathways and overcome obstacles to the ending of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland.

1.2 Mission

IPER’s mission is to provide education about methods of peacebuilding and about violence and its consequences; to model respectful communication in situations of high tension and contention; to promote non-violence, conflict resolution, restorative practices and peaceful methods of managing conflict and differences; to support positive community leadership in communities and organisations affected by violence; to build and support positive relationships between legal authorities and communities and organisations affected by violence; and to provide opportunities for local and international learning, exchange and dialogue.

1.3 Values and Methods of Work

IPER operates on a strong value base which commits us to working with a wide range of agencies, groups and individuals from those with the highest status to those stigmatised in our current climate. We are committed to working at all times with mutual respect, cooperation and mutual support, valuing both grassroots peacebuilding, violence education and the work of those within official bodies who are committed to positive change through respectful dialogue. IPER believes that dialogue with all those with a stake in ending paramilitarism is the fundamental method of making progress and that all engagement must be based on firm principles of non-violence, democracy and lawfulness.

Dialogue is our chief method of working towards progress and we are committed to engaging in dialogue with – and between – all those with a stake in ending paramilitarism. In order to effectively communicate with both official bodies and local communities, IPER is conscious of a wide gap in communication languages and styles. Effective working requires a

kind of bilingualism, using and understanding jargon and acronyms of official bodies on the one hand and the varieties of the vernacular more familiar at community level on the other.

In line with IPER’s vision of effective partnerships between academics, communities, police, government agencies and voluntary bodies, our work involves a range of methods. Alongside traditional documentary research and statistical analysis methods, we use community development methods, lobbying, conflict resolution, coaching, community education and advocacy.

1.4 Proscribed Paramilitary Groups

The Independent Reporting Commission has recommended, in successive years, that the two governments appoint an interlocutor to engage with the armed groups in order to further a process of group transition. This recommendation has been made in the context of the considerable achievements of other mechanisms and programmes aimed at ending paramilitarism. The police and intelligence service continue to apprehend members of paramilitary groups where there is evidence of criminality and the opportunity to prosecute. However, considerable number of paramilitary members, particularly on the loyalist side, are not involved in criminal activity, even if they are members of proscribed organisations. Many of these, especially outside the Belfast area, wish to avail of opportunities to transit out of the organisations which they joined in different times. Following the Fresh Start Agreement in 2015 a range of programmes and initiatives were put in place, all aimed at ending paramilitarism and supported by considerable public investment. However, almost a decade later, paramilitary violence continues -- albeit abated -- and none of the paramilitary organisations that have operated during the Troubles have disbanded<sup>1</sup>.

There are fourteen organisations In Northern Ireland listed as proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000. These organisations are:

- Continuity Army Council
- Cumann na mBán
- Fianna na hÉireann

<sup>1</sup> See [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80ee03e5274a2e8ab52f76/Paramilitary\\_Groups\\_in\\_Northern\\_Ireland\\_-\\_20\\_Oct\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80ee03e5274a2e8ab52f76/Paramilitary_Groups_in_Northern_Ireland_-_20_Oct_2015.pdf)

- Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)
- Irish People’s Liberation Organisation (IPLO)
- Irish Republican Army (IRA)
- Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF)
- Orange Volunteers
- Red Hand Commando (RHC)
- Red Hand Defenders (RHD)
- Saor Éire
- Ulster Defence Association (UDA)
- Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF)
- Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)

Whilst some of these organisations are no longer active, some have been formally demobilised but none have disbanded;<sup>2</sup> meanwhile there are other active dissident republican groupings which are not currently proscribed organisations:

- Arm na Poblachta (ANP)
- Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA)
- Irish Republican Liberation Army (IRLA)
- Irish Republican Movement (IRM)
- New Irish Republican Army (nIRA)
- Óglaigh na hÉireann (Real IRA splinter group) (ONH)

### 1.5 Proscription

Under the Terrorism Act 2000, the British Home Secretary may proscribe an organisation if it commits or participates in acts of terrorism, prepares for terrorism, promotes or encourages terrorism (including the unlawful glorification of terrorism) or is otherwise concerned in terrorism and it is proportionate to proscribe them.

“Terrorism” is defined in the Terrorism Act 2000 as the use or threat of action which:

- involves serious violence against a person;

<sup>2</sup> Demobilisation is the ‘standing down’ of a militia, retaining the potential to remobilize at some point in the future; disbandment is the dismantling of the organisation’s structure, ceasing to function as an organization, effectively ending its existence.

- involves serious damage to property;
- endangers a person’s life (other than that of the person committing the act);
- creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or section of the public or
- is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system.

These actions must be:

- intended to influence the government or an international governmental organisation; or
- to intimidate the public or a section of the public; and
- must be undertaken for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause.

The Home Secretary will then consider whether to proscribe the organisation taking into account:

- the nature and scale of an organisation’s activities
- the specific threat that it poses to the UK
- the specific threat that it poses to British nationals overseas
- the extent of the organisation’s presence in the UK
- the need to support other members of the international community in the global fight against terrorism.

### 1.6 Consequences of Proscription

Proscribing an organisation makes it a criminal offence to:

- belong, or profess to belong, to a proscribed organisation (section 11 of the Act);
- invite any kind of support for the proscribed organisation (section 12(1));
- express an opinion that supports the proscribed organisation (section 12(1A));
- arrange, manage or assist a meeting designed to support or further the activities of a proscribed organisation, or is to be addressed by a person who belongs or professes to belong to a proscribed organisation (section 12(2));
- address a meeting in order to encourage support for a proscribed organisation (section 12(3))
- wear clothing or display articles in public that arouse suspicion that the individual is a member or supporter of a proscribed organisation (section 13)
- publish an image of an item of clothing or a flag or logo, in the same circumstances (section 13(1A))

The penalties for proscription offences under sections 11 and 12 are a maximum of 14 years in prison and/or a fine. The maximum penalty for a section 13 offence is 6 months in prison and/or a fine not exceeding £5,000.

### 1.7 Meeting proscribed organisations: our work

Section 12(2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 makes it an offence to arrange or manage (or assist in the arrangement or management) of a meeting in the knowledge that it is to support or further the activities of a proscribed organisation, or is to be addressed by a person who belongs to a proscribed organisation.

However, section 12(4) provides a defence, in the case of a private meeting addressed by a member of a proscribed organisation which is not to support the proscribed organisation or advance its terrorist activities. The explanatory notes to the Terrorism Act 2000 - which have a force in law - explain that the defence in section 12(4) is intended to permit the arrangement of 'genuinely benign' meetings where the terrorist activities of the group are not promoted or encouraged, such as meetings designed to encourage a proscribed organisation to engage in a peace process or facilitate delivery of humanitarian aid where this does not involve knowingly transferring assets to a designated organisation. The work that IPER conducts with paramilitary groups qualifies as 'genuinely benign' and encouraging and supporting lawfulness is at the core of our work.

**1.8 Deproscription** Under section 4 of the Terrorism Act 2000 the organisation, or any person affected by a proscription of an organisation in Northern Ireland can submit a signed, written application to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland requesting that they de-proscribe the organisation setting out the grounds<sup>3</sup> for such a move. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland must decide the outcome of the application within 90 days and if the application is refused the applicant may appeal to the Proscribed Organisations Appeals Commission (POAC). The Commission may allow an appeal and either party can appeal their decision at the Court of Appeal. If the decision is to de-proscribe the organisation, the Secretary of State lays an Order before Parliament and if voted into force,

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<sup>3</sup> The grounds for deproscription are set out in The Proscribed Organisations (Applications for Deproscription etc.) Regulations 2006 available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2006/2299>

the organisation will be removed from the list of proscribed organisations. The Order must be agreed by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

On 12 September 2017, the Red Hand Commando (RHC), supported by the Loyalist Community Council (LCC), announced that they intended to apply for deproscription in a 100 page document. In support of the application, the LCC issued a statement:

"It is many years since the RHC was engaged in violent or criminal activity. Its leaders and members have supported the peace process and have led many initiatives to regenerate deprived loyalist areas and promote loyalist and unionist heritage and culture. The LCC hopes that HM Government will recognize that this application is made sincerely and in good faith, and will respond positively. It is further hoped that this course being taken by the RHC can lay out a road map for the transformation of loyalist groups in general..."<sup>4</sup>

Accounts vary as to why the application did not succeed. IPER learned that anxiety about affixing names to the application contributed to its being aborted. However, according to section 10 of the Terrorism Act 2000, actions taken in order to prepare a de-proscription application may not be admitted as evidence in prosecutions under that Act.

The Committee on the Administration of Justice points out that de-proscription would not dismantle some of the barriers faced by ex-prisoners convicted of paramilitary activity unless further legislation removed them. Past membership would remain an offence. Other barriers to, for example international travel or visas are due to convictions for activities while members of paramilitary organisations, not simply because of membership of a proscribed organisation. Nonetheless, de-proscription, as the LCC points out, could act as a sign of the intent of an organisation to transition away from armed activity and removal of some of these barriers could potentially form part of a package of measures designed to support such transition.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-41238502>



## 2. Paramilitarism

### 2.1 Overview of the current situation

As is well known, paramilitary groups continue to exist and remain active as proscribed organisations, although the extent to which they are involved in violence and other illegal activities varies. In IPER’s separate report “The Geography of Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland since 1998” we present our deeper analysis of comprehensive data on paramilitary crime in order to add detail to this picture. Here we provide a brief overview.

Both loyalist and republican paramilitary activity is based and concentrated in working class areas which bear the brunt of the effects of paramilitary violence and where any remaining support for paramilitarism is concentrated.

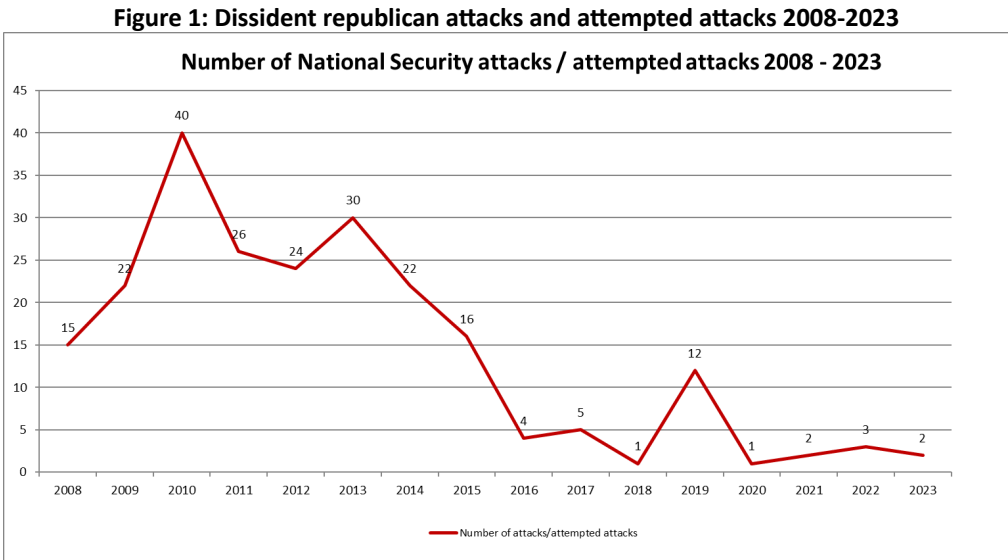
### 2.2 Republican paramilitarism

Following the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, elements of republicanism opposed the ending of a republican military campaign aimed at uniting the island of Ireland, and a number of dissident republican groups were formed and re-formed as a result of subsequent splits and disagreements amongst them. Some of these groups remain militarily active, conducting bombings and shootings, primarily aimed at attacking the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). These organisations are fragmented and their total membership, when compared with loyalists, is in scores and hundreds rather than thousands. There is also considerable overlap between these organisations and criminal pursuits such as drug dealing, loan sharking, extortion and racketeering. Since their primary target is the state and the police in particular, dissident republicans are considered to be a national security threat, thus attracting the attentions of the national security service MI5 as well as those of the PSNI and their intelligence branch, C3, previously known as Special Branch.

A range of intelligence-gathering methods are focused on dissident republican activity. These include the use of civilians recruited as Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) also known as ‘agents’ – or colloquially by the derogatory term ‘touts’. Dissident republicans are also subject to directed surveillance by following and observation, their communications may be intercepted, emails and phone calls monitored and their computers or other devices may be covertly accessed. Dissident republicans may also be subject to the use of intrusive surveillance, such as covertly installed eavesdropping devices in their cars, workplaces or

homes. These attentions are more intensely focused on dissident republicans, given their classification as a national security threat.

The graph in Figure 1 shows dissident republican attacks and attempted attacks from 2008 - 2023.



Source : <https://www.psni.police.uk/sites/default/files/2024-12/Security%20Situation>

Dissident republicans are hostile to the main nationalist parties and regard the peace agreement as a betrayal of the struggle for national unity. Whilst some of the groups are effectively on ceasefire, these ceasefires are not officially recognised and the groups are unwilling to be seen to engage with any of the authorities. The concerns they voice are focused on the welfare of and access to their incarcerated members on both sides of the border. Significant elements of the dissident population now believe that pursuing a military path is counterproductive to their cause of achieving Irish unity. This has led to some elements calling for a ceasefire, whilst remaining intact as organisations. Given the refusal of many in these organisations to recognise the authority of the British government in particular, transition out of violent paramilitarism for dissident republicans may well take a different form to that for loyalists.

### 2.3 Loyalist paramilitarism

According to 2020 briefings as reported by the BBC, there were an estimated 12,500<sup>5</sup> members of proscribed loyalist organisations, some 7,500 in the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and a further 5,000 in the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) based on PSNI and MI5 intelligence. Although some are inactive, they all commit the offence of belonging to proscribed organisations, all of which have the potential to remobilise and all have access to weapons, munitions and financial assets.

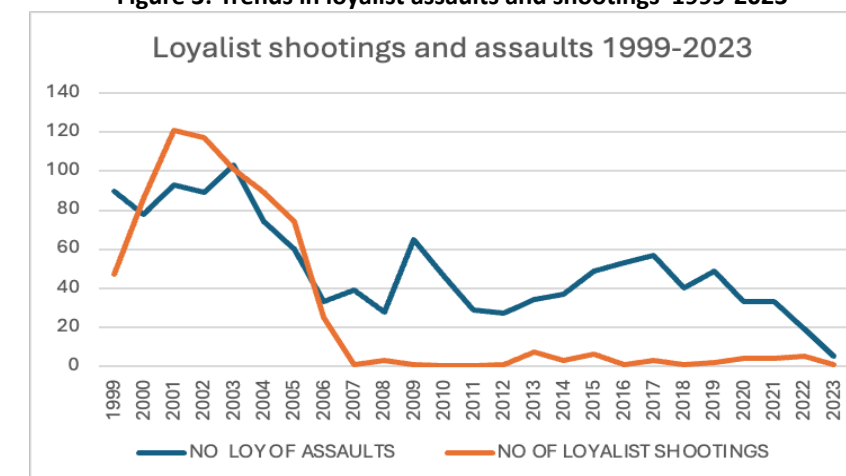
Since loyalist groups primarily do not target the police or the state for attack, they are not regarded as as a national security threat, and therefore do not attract the attention of national intelligence agencies. For these reasons, they are regarded as less of a priority for law enforcement than their dissident republican counterparts. However, loyalist organisations continue to hold weapons and elements of their membership are motivated by personal gain and are engaged in drug and people trafficking, racketeering and extortion. Again, many loyalist paramilitaries, but not all, are involved in criminality in a number of locations throughout Northern Ireland.

The map of the two main loyalist organisations is complex, with the UVF being the most cohesive, with a central command based in Belfast, but increasingly subject to internal tensions and power struggles. The UDA structure lacks a central command but is composed of six brigades, each organised in local battalions. There are also many more ‘satellite’ or breakaway groups. Territorial disputes and other rivalries, coupled with the lack of central command and control, effectively means that brigades operate more or less autonomously. In the past, rivalries between UDA and UVF factions have led to wholesale violence and movements of population due to intimidation (largely in Belfast). In other districts, however, relationships between the two are almost collegial.

Figure 3 shows trends in all loyalist violence since 1999, with shootings surpassing assaults until 2006 when they sharply declined to a low in 2007 and have remained comparatively low since then. The levels of assaults have been higher than shootings since 2006, with variations since that time, peaking in 2009 and rising again in 2017, but declining since then.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-55151249>

Figure 3: Trends in loyalist assaults and shootings 1999-2023



Source: IPER reanalysis of PSNI data

These data illustrate how paramilitarism continues to be involved in violent attack, albeit at a declining level. Continuing violence is one of the impediments to any paramilitary transition process and undermines the credibility of any declared intent of that nature.

The older, more established leaderships within both of these organisations still exert variable degrees of power and influence. There has been consistent interest on the part of significant numbers of this leadership to lead their organisation - or the part they command - through a transition process whereby they forswear violence and embrace a demilitarised and civilianised future. Investment in community projects and engagement with the various authorities have supported efforts in some areas to alter mural images away from depictions of armed and masked men in favour of more cultural and peaceful themes. Efforts aimed at preventing the burning of flags and effigies, making bonfires safe and supporting cultural identity projects have gained traction in some quarters, although much work remains to be done in others.

### 2.4 Bombings and shootings – all groups

The table below shows bombing and shooting incidents for the past two years disaggregated by policing district / local council area. Although there is a decline in both bombings and shootings over the years, the rate of attack far surpasses any other region in the UK or Ireland. (On the 2024 Dragonfly Terrorism Tracker<sup>6</sup>, United Kingdom ranks 68<sup>th</sup>, rising three places since 2023, whereas the Republic of Ireland remains at 89<sup>th</sup> place.)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>



Table 1: All bombing and shooting incidents by policing district

Bombing and Shooting Incidents

Policing District	Bombing Incidents <sup>1</sup>			Shooting Incidents <sup>2</sup>		
	12 months to February 24	12 months to February 25	Change	12 months to February 24	12 months to February 25	Change
Belfast City	2	0	-2	12	2	-10
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ards & North Down	2	0	-2	4	6	2
Newry, Mourne & Down	0	1	1	0	0	0
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mid Ulster	1	0	-1	0	0	0
Fermanagh & Omagh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Derry City & Strabane	1	2	1	7	5	-2
Causeway Coast & Glens	2	2	0	2	4	2
Mid & East Antrim	0	0	0	0	1	1
Antrim & Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Ireland	8	5	-3	25	18	-7

1) Individual bombing incidents involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents include explosions and defusings. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

2) The following types of incidents are included:

- Shots fired by terrorists
- Shots fired by the security forces
- Paramilitary-style attacks involving shootings
- Shots heard (and later confirmed)

Source: PSNI data

Belfast, followed by Derry City and Strabane saw the highest levels of shooting incidents in 2024 and the largest decline in the following 12 months to February 2025. Bombings were comparatively fewer and declined year on year, and were more widely dispersed. They occurred in Belfast, Ards and North Down, Mid Ulster and Causeway Coast and Glens in the year ending February 2024 and in Newry and Mourne, Causeway Coast and Glens and Derry City and Strabane in the year ending February 2025.

2.5 Casualties

In terms of the harm done by paramilitaries, this is often concentrated in and directed at those who live in the communities in the paramilitary group’s own territory. Table 2 shows the distribution of casualties of paramilitary style attacks across the Policing Districts in Northern Ireland.

Table 2: Casualties of paramilitary style attacks by policing district

Casualties of Paramilitary-Style Attacks

Policing District	Casualties Resulting from Paramilitary-Style Shootings <sup>3</sup>			Casualties Resulting from Paramilitary-Style Assaults <sup>3</sup>		
	12 months to February 24	12 months to February 25	Change	12 months to February 24	12 months to February 25	Change
Belfast City	8	0	-8	15	7	-8
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ards & North Down	2	3	1	2	3	1
Newry, Mourne & Down	0	0	0	1	0	-1
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	0	0	0	0	2	2
Mid Ulster	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fermanagh & Omagh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Derry City & Strabane	3	1	-2	3	4	1
Causeway Coast & Glens	1	3	2	1	3	2
Mid & East Antrim	0	0	0	7	3	-4
Antrim & Newtownabbey	0	0	0	2	1	-1
Northern Ireland	14	7	-7	31	23	-8

(3) Paramilitary style assaults/shootings that result in death are counted as security related deaths and are not included in the casualties of paramilitary style assaults/shootings figures.

Source: PSNI data

2.6 Law enforcement and paramilitarism

The Independent Reporting Commission (2025)<sup>7</sup> has consistently reported that the PSNI have informed them that they cannot arrest their way out of paramilitarism. However robust policing efforts may be, they can only capture a small share of the weapons and munitions that remain in the hands of the armed groups. Table 3 below shows seizures of firearms and explosives from 2002-2024, with a great deal of variability in the amounts of firearms, explosives and rounds of ammunition seized each month. Whilst there are undoubtedly successes in taking these items out of circulation, the targeting of certain groups and individuals leaves others to continue to possess weapons and munitions unmolested by the attentions of law enforcement.

There is a consensus amongst law enforcement agencies, that, whilst they have achieved a great deal in their efforts, without a formal negotiated and agreed process of transition there can be no systematic removal of weapons from circulation. Police and intelligence agencies see the benefit of a formal transition process. Indeed, some would argue that we are currently reaping the harvest of our failure in the previous decommissioning process to

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bdc1dbb0d253f92e213c40/E03282244\\_IRC\\_Seventh\\_Report\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bdc1dbb0d253f92e213c40/E03282244_IRC_Seventh_Report_Accessible.pdf)

pay sufficient and timely attention to all weapons, especially those held by loyalist organisations.

Table 3 Number of firearms, explosives and rounds of ammunition seized by PSNI over the last 24 months (December 2022 to November 2024)

	Firearms	Explosives (kg)	Rounds of Ammunition		Firearms	Explosives (kg)	Rounds of Ammunition
Dec-22	0	0.00	8	Dec-23	0	0.00	115
Jan-23	1	0.00	1	Jan-24	1	0.22	11
Feb-23	2	0.00	147	Feb-24	1	0.00	12
Mar-23	4	0.00	96	Mar-24	5	0.00	59
Apr-23	0	0.62	10	Apr-24	0	0.00	2
May-23	3	0.00	56	May-24	1	0.30	37
Jun-23	0	0.00	5	Jun-24	1	0.00	4
Jul-23	1	0.00	6	Jul-24	0	0.00	3
Aug-23	1	0.00	27	Aug-24	1	0.00	9
Sep-23	4	2.29	112	Sep-24	0	0.00	6
Oct-23	3	0.00	257	Oct-24	0	0.00	0
Nov-23	1	0.31	181	Nov-24	1	0.00	47
Total	20	3.22	906	Total	11	0.52	305

Source: IPER reanalysis of PSNI data

2.7 Progress on ending paramilitarism

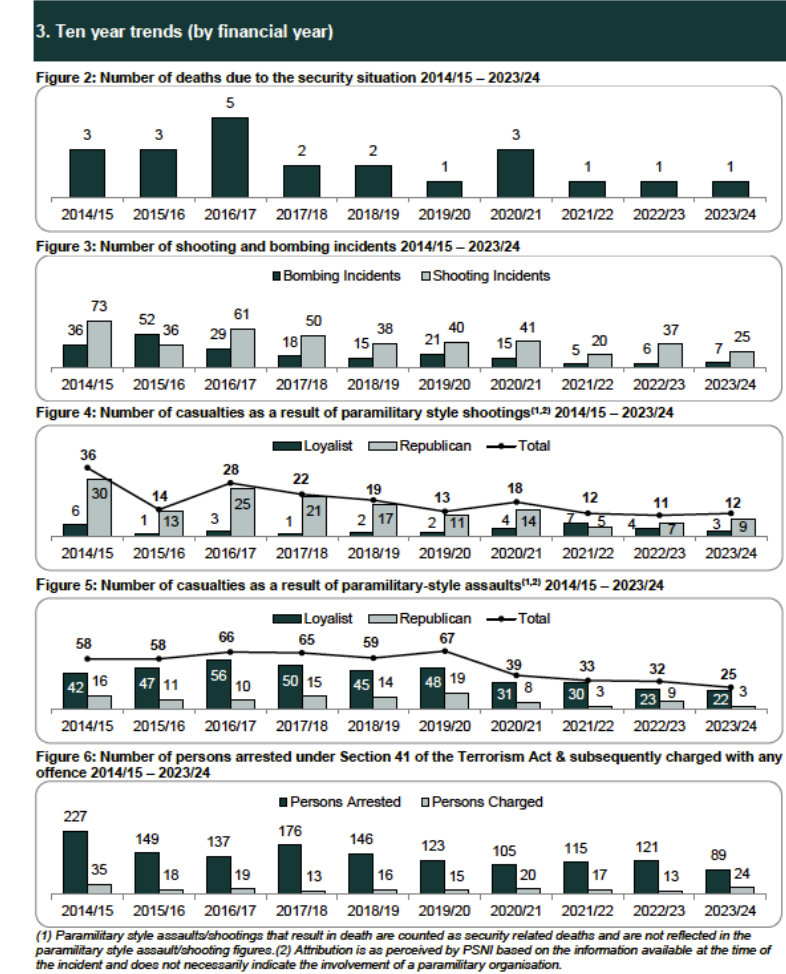
One could describe progress over the last decade toward the goal of ending paramilitarism as faltering. The Cross-Executive Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime (PCTF)<sup>8</sup> programme is based on the work of the Fresh Start panel in 2007. A key goal was the ending of paramilitarism “once and for all”. The website describes the projects the Executive supports as follows:

“Some projects prevent harm before it occurs (like a flexible education initiative to stop children being vulnerable to criminal exploitation); some aim to deal with harm immediately as it is happening – to stabilise the situation and prevent it worsening (like the multi-agency youth stream of a Support Hub to support young people who are at risk of being involved with, influenced by, or exploited by paramilitary gangs; and some projects are about reducing the long term impact of paramilitarism and organised crime (for example young men who have previously been involved in paramilitary / criminal activity).”

The Northern Ireland Executive programme reflects the increasing overlap between paramilitarism and organised crime and the programme includes both in its broad remit. The

programme prioritises building resilience to paramilitarism, providing a range of support at community level and focuses largely on communities most at risk, localising intervention according to the degree of such risk.

Figure 6: Ten year trends 2014-2024 in paramilitary violence



As can be seen from Figure 6, the number of deaths, bombing and shooting incidents, arrests and charges since the inception of the Executive Programme have declined somewhat but paramilitarism has not ended.

Current efforts designed to end paramilitarism in Northern Ireland are effective at containing paramilitarism at a comparatively low level, and a slow decline is evident in the numbers of paramilitary style attacks over the last decade. In order to comprehensively end paramilitarism additional measures will be required.

<sup>8</sup> See the is #ENDINGTHEHARM website for full details <https://www.endingtheharm.com>

Three outstanding issues remain unaddressed by current programmes:

- the removal of all weapons held by paramilitary groups comprehensively from circulation;
- the ending of attempts by paramilitary groups to recruit new members; and
- the permanent relinquishing of all forms of violence by paramilitary groups.

To address these issues, an initiative by the two governments is required, namely the design and implementation of a formal process of transition. This will involve direct engagement with the groups, verification of any undertakings made by them through security monitoring and some form of decommissioning of weapons.

## 2.8 Prospects for a paramilitary transition process

Following a comprehensive parliamentary inquiry into paramilitarism, in February 2024 the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee published their report in which they concluded:

We have heard evidence both for and against the establishment of formal process of Group Transition. On the one hand, we are concerned that a Group Transition process aimed at the disbandment of paramilitary groups could inadvertently risk reinforcing the status of such groups and fail to displace the coercive control they hold over some communities. On the other hand, we have heard that a strategy to end paramilitarism that does not engage with the continued existence of paramilitary structures ignores the elephant in the room. For any process to have a chance of success, it must hold the confidence of political parties and receive widespread public support in Northern Ireland. *The Government should conduct a scoping exercise to assess public support for such a process which should include dedicated engagement with those who have suffered violence and harm from paramilitary groups*<sup>9</sup>.

And

Paramilitary groups do not resemble cohesive units, rather they are composed of sub-groups that vary in location, strength of affiliation and level of criminal activity. We have heard that some sub-groups are readying themselves for transition, whilst

<sup>9</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmniaf/43/report.html# para 102>.

others show little appetite to transition away from criminality. We see some merit in the argument that a process facilitating those willing to transition away from paramilitarism would then allow for the better training of law enforcement resources on those sub-groups that remain determined to cause harm. However, the concept of sub-group transition requires fuller development before its risks and opportunities can properly be considered by the Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland<sup>10</sup>.

Subsequently, on 29 April 2024<sup>11</sup>, the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) met and representatives of the UK Government and the Government of Ireland discussed the recommendations to appoint an interlocutor to engage with the armed groups made by the Independent Reporting Commission, as well as the conclusions of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry on ending paramilitarism. The two Governments agreed:

to take forward work, including through joint support for independent scoping and engagement, to assess whether there is merit in and support for a formal process that ensures the transition to disbandment of paramilitary groups given the continuing impact of violence and harm in communities.

On 25 February 2025<sup>12</sup>, Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, announced the intention of the British and Irish Governments to appoint an interlocutor to explore the prospects of paramilitary transition in Northern Ireland. The announcement received a cautious welcome from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Ulster Unionists (UUP), but the leader of the Alliance Party, Minister for Justice Naomi Long described the move as ‘madness’<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee (2024) The effect of paramilitary activity and organised crime on society in Northern Ireland Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmniaf/43/report.html# para 108>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/biigc-april-2024-joint-communique>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1enzy4jzx2o>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/naomi-long-hilary-benn-northern-ireland-parliament-irish-b2704408.html>

IPER welcomes this initiative from the two governments and is committed to assisting the interlocutor in whatever way we can. There is, however, much work to be done to convince local political actors of the precious prize to be gained by a transition process. Whilst we share a common goal – a comprehensive end to paramilitarism and the installation of a meaningful peace in all communities, locations and social classes – there is no consensus on the method of achieving that goal in a timely manner.

### 3. IPER’s Core Activities

#### 3.1 Overview of All Activities: Key Projects

Since the inaugural meeting of this project on 19th June, 2024, our work can be described under a number of headings:

- establishing the facts: data analysis on paramilitarism;
- supporting loyalist paramilitary transition;
- supporting republican paramilitary transition;
- work with official agencies on developing policy and practices to support paramilitary transition;
- key processes: a sketch of a transition process;
- briefings on our work and progress;
- organisational development and fund-raising.

#### 3.2 Establishing the facts: data on paramilitarism

Arriving at a reliable assessment of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland based on verifiable facts is bedevilled by a number of distractions and difficulties. First and most influential is the role of the press, especially the Sunday newspapers in publishing allegations about paramilitary activity and crime. The sources used by newspapers are not discoverable and allegations made, for example that a particular paramilitary grouping was responsible for a particular crime, are not subject to the same challenges as those made about a lawful organisation or an individual, since, by their very nature paramilitary groups are unable to challenge such assertions in court.

Second, the reputation that paramilitary groups have earned for violence, intimidation and other forms of crime renders them liable to be blamed for particular forms of malfeasance

whether or not they are responsible. Social media plays a prominent role in both local opinions and rumours about paramilitaries and the material published by Sunday tabloids. Much of the crime reporting is focused on working class communities, with little or no coverage of the positive aspects of working class community life. Often, the information published is unverified, inaccurate or just plain wrong and not open to challenge. Yet it is on this material that public opinion is based.

The balance of representations of paramilitants in both social media and print media is predictably negative, but goes beyond negativity to the point of dehumanisation and demonisation. Reports of how some members of paramilitaries have moved away from violence and are working to make positive contributions to society are very rare. This contributes to popular disbelief that engagement of any kind with paramilitants can have any positive societal outcome, or that rehabilitation is possible.

The security classification of loyalist organisations at a threat level below national security threat has implications for the extent and depth of intelligence available to the police on loyalist paramilitary groupings. Whereas the joint resources of MI5 and the PSNI’s C3 are focused on violent dissident republicans, MI5 do not ordinarily concern themselves with loyalist activity except when it rises to the level of a national or international threat, such as in the bomb hoax threat to Irish Minister Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney<sup>14</sup> in 2022.

Since IPER is committed to evidence-driven work, this year we have undertaken reanalysis of data on paramilitarism and have published that as a separate report: “The geography of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland since 1998” which is available in hard copy and in PDF.

#### 3.3 Supporting Loyalist paramilitary transition

In comparison to dissident republicans, loyalist groups are larger and more geographically dispersed, although many of the estimated 12,500 members of loyalist organisations are members in name only and are inactive. Early in the year, IPER has worked more generally with loyalist groupings throughout Northern Ireland and identified those with a high level of

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/loyalist-bomb-attack-on-coveney-a-hoax-psni-believe-uvf-behind-incident/41486371.html>



motivation to move away from paramilitarism. In the second part of the year, our work focused on closer engagement with those with such motivations. The work in the second part of the year has been outside the Belfast area, where, by our estimation, loyalist paramilitarism is much further down the road of transition than their Belfast counterparts in both the two main loyalist groupings.

Paramilitary leaders keen to end paramilitarism have expressed concerns that their transition out of paramilitarism will create a vacuum in local communities into which criminal gangs are poised to move. For much of this year, we prioritised work to address this concern and sought ways to create and strengthen grassroots strategies for managing local law and order issues without recourse to paramilitarism.

We work with paramilitary elements and their communities to build vertical networks between them and the various authorities. Complete disengagement with the police in particular and a loss of faith in the ability of the police to address drug and other criminality is the norm in these communities. This leads some local areas to turn to paramilitaries rather than to the lawful authorities. We work to build trust first with the local community, validate their concerns, and then broker a re-engagement between communities and state agencies in general and the police in particular. In Loyalist areas, we tend to work predominantly with males between 40-60 years old in the first instance, and in some areas, women become involved, usually aged between 30-60. Through the women, we have also engaged with local young people.

The first step in our work is to build trust with the local community, hear and validate their concerns. Then we engage with the police and other authorities, explaining the goal of our work and the concerns we are aware of. Our practice has been to engage the authorities first at a regional level and then locally. This approach provides support for local officials who may be concerned about direct engagement with particular groups and addresses any concerns about agency policy in relation to 'talking to paramilitaries'. Even when their employer is clearly supportive of such engagement, on occasion, local staff have been demonstrably uncomfortable or sceptical and the agency has tasked an alternative representative in their stead. We then broker a re-engagement between communities and agency or agencies, generally the police, but latterly also the Northern Ireland Housing

Executive (NIHE). We have the full cooperation of both the PSNI and the NIHE, both of whom we engage at regional and local levels.

Our work with one UDA grouping outside Belfast is at an advanced stage. This involved working with the local policing district, connecting district policing staff with wider community networks who provided a broader context to the work on transition, and working with district staff to understand the priorities of the community and how the police might demonstrate responsiveness to those concerns. This involved work at both policing district and police headquarters to ensure policy alignment and support for district staff for adjustments at local level. District leadership were enthusiastic about the prospects of change and effective in addressing organisational issues in order to facilitate this work locally. Following a period of engagement with the police and their acceptance of the challenge, police reported an increase in morale and increased ownership of the work at local level. Police now convene local meetings, allowing IPER to withdraw from that role and we have become increasingly redundant.

The local group has commented: "the help which we have received from IPER has been invaluable in bringing about a better understanding of the issues affecting us. Since we began our relationship with Marie and IPER, we have seen a substantial reduction in paramilitary style attacks and relationships with the PSNI and other Statutory Agencies have greatly improved."

We had several contacts with a second UDA grouping in another policing district, but we observed that the lack of internal cohesion and factionalism within that grouping may account for the lack of follow up. Contact was also facilitated and controlled by a third party which may also be a factor.

We are also engaged on an ongoing basis with another loyalist community allied to the UVF in that same district. The scepticism, anger and lack of trust in local policing was voiced to us when we began work. Having identified the key concerns of the group, we worked to persuade them that efforts to build relationships with the police could be effective. We also worked with police at district level to explain our work, the rationale for engagement and the concerns that were likely to be raised. We then organised, agenda-ed and chaired the

first meeting which was turbulent and the police were challenged, but forewarned of the challenges. Subsequent meetings were organised with the community policing officers and gradually relationships developed and trust was built, with a little coaching from us.

Significant progress was made when we offered the local group the chance to organise a residential which we could do thanks to our board member, Sylvia Gordon. A residential for local young people was planned and delivered much to the delight of the young people. The police rotated the staffing of the residential so that all their community team attended at one point over the weekend. Working together to plan and deliver the residential achieved a significant improvement in relationships between the community and the police, and local people now regularly contact community police officers by phone with questions or concerns.

Emergency housing allocation in the area has led to the identification of a second piece of work in the area. A vacant flat in the estate was allocated to a person who local people discovered was a convicted child abductor and paedophile. The local response was to put up signs in the estate announcing that 'paedophiles were not welcome' and subsequently the person quickly moved out. Whilst this method of addressing a local concern is less violent than previous methods, the erection of such signs will be attributed to the local paramilitary (whether or not they had a hand in putting them up) and is tantamount to intimidation. IPER challenged this method of addressing the community's concerns about the safety of children in the area and proposed that it was the responsibility of the authorities to provide lawful means whereby the community could express concerns about such threats to the community.

IPER then discussed the issue with the NIHE who had some reservations about their ability to address community concerns, given current housing allocation policy and procedures. We engaged the senior district community engagement staff in the PSNI on the issue and proposed a project to develop lawful means whereby the community could express such concerns and they agreed to lead a project with the NIHE on this issue. We convened a meeting with the Offender Management Unit of the PSNI, the Prison Pre-release staff, the NIHE, the local community police officers and the local group to discuss the plan and demonstrate that their concerns are being addressed.

We have also begun work with another North-West loyalist UDA element where our first task will be to overcome their complete disengagement with, and mistrust of, all authorities. In the first instance our work is in the community, whilst keeping the PSNI informed of the scale and nature of the community concerns. The timescale is difficult to predict since the work of gaining the trust of communities must take its course. The meetings we facilitate are often fractious to begin with, yet they offer an opportunity for the community to voice concerns which we can then take to the authorities. Ultimately our goal is to resolve conflicts between the community and the authorities so that trust and communication between them can become commonplace.

### **3.4 Supporting dissident republican paramilitary transition**

Dissident republican organisations will not openly work to engage with the police or the authorities and IPER is not involved in clandestine work with republican groups. Utmost discretion must be exercised and trust must be built slowly. In some communities, to be seen to be working closely with the authorities, particularly the police, can endanger community members' safety, so we must manage levels of anxiety about being seen as a 'tout'. We take this into account when managing referrals and organising and reporting on our work. In principle we will work with dissident organisations although the focus of most of our work has been to build vertical networks between groups and the existing authorities and this holds little appeal for dissident organisations.

However, individuals with dissident links have been referred to us when they have experienced ongoing difficulties with the authorities in spite of a decision to disengage and move away from their previous associations. We have worked with convicted dissident republicans, helping them to understand and comply with legal conditions arising from previous convictions and supporting them to conduct themselves in a manner less likely to antagonise the authorities.

We remain open to further work with this cohort.



3.5 Developing policy and practices to support paramilitary transition

IPER’s work has been met with high levels of cooperation and enthusiasm from the statutory agencies who are keen to build relationships in communities that are facing multiple problems and where paramilitarism has been a feature of local life. The two key agencies have been the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. With both agencies, IPER’s initial engagement was with the leadership in the organisation where we explained our work and methods and secured the approval of the organisation as a whole to working with us. Only then did we engage with staff in the districts in which we work. By doing this, we ensured that we were not placing local staff in the position of doing things that were not sanctioned by their organisation.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Our work with the NIHE is relatively recent in origin and has focused on the issue of housing allocation of offenders, but may well extend to other issues related to housing allocation and housing conditions in the future. The issue of housing allocation and the location of offenders in local communities poses the challenge to agencies of how to create lawful pathways for the local community to lawfully express their concerns about the housing of offenders in their midst. Educating the local community about the systems that are in place to manage offenders in the community, such as Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI)<sup>15</sup> can form part of the work. However, there are shortfalls in those systems. The His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) 2024 inspection<sup>16</sup> of the PSNI found that ‘the service isn’t effectively managing the risk posed to the public by registered sex offenders’. The inspectors found that although officers were committed to protecting the public, personnel were overwhelmed and the work was compromised by officer shortages and the diversion of officers to other duties. An audit of the use of Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR) by the PSNI in October 2024 found 630 outstanding visits to sex offenders and violent offenders and although the PSNI moved to address this, by

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.publicprotectionni.com>  
<sup>16</sup> <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/psni-inspection-of-police-effectiveness-and-efficiency-2025/>

the end of January 2025, 474 visits remained outstanding. They concluded that the management of sex offenders in the community needed to be improved.

Joint work with the various parts of PSNI, the Prison Service and the NIHE is ongoing. Where no lawful method of expression of legitimate community concerns is provided, the lessons of our history show that communities turn to unlawful methods, often involving paramilitarism. Whilst work on this issue is ongoing in one district, an effective solution will require the agreement and support of the leadership of the NIHE and ultimately any solution will offer a pathway, not only to that specific district but throughout Northern Ireland. IPER will work to support this work in whatever way we can.

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Policing sits at the centre of much of our work in supporting paramilitary transition. There is a long history of paramilitary vigilantism which has been amply documented (see Silke: 1998<sup>17</sup>; Silke and Taylor: 2000<sup>18</sup>; and most recently Morrison: 2024<sup>19</sup>) which dates back to the days of the Troubles, when Silke (1998) observed:

An unofficial recognition and acknowledgement of the paramilitaries’ vigilante role among many [police] officers helped to reinforce that system while simultaneously undermining RUC efforts to re-establish normal policing...;  
and  
“... community-level perception that paramilitary vigilantism is the system more interested in combating ordinary criminal activity. As a result in many areas there are

<sup>17</sup> Silke, A. 1998 “The Lords of Discipline: The Methods and Motives of Paramilitary Vigilantism in Northern Ireland”, *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, Vol.7, No.2 (Autumn 1998), pp.121-156. FRANK CASS LONDON  
[https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/56161785/The\\_Lords\\_of\\_Discipline\\_The\\_Methods\\_and\\_Motives\\_of\\_Paramilitary\\_Vigilantism\\_in\\_Northern\\_Ireland.pdf](https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/56161785/The_Lords_of_Discipline_The_Methods_and_Motives_of_Paramilitary_Vigilantism_in_Northern_Ireland.pdf)  
<sup>18</sup> Silke, A. and Taylor, M. (2000). ‘War Without End: IRA and Loyalist Vigilantism in Northern Ireland.’ *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 39/3, pp.249-266.  
[https://www.academia.edu/11681460/War\\_Without\\_End\\_IRA\\_and\\_Loyalist\\_Vigilantism\\_in\\_Northern\\_Ireland\\_and\\_email\\_work\\_card=view-paper](https://www.academia.edu/11681460/War_Without_End_IRA_and_Loyalist_Vigilantism_in_Northern_Ireland_and_email_work_card=view-paper)  
<sup>19</sup> Morrison, J. F. (2024). The Violence of Peace: Post Good Friday Agreement Paramilitary Vigilantism in Northern Ireland. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2024.2371582>

relatively high levels of support for the paramilitaries' system and relatively low levels of support for the police" (p15)

Historically, disengagement between state agencies – the police in particular – in both loyalist and republican working-class communities has been based on strong community perceptions of the ineffectiveness of the police to deal with ordinary crime and address drug problems and anti-social behaviour. Recent allegations emanating from loyalist quarters of 'two tier policing' coupled with heightened levels of loyalist demoralisation have exacerbated the problem in loyalist areas.

Whilst the PSNI have developed policy<sup>20</sup> to improve their community engagement in general, the level of disengagement in the communities we work in requires high levels of proactivity and often a mediator to initiate community engagement. Recent surveys on confidence in the police show general confidence in the PSNI at around 50% of those surveyed. Confidence levels in the communities in which we work are much lower at the point when we become involved. Graeme Ellison et al<sup>21</sup>. (2012: 252) points out that surveys of the general population, whilst useful in highlighting general trends in public confidence, are "rather less useful in highlighting police-community relations in specific neighbourhoods and among specific social groups," particularly working-class Republican and Loyalist communities where Topping and Byrne (2012)<sup>22</sup> pointed to ongoing legitimacy issues. Ellison et al. (2012) surveyed 280 New Lodge residents and found that 35.14 percent of respondents felt 'positive change' had occurred within policing, while only 51.99 percent said they would report a crime directly to the PSNI, indicating localised, community-specific perceptions of confidence in policing in both loyalist and republican areas. The 2024 HMICFRS inspection of the PSNI reported that "...in some communities in Northern Ireland the PSNI isn't welcome, and many people are unwilling to work with the service for fear of reprisals. This means that neighbourhood policing in Northern Ireland is different to that in

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.psnipolice.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Here%20for%20You%20-%20Public%20Engagement%20Vision.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Ellison, G. et al. (2012a) 'Assessing the Determinants of Public Confidence in the Police: A Case Study of a Post-conflict Community in Northern Ireland', *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 13(5), 552-576

<sup>22</sup> Byrne, J. and Topping, J. (2012a) *Community Safety: A Decade of Development, Delivery, Challenge and Change in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium

England and Wales."<sup>23</sup> HMICFRS also highlight that "Neighbourhood policing is suffering the effect of the budgetary cuts... we found that the service often took neighbourhood officers away from their core roles to cover response and other policing duties... Despite best efforts, neighbourhood policing has borne the consequences of the budgetary position..<sup>24</sup>."

Based on our experience to date, we advocate that a PSNI strategy for policing paramilitary transition be developed in anticipation of the work of the interlocutor and any subsequent moves towards formal paramilitary transition. Elements of that strategy are already in place in the PSNI 'Here for You' strategy. However this strategic approach should be specifically applied to work with groups and individuals in the community with paramilitary associations. Furthermore, policy and legal clarity is required to support officers engaging in such work, so that they are clear where their community engagement work stops and their law enforcement and crime detection work begins. Officers also require underpinning policy in order to be able to engage with such work confident of the endorsement of their organisation. Currently this endorsement is available in patches but requires institutionalisation.

Policies about intelligence sharing between police headquarters and district within the PSNI also require review in order to make them fit for the purpose of policing paramilitary transition. Currently, some general intelligence material is not shared at district level and in our view, there may be reason to be concerned about the quality and depth of some intelligence on loyalist paramilitarism, particularly that pertaining to areas outside Belfast.

Our work will contribute to the development of a PSNI strategy for policing paramilitary transition, and we are keen to contribute what we can to that process. Likewise, we enjoy the full cooperation of the NIHE, who are often key to addressing local challenges about housing allocation touching on issues of drugs, domestic violence and child sexual abuse, all matters on which some communities look to the paramilitaries for action. Here too, there is an enthusiasm amongst local staff about the rationale and methods of our work and we are

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<sup>20</sup> The Police Service of Northern Ireland: An inspection of police effectiveness and efficiency April 2025 <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/psni-inspection-of-police-effectiveness-and-efficiency-2025/>

<sup>24</sup> op cit.

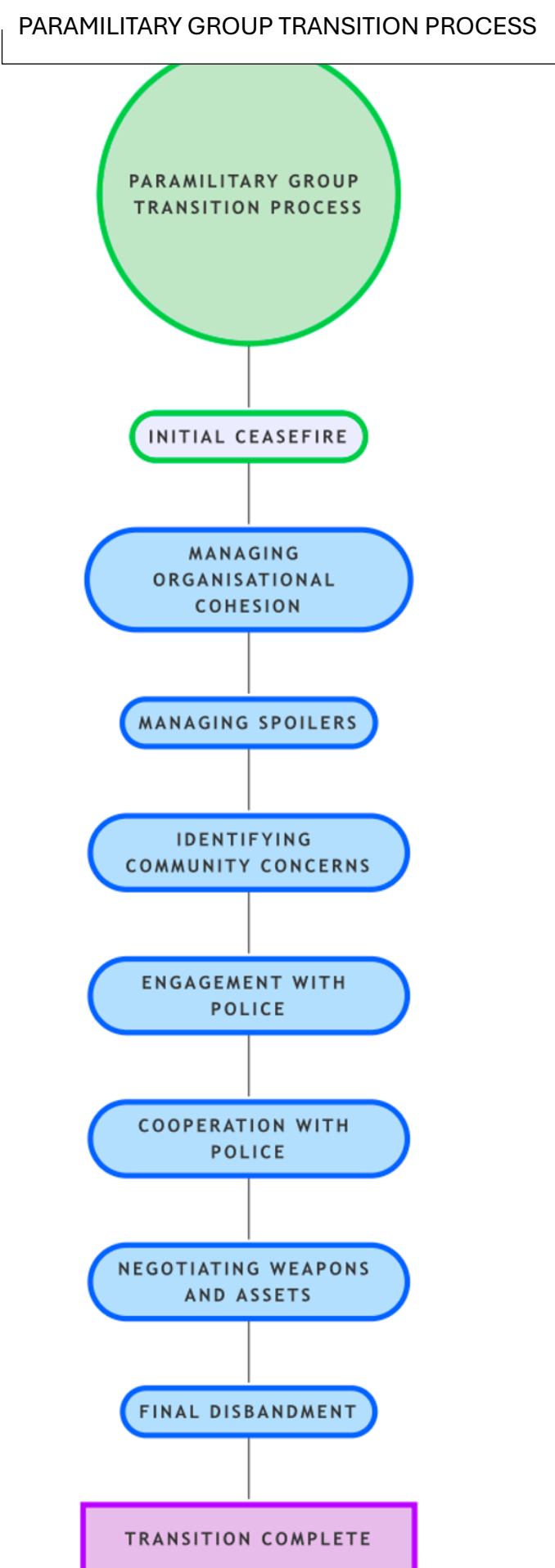
sustained by the dedication of those who work in these communities, but who have not worked in this way before.

3.6 A sketch of a transition process

Below is a summary in diagrammatic form of what we have learned to date about a paramilitary transition process. The following diagrams set out what the internal (inside the paramilitary organisation) and external (engagement between the authorities and the paramilitary organisation) processes of paramilitary transition might look like.

Phase 1 – INTERNAL PROCESSES WITHIN A PARAMILITARY	
PREPARING FOR GROUP ORGANISATION	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paramilitary leader decides to transition</li><li>• Ceasefire and cessation of criminal activity</li><li>• Gathers information about pathways and consequences</li><li>• Engages with membership – explains consequences of transition and refusal to transition – for refusers who are inactive, refusers who are not</li><li>• Set out lawful alternatives for those who wish to remain engaged</li><li>• Persuasion and poll</li><li>• Identification of refusers who are active and design management plan</li><li>• Public declaration or official notification of intent to transition</li></ul>
Phase 2 LOCAL COMMUNITY PROCESSES	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TRANSITION AGENCY engages with constituent community and sets out pathway to transition</li><li>• Identification of concerns and consequences of transition for constituent community e.g. drugs, housing, anti-social behaviour, territorial vacuums</li><li>• Notification of key areas of concern and identification to relevant agencies</li><li>• Establish focused relationships between leadership and relevant agencies, usually PSNI and NIHE</li><li>• Explain future lawful pathways for community and paramilitary members after transition</li></ul>

Phase 3 TRANSITION AGENCY AND LAWFUL AUTHORITIES (overlaps with Phase 2)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage with local PSNI district and build relationships</li><li>• Engage with NIHE and any other agency and build relationships focused on transition</li><li>• Set out the pathway and gaps that agency can fill</li><li>• Agree Terms of Reference and mechanisms for transfer of information and transitional operations</li><li>• Establish lines of communication and mechanisms for liaison</li></ul>
Phase 3 INITIATION OF PROCESS	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paramilitary group engages with formal processes of transition</li><li>• Agree and implement protocols for disposal of weapons and assets</li><li>• Negotiate agreements about demobilisation, disbandment, legacy, de-proscription and other relevant matters</li></ul>
Phase 4 IMPLEMENTATION	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cooperate with oversight and verification processes</li><li>• Public statement about transition and the future.</li></ul>



### 3.7 Briefings on our work and progress

We are committed to providing briefings on our work to organisations who request it and others with whom we initiate contact. We have regularly met and briefed and exchanged views with, amongst others, the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC), the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), the Irish Secretariat, the leadership of the PSNI, ACT, EVOLVE, the Reference Group, the Falls Community Council, PSNI Headquarters and District staff in three districts, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Social Change Initiative, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, and we have plans to provide briefings for various specialist sections of the PSNI in the near future.

We respond to requests for information positively, and whilst honouring the confidentiality of some of our work and exercise due discretion, we see no reason for secrecy about our work. Indeed, as word spreads about what we can offer, we would hope that will encourage more people to avail of the support we have available.

Finally, we have run one event and plan for a second in the summer of 2025, where we present an aspect of our work to an invited audience composed of all of the parties mentioned here alongside representatives of the two governments, the IRC, the voluntary sector, arms-length agencies, the police and other relevant authorities. At these events, we provide considerable time for informal networking which is as valuable as anything we say or do. At our next event, we plan to present geographical analysis of data on paramilitary crime from 1998 -2023 contained at section 4.2 above.

### 3.8 Organisational development and fund-raising

During this year, we built our website [www.peacepartnership.org](http://www.peacepartnership.org) and established our new board, with all members meeting face to face at our AGM in June. Due to the international location of two of our members and the international travel commitments of one other, this was the only time we managed to meet face to face.

Sadly, Aelred, Father Gerry Magee stepped down from the board due to the pressure of work and Mike Nesbitt subsequently also stepped down following his appointment as Minister of Health for Northern Ireland. We were pleased to appoint Sylvia Gordon who is Head of Programmes at Corrymeela Community to our board, as well as the Reverend

Canon Tracey McRoberts who has been Rector of St Matthew's in the Shankill area of Belfast since 2012 and Rural Dean of Mid-Belfast since 2018. We are keen to recruit new board members and have approached several candidates but have yet to make an appointment.

We benefited by the arrival of our intern Katherine Fynes whose enthusiasm and youth has improved our work and our mood and we look forward to the arrival of our next intern from the University of Chicago. It is a welcome indication of the growing recognition of our work that individuals and institutions approach us seeking educational opportunities.

### **Funding**

In spite of the concerted efforts of our chair and company secretary, our fundraising efforts this year met with only modest success. We are grateful to the Honorable the Irish Society Clothmakers Fund, and the Irish Quakers Peace Foundation who provided us with small grants. We are particularly grateful for a godsend grant from the Social Change Initiative which not only improved our ability to pay our bills but also provided a much needed morale boost. We made a range of unsuccessful applications to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, to the Fore and to some others. One funder declined to fund us on the grounds that that we are doing work that should be undertaken by government and we are conscious that our work does not fit easily into current funding priorities. We continue to rely entirely on volunteer labour and have sufficient funding to support staff mileage, one event per year and the costs of meeting our governance, filing and other legal requirements as a limited company and a registered charity.

As a result of the requirements of potential funders, we have developed IPER's strategy and vision which is available on our website [www.peacepartnership.org](http://www.peacepartnership.org), as is our risk assessment and management strategy, relevant reading and source material and our publications and reports.

## **4. Partnerships and Collaborations**

We have benefited greatly from close working and support from a range of organisations in the voluntary and statutory sectors.

### **4.1 Voluntary groups**

The quiet work of the Reference Group broke much of the ground on which we now walk, and the support and willingness of the convenor and members of that group to work with us has been indispensable to our ability to engage in local communities. The Group's deep knowledge of the minutiae of local conditions is a huge asset in working to end paramilitarism. Likewise, the work of EVOLVE in Magherafelt and beyond has sustained our faith in the reality of positive change in communities in spite of ongoing and seemingly overwhelming challenges. The energy they bring to this work is inspirational and has earned widespread respect. Quaker Service in Frederick Street is our second home, where we are assured of a welcome and facilities for our meetings and a steady supply of cheerfulness, mentoring and tea and biscuits. Corrymeela's impressive facilities, international volunteers and enthusiasm for peace building has made a difference to young people in one community we work with, and they are clamouring to come back. The legal expertise of the Committee on the Administration of Justice is always at our disposal and their research on issues such as deproscription sheds light on the more obscure corners of the law.

### **4.2 Statutory agencies**

The statutory agencies are essential to the process of filling vacuums in local communities affected by paramilitarism. We are conscious of the challenges they face in resourcing, bureaucracy and policy-blindness. Yet in our work, the statutory agencies, too, have played their part. Our working relationship with the PSNI both at headquarters and in local districts has grown and continues to grow. Almost without exception, when we have taken a local problem to them, they have made visible efforts to adapt their responses to creatively and sensitively work with local people to build confidence and relationships of trust and lines of communication. We see this work as sitting at the heart of paramilitary transition. Re-engagement with state agencies in communities who feel marginalised and neglected and who have lost trust in authority requires patience, humility and dedication. The PSNI have demonstrated that. There is much work to be done, and some of the areas we work in are a long way from trust and engagement. Yet we are confident that the lessons we learn from the early work will build a momentum and a PSNI strategy for policing paramilitary transition, based on building trust on the one hand and on working in partnership with those who wish to live in a demilitarised community, and effective law enforcement on the other.



Towards the end of the year, we became aware of the crucial role of the Housing Executive and engaged with them at regional and local levels. The dedication of their staff and their willingness to work through and find solutions to long-standing and seemingly intractable problems is truly impressive. We look forward to further work with them in the future.

#### **4.3 Local leaders**

Finally, we are acutely aware of the courage of local leaders including those with close association with paramilitary groups, who work to persuade others to move with them towards a definitive end to paramilitarism. These are the people who put their lives at risk for this cause, who face life threatening challenges and yet they have held firm on their intentions and direction. We offer our support to them and help in whatever way we can to build pathways that they can walk on - and lead others down - so that they can walk away from paramilitarism.

#### **4.4 Board inputs**

The local and international expertise of our board members is an invaluable resource which supports the work of IPER in a number of important ways. Professor Roger Mac Ginty has sourced data analysis expertise for us at the University of Durham and has mentored our intern and encouraged her career path in peace-building. It is, of course, accidental that our intern Katherine has decided upon Durham as the university she chose for her graduate studies. Rev. Tracey McRoberts' deep knowledge of local communities and networks have greatly assisted us in growing our understanding of local communities and her advice and counsel is invaluable for our fieldwork. Sylvia Gordon's support in kind through her work at Corrymeela has contributed to a morale boost and a largely unprecedented outbreak of gratitude and enthusiasm amongst local young people in one community. Nomfundo Walaza's carefully measured contributions offers the clarity and wisdom that she has earned from her wide international experience in deeply divided and traumatised societies including her native South Africa. Professor Darren Kew has the longest association with IPER and we congratulate him and look forward to future collaborations with the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies University of San Diego following his appointment as Dean in July 2024.

One person above all others has steered IPER through the terrain of the year. Her persistent efforts at fund-raising, her willingness to listen, suggest, network, observe and bend the arc of a problem towards a solution forms the backbone of IPER. Our chairperson, Felicity McCartney, who long ago earned the respect of the community sector in Northern Ireland continues to demonstrate her commitment to peace and justice coupled with a Quaker willingness to work on issues marginalised by others and with populations subject to dehumanisation and stigma. Without her and her Quaker colleagues, IPER's work would be less sustainable, joyful and the craic would not be as good. We owe her a continuing debt of gratitude.

#### **4.5 Student inputs**

We benefited from a self-financed six-month internship during this year. Katherine Fynes from Washington, D.C., based herself in Belfast and worked on a number of projects in Ballymena and Ballymoney. She also provided valuable minute taking services and her report on her work is below. We anticipate a further intern placement from July 2025 for six months, but will require IPER to become registered with the Home Office in order to sponsor an intern visa. We also benefited from the assistance of Charlotte Dean, a graduate student in Durham University introduced to us by Roger Mac Ginty, who worked with us on data analysis.

#### **4.6 Intern report**

My name is Katherine Fynes and I am from Washington, D.C., U.S.A. I was living in the Republic of Ireland when I was lucky enough to be introduced to Dr. Breen-Smyth and IPER, and I knew that it was work I wanted to get involved with. During my undergraduate studies at the University of Notre Dame, one of my programs was Global Affairs with a concentration in Peace Studies, which solidified my interest in working in the realm of peace. As part of my capstone for the program I wrote about the inclusion and efficacy of women in peacebuilding and diplomacy, and in the paper I discussed the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, which marked my first time thoroughly learning about the conflict in Northern Ireland. I found the material incredibly interesting, and so when I was living down near Dublin over the summer and I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Breen-Smyth and become engaged with IPER's work I was very eager to intern for a number of reasons. I wanted to



continue learning more about the conflict and engage more deeply. Having recently graduated, I was interested in seeing how the concepts I learned about in university classes actually applied in the real world and I wanted to continue developing the basic skills I learned in peace mediation classes. I also had decided I wanted to work in this field but in a non-governmental position, and I was unsure about how to go about doing so. I feel very grateful that I was given this chance to intern with Dr. Breen-Smyth and IPER.

Aside from learning much more about the conflict itself, I was interested in learning more about a society that, while technically being in a post-violence period, is still grappling with the effects of the violence today. I learned about post-conflict reconciliation in theory but I believe that the best way to learn is to truly experience something. From a peace-building lens, I wanted to learn more about how to support a productive dialogue, especially one between actors who historically have not worked well together, and the best ways to mediate a tense situation. In general, I was very interested to learn how paramilitary transition could be possible, what it would take for the process to occur, and what successful markers would be.

Over the past months, I was definitely able to learn much more about the conflict, about the various actors and groups that played a role, and about their lingering presence today. I feel as though I have gained a very strong understanding of paramilitarism and the aspects it entails, and a much firmer understanding of loyalism and republicanism in Northern Ireland. Additionally, I was able to learn more about the complexities of the political system here in Northern Ireland, which was something I struggled with previously. I gained a lot of knowledge observing Dr. Breen-Smyth lead meetings and work with a wide variety of actors, and I feel lucky to have been able to support her during these meetings. I also learned a great deal about community development and am very proud of how far some of the community groups have come in the time since we have been working with them. Furthermore, I also learned a lot more about the logistical aspects of working and running a non-profit, and all the difficulties that can arise. I have gained so much knowledge during my time as an intern for IPER and I feel that I achieved what I set out to achieve.

I enjoy being an intern for IPER very much, and would recommend it to anybody who is interested in peace mediation, transition, community building, etc. In regards to suggestions

for future interns, I would say that having foundational background knowledge of the conflict is very important. There is a plethora of materials out there to learn from, and Dr. Breen-Smyth has some very good recommendations, and I really believe that it is important to approach this job with an understanding of the history. I think that it is also important for anyone not coming from Ireland or the United Kingdom to spend time making sure one can understand the accents, as we meet with a variety of people around Northern Ireland with a variety of dialects, and as conversations during meetings can go quite quickly, making sure one can understand as much as possible is essential. In terms of suggestions for IPER, I truthfully just value everything I have gotten to do and learn, and I think giving the same opportunities to future interns would be wonderful.

## 5. Financial Performance

### 5.1 Financial overview

Our financial situation remains a concern. In spite of multiple grant applications to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Fore and others, we were unsuccessful in attracting any substantial funding. We are very grateful for the grant of £1,400 from the Honorable the Irish Society Clothmakers fund, which provided a laptop and other equipment and an open grant of £6,500 from the Social Change Initiative have eased our financial worries. We continue our fundraising efforts in the hope that we can move onto a firmer financial footing and obtain some paid help with administration and become able to pay for the work undertaken on our behalf.

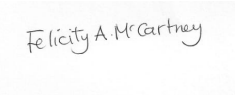
Currently all our fieldwork is conducted on a voluntary basis. With financial support comes other forms of support - validation and tangible recognition of the value of the work. We work largely without these benefits. We are sustained by our commitment to this work, and our desire not to let down those in working class communities, including those in paramilitary groups, who have argued and worked courageously and against the grain for an end to paramilitarism. We are also sustained by words of encouragement by some of those engaged at a high level in working for the same goals as we do.

We were greatly heartened by the April 2024 British Irish Intergovernmental Council's recommendation that the two governments appoint an interlocutor to scope the feasibility of a process of paramilitary transition. This was followed by a joint announcement in early

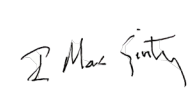
2025 by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Hilary Benn and the Irish Government<sup>25</sup> that the appointment would proceed. We look forward to meeting the appointee and to working to support him or her in whatever capacity is feasible and useful.

5.2 Financial review

This report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies entitled to the small companies exemption. The trustees' annual report<sup>26</sup> (incorporating the directors' report) was approved on 23rd April 2025 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:



Ms F A McCartney  
Trustee



Prof R H Mac Ginty  
Trustee

International Peace Education Resources (IPER)

Company Limited by Guarantee

Statement of Financial Activities  
(including income and expenditure account)

Year ended 31st March 2025

		Unrestricted funds	2025 Restricted funds	Total funds	2024 Total funds
	Note	£	£	£	£
Income and endowments					
Charitable activities	5	6,500	1,400	7,900	—
Total income		6,500	1,400	7,900	—
Expenditure					
Expenditure on charitable activities	6,7	5,447	1,298	6,745	1,045
Total expenditure		5,447	1,298	6,745	1,045
Net income/(expenditure)		1,053	102	1,155	(1,045)
Transfers between funds		102	(102)	—	—
Net movement in funds		1,155	—	1,155	(1,045)
Reconciliation of funds					
Total funds brought forward		4,905	—	4,905	5,950
Total funds carried forward		6,060	—	6,060	4,905

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year. All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

<sup>25</sup> [Minister O'Callaghan and the Tánaiste welcome publication of the Seventh Report of the Independent Reporting Commission](#)

International Peace Education Resources (IPER)

Company Limited by Guarantee

Notes to the Financial Statements *(continued)*

Year ended 31st March 2025

5. Charitable activities

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds
	£	£	£
Other income from charitable activities - HISC	–	1,400	1,400
Other income from charitable activities - Social Change	6,500	–	6,500
	<u>6,500</u>	<u>1,400</u>	<u>7,900</u>
	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds
	£	£	£
Other income from charitable activities - HISC	–	–	–
Other income from charitable activities - Social Change	–	–	–
	<u>–</u>	<u>–</u>	<u>–</u>

6. Expenditure on charitable activities by fund type

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds
	£	£	£
Peace education	3,961	1,298	5,259
Support costs	1,486	–	1,486
	<u>5,447</u>	<u>1,298</u>	<u>6,745</u>
	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds
	£	£	£
Peace education	576	–	576
Support costs	469	–	469
	<u>1,045</u>	<u>–</u>	<u>1,045</u>

7. Expenditure on charitable activities by activity type

	Activities undertaken directly	Support costs	Total funds	Total fund
	£	£	£	£
Peace education	5,259	–	5,259	576
Governance costs	–	1,486	1,486	469
	<u>5,259</u>	<u>1,486</u>	<u>6,745</u>	<u>1,045</u>

5.3 Independent examiner’s report

I report on the financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2025, which comprise the statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account), statement of financial position and the related notes.

I have examined your charity accounts as required under section 65 of the Charities Act and my examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act. The examination included a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also included consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters.

I have completed my examination and have no concerns in respect of the matters (1) to (4) listed above and, in connection with following the Directions of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, I have found no matters that require drawing to your attention.

Donaldson & Thompson  
Chartered Accountants  
Independent Examiner

Limavady Road Londonderry

BT47 6JU

23rd April 2025

6. Future Directions

In 2024, a new focus for IPER's work was identified and we committed ourselves to supporting movement away from violence by individuals and groups at community level and the building of relationships of trust and mutual benefit between the authorities and those affected by, or previously involved in, violence. We are grateful to those organisations, such as the Social Change Initiative, the Honorable the Irish Society and the Irish Quakers' Association that have contributed to our costs. Our focus for the next period will remain on ending paramilitarism and building vertical networks between communities and the statutory agencies, and on assisting those agencies to adapt their policies to support communities and individuals towards a paramilitary free future. We will work with partners in all sectors to further these goals, including with the two governments' interlocutor when that person is appointed.

7. GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

ACT	Action for Community Transformation
ANP	Arm na Poblachta
BIIGC	British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference
CHIS	Covert Human Intelligence Sources
CIRA	Continuity Irish Republican Army
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EVOLVE	Community Enterprise based in Magherafelt
FOI	Freedom of Information
HMICFRS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies, Fire and Rescue Services
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
IPLO	Irish People's Liberation Organisation
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRLA	Irish Republican Liberation Army
IRM	Irish Republican Movement
LCC	Loyalist Community Council
LVF	Loyalist Volunteer Force
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
nIRA	New Irish Republican Army
ONH	Óglaigh na hÉireann
PCTF	Paramilitary Crime Task Force
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
POAC	Proscribed Organisations Appeals Commission
PPANI	Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland
RHC	Red Hand Commando
RHD	Red Hand Defenders
TACT	Terrorism Act 2000
TPP	Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force
ViSOR	Violent and Sex Offender Register



Company Number NI667552 | Charity number 108297

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**[www.peacepartnership.org](http://www.peacepartnership.org)**