

# Exploring Diaspora Strategies: Lessons for Ireland

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NIRSA, NUI Maynooth

June 2009

1. Context
2. What does Ireland presently do?
3. How might these programmes be extended and augmented?
4. What should be the ethos of an Irish diaspora strategy?
5. Ways forward: Towards a diaspora strategy for Ireland

Note 1: This paper should be read in conjunction with the Exploring Diaspora Strategies: An International Comparison workshop report. This workshop was held in NUI Maynooth, 26-28 January 2009 (see [www.nuim.ie/nirsa/diaspora/International.pdf](http://www.nuim.ie/nirsa/diaspora/International.pdf)).

Note 2: *This paper represents the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the workshop participants. The purpose of the paper is to stimulate informed debate on the Irish state's formal connections with the Irish diaspora. Contact: Rob.Kitchin@nuim.ie*



## 1. Context

*‘Successive Irish Governments have built a multi-layered relationship with the global Irish community, one that has marked us out as a role model for many other countries. The Government and the global Irish community have in the past worked closely together on issues such as the peace process in Northern Ireland and the rewards of such cooperation have been considerable. The Forum will provide us with the opportunity to take Ireland’s relationship with the global Irish community in a new direction, to examine innovative ways of working together and to generate ideas for Ireland’s economic recovery. Now is the time to shape a more strategic relationship which will bring benefits both to Ireland and to our global community and which has a more developed economic focus. Our global Irish community constitutes one of the most powerful and far-reaching resources at our disposal and, using our worldwide network of Embassies and Consulates, we have identified some of the most successful individuals from that global community. They will bring with them an invaluable global perspective.’*

(Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Micheál Martin T.D. April 2009, following his convening of a Global Irish Economic Forum for September 2009)

In 2009 the population of the Irish Republic stood at 4.42 million. At the same time over 70 million people worldwide claimed Irish descent, and 3.2 million Irish citizens (passport holders) and 800,000 Irish born citizens lived overseas. The historical and geographical formation of the Irish diaspora has been a complex process incorporating a wide range of migrant flows and experiences of re-settlement. The principal migrant streams include the missionary and mercenary migrations to Europe between the sixth and the fifteenth centuries, the movement of the Scotch Irish to North America between 1705 and 1776, the ‘convict’ and ‘free’ migrants relocating to the far shores of Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and Uruguay in the nineteenth century, the scattering of the famine migrants to North America and the United Kingdom in the 1840s, the flight of the impoverished to the United States and the United Kingdom from the 1850s to the

establishment of the Irish Free State in the 1920s, and the economic migrants who left in the 1950s and the 1980s, principally for the United Kingdom.

The Irish diaspora has always maintained a relationship with Ireland – that is it has always operated as a transnational diaspora – but the nature of that relationship has changed and evolved. Currently, the Irish diaspora is, we believe entering a new era. This is resulting both from an awakening of interest within Ireland itself as to the unfulfilled potential of the relationship and changes taking place within the diaspora itself.

In April 2007, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dermot Ahern, stated that ‘The time is right to review our approach to our community across the globe and to develop a strategy for the years ahead.’ Later in the same year, David McWilliams, in his book *The Generation Game*, argued that Ireland should seek to ‘exploit the demographic potential of the Diaspora’ to reinvigorate the nation. In 2008, we provided a rejoinder that sought to set out a prospective Irish diaspora strategy and the ethics and principles that should underpin it<sup>1</sup>. Throughout her Presidency, Mary McAleese has continually highlighted the extraordinary story of our diaspora, including most recently during the Presidential Lecture Series on RTE Radio One over the 2009 New Year period. In March 2009 Taoiseach Brian Cowen announced a major review of Ireland-US relations under the banner ‘Ireland and America: Challenges and Opportunities in a New Context’. And in April 2009, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Micheál Martin T.D. proposed the hosting of a Global Irish Economic Forum, scheduled for September 2009. These interventions have been accompanied by recent conferences in New York and Dublin, opinion pieces in *The Irish Times*, and radio debates on the subject.

The Irish diaspora has been a long time in gestation and has assumed a different guise in different places and at different times. Its relationship with Ireland has been varied, complex, and at times contradictory. Today, this relationship is entering new and uncharted waters. Until very recently, the number of emigrants leaving Ireland and

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<sup>1</sup> Boyle, M. and Kitchin, R. (2008) Towards and Irish diaspora strategy. NIRSA Working Paper 37.

joining the diaspora had shrunk remarkably and many of those who left in the late 1980s had returned. Moreover, the traditional imperatives that have helped to maintain a strong Irish identity across generations have weakened. Anti-Irish racism, while still present to a certain extent, has reduced significantly. Despite the recent downturn, the economic position of Ireland has been radically transformed and the need to provide remittances and philanthropy has dissipated. The need to mobilize in relation to the 'Irish question' in the North has lessened given the peace process. For younger members of the diaspora, long established groups such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians no longer appeal. The result is aging membership and slow decline.

Whilst their agendas might differ, all commentators recognise that the Irish diaspora has an important part to play in Ireland's future and that the time is right for Ireland to consider how it wants to engage with the global Irish diaspora in the future. In short, it is understood that the diaspora is a vital aspect of Ireland's history and identity and a central component underpinning its place on the world stage, and that to think of Ireland as a globally connected nation of 70 million people, rather than a small country on the periphery of Europe, is a powerful way to think and proceed.

As the Irish state is well aware, with its programmes already to some extent organised as such, the Irish diaspora constitutes both an obligation and a huge potential resource. It is an obligation because Irish citizens, on the one hand, remain Irish citizens and, on the other, because many of them have served and continue to serve Ireland while overseas. The diaspora is a massive potential resource because the millions of people worldwide who claim some Irish ancestry possess an abundance of skills, knowledge, contacts, business acumen, and financial and political resources that could help Ireland as it tries to rebuild its economy.

## **2. What does Ireland presently do?**

While Ireland does not have at present a planned, coordinated, overarching diaspora strategy it does have a wide range of programmes and schemes through which it engages its diaspora (see Table 2). Together these programmes and schemes provide a broad

range of services to, and partnerships with, the Irish diaspora across the globe and constitute a constellation that few other countries can match in terms of scope and reach. Such a statement might be a surprise to many commentators as a relatively common perception is that the Irish state does relatively little to engage the diaspora and has a scarcity of programmes (a perception that is not shared by other countries’ policy makers). This perception is the result of a number of factors including:

- The ad hoc development of programmes;
- The custodian, midwifery and husbandry style of engagement rather than a demiurge, state-led, highly managerialist approach<sup>2</sup>;
- The lack of an overarching, highly interconnected, well articulated, and high visibility strategy accompanied by the relatively low key, low visibility of existing programmes and schemes;
- Many of the programmes are seen as relating to business or culture rather than the diaspora per se, although they directly engage the diaspora;
- A well entrenched story of Ireland failing its diaspora, perpetuated in the popular media and academia that is relatively resistant to challenge;
- And public servants working in the sector are, in general, not allowed to trumpet or defend the work being undertaken (this being the preserve of the relevant Minister).

Ireland currently undertakes activities in the following areas with regard to the development and enhancement of relationships with its diasporic populations: 1) rolling out new administrative structures to support diaspora strategy making; 2) building

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<sup>2</sup> Absent the state leaves the formation of links between the homeland and the diaspora to the market or to autonomous social, cultural and political movements, with the diaspora self-organizing itself and its engagement with its homeland

Custodian the state nurtures, protects, regulates, and polices new and emerging diasporic connections

Midwifery the state identifies potential engagements and champions/leaders and mobilizes and cultivates them but leaves ownership in the hands of the diaspora

Husbandry the state works with and re-energizes existing diaspora organisations and networks

Demiurge the state directly creates and runs diasporic initiatives and networks, perhaps with the intention of letting the market assume responsibility at a later date.

infrastructure connecting diaspora and the homeland; 3) widening citizenship to the diaspora in certain key ways, not least in the provision of welfare services; 4) building diasporic patriotism through supporting cultural activities, education and language learning; 5) promoting philanthropy; 6) building business networks; 7) nurturing return migration; and 8) promoting the idea of affinity diasporas.

### ***1) Administrative structures in support of diaspora strategy making***

The first bridge between the Irish state and the Irish diaspora is Ireland's consulate and embassy services. Ireland has 56 embassies and 8 consulates around the world that are staffed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and offer a full range of diplomatic and consular services. In addition it has another 93 consulates staffed by honorary consuls who may not be in a position to offer the full range of consular services, or have an out of hours service. Services include passport and citizenship enquiries, helping citizens who become ill or are hospitalized abroad or who are victims of crime or become financially distressed or destitute or are arrested or detained, or dealing with a death abroad, welfare issues or a major emergency. These services are offered to all Irish citizens and passport holders. As part of their brief, embassies and consulates regularly engage the diaspora, attending local diaspora events, and providing advice, in-kind supports and funding to local diaspora organisations. Recently, the Irish Abroad Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs has received a mandate to coordinate engagement with the diaspora, and Enterprise Ireland and the President's Office have a proactive interest too.

As Ireland has developed an additional set of layers of engagement with its diasporas it too has begun to roll out new structures and approaches. Following Alan Gamlen, we would see Ireland as having a complex 'emigrant state' – that is, different parts/branches/arms/organs of the state that are actively involved in engaging with different diasporic populations. However, while Ireland does have in place a number of policies and programmes to engage its diaspora, there is little sense that these constitute a coherent diaspora strategy. Rather these policies and programmes have developed over time in response to specific needs with respect to particular issues. Fortuitously, when taken together they provide a reasonably comprehensive set of instruments through which

to engage the diaspora, and many adopt a form of developmental managerialism that works very effectively (custodian, midwifery and husbandry and not demiurge). That said, we believe there is a need for the Irish government to undertake a root and branch review of how the state engages the diaspora with a view to organising state activities within a coordinated, comprehensive diaspora strategy framework.

## ***2) Building infrastructure, building new bridges: creating and fostering information flows and portals***

The development of broad-based information portals for the diaspora has been left to independent organisations to develop, although some receive finance and advice from government departments. Through the Emigrant Support Programme, for example, funding has been allocated to support a number of online information services, including Crosscare Migrant Project ([www.migrantproject.ie](http://www.migrantproject.ie)), the Irish Network of Great Britain ([www.in-gb.co.uk](http://www.in-gb.co.uk)), and, before it discontinued operations, EAN, the Emigrant Advice Network, ([www.ean.ie](http://www.ean.ie)). The Department of Social and Family Affairs has also provided funding to support Crosscare Migrant Project. Emigrant News, an independent organisation, provides a weekly news summary through its website ([www.emigrant.ie](http://www.emigrant.ie)) and its database of over 30,000 subscribers. Irishabroad.com and EuropeanIrish.com provide a wide range of information about Ireland, the diaspora, and links to other Irish-related websites, as well as providing a range of social networking options including blogging, discussion forums, public groups, community forums and dating. Irishabroad.com has over 240,000 registered users. In addition, RTÉ and other national and local radio stations broadcast across the Internet, and most national and local Irish newspapers are available online. There was some recent discussion about RTÉ purchasing a satellite channel in the UK to broadcast to the diaspora there, but these plans seem to have been shelved given cutbacks in funding.

## ***3) Extending citizenship: offering welfare assistance to diasporians living abroad***

Under the auspices of the Díon Committee, the Irish Government has, since 1984, provided grants to Irish community and non profit organisations to provide advice and practical assistance to disadvantaged members of the Irish community. In addition, since

1989, Government funding has been allocated to support Irish community organisations in the United States. The transfer of responsibility for emigrant services funding in Britain from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to the Department of Foreign Affairs in February 2003 centralised the coordination of emigrant services funding worldwide. In September 2004, the Irish Abroad Unit was established within the Department of Foreign Affairs to coordinate this new centralised programme (Emigrant Support Programme).

The emphasis of the Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) is on supporting culturally sensitive, frontline welfare services, targeted at the most vulnerable members of Ireland's overseas communities. Elderly Irish emigrants, including those who emigrated in the 1950s, are amongst the major beneficiaries of this support; however, funding is also directed to support other vulnerable or marginalised groups, including the undocumented Irish in the US, the homeless in Britain, and those suffering from particular difficulties, including alcohol or mental health issues. The programme also funds the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas, which supports Irish citizens incarcerated abroad.

While its focus remains on welfare services, the expansion of the Emigrant Support Programme since 2003 (it has grown five fold since then, from €3 million to €15 million) has also enabled the Government to invest in a range of community and heritage projects, which aim to foster a greater sense of Irish identity, as well as capital projects. These grants, which have been an increasing feature of the programme in recent years, are a key part of the Government's approach to developing links with Irish communities overseas and to securing the long term future of these communities.

Geographically, the programme's funding has largely been directed to support Irish community organisations and projects in Britain and the United States. In 2008, for example, over €10.2 million was directed to support 135 Irish community and welfare organisations in Britain (including 200 posts, full and part time), with a further €3.5 million directed to support a range of projects across the United States. Since the establishment of the Irish Abroad Unit, however, the programme's geographic range has



broadened, with funding allocated to support Irish community organisations in Australia, Canada, Argentina, South Africa, Zimbabwe, the Netherlands, France and, most recently, China.

In addition, the Department of Education and Science supports a number of schemes designed to investigate and redress past abuse of Irish children within state agencies who subsequently emigrated, supplies outreach services to such citizens, and until recently provided an educational grant scheme for former residents and their families.

#### ***4) Building Irish mindedness and diasporic patriotism***

##### *Supporting cultural activities and language learning*

In 2005, Culture Ireland was established as a state agency to promote the best of Ireland's arts and culture internationally and to assist in the development of Ireland's international cultural relations. Mostly the aim is to create international opportunities for Irish artists and cultural practitioners, but it also serves to promote Ireland and Irish-mindedness, and many of the projects Culture Ireland supports relate to engagements with the diaspora, as well as other cultures. In 2006 the total budget available in grants was €3m. The network of embassies and consulates also supports the cultural activities of the diaspora through the hosting and attending of different cultural events, including the worldwide celebration of St Patrick's Day. Similarly, the Ireland Funds also host numerous cultural activities targeted at the diaspora that reinforce Irish identity and Irish-mindedness. Ciste na Gaeilge of the Irish Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is a fund which supports the teaching of Irish at third-institutions outside of Ireland. Students sit the TEG examinations upon completing the course, and the most successful students are provided with scholarships to intensive summer courses in Carraroe, Co. Galway.

##### *Creating, facilitating and nurturing diaspora social networks*

In the main, social networking activities are organised by the diaspora for the diaspora. For example, the Ireland Funds, various business networks, societies and clubs, all host events and in some cases provide virtual platforms that help members of the diaspora find

and interact with their peers. In general, the Irish state's involvement is limited to helping to facilitate such social networks through some in-kind or financial aid. As noted previously, funding is also allocated to Irish community organisations overseas under the Emigrant Support Programme to support a broad range of community and heritage projects, including strategic, flagship heritage initiatives, like the GAA Development Programmes in Britain and the United States, and smaller, community programmes in Irish centres and organisations throughout Britain, the United States, Canada and elsewhere.

#### *Facilitating short-term and tourist home visits by the diaspora*

While Bord Failte seeks to market Ireland as a destination to as many people as possible, it has specifically targeted the diaspora as a group with a higher propensity to visit. Similarly Aer Lingus in its marketing is relatively unique as an airline as over its history it has traditionally marketed itself by reference to where it flies from (Ireland) as opposed to where it flies to. Both have worked to encourage the diaspora to visit Ireland. A different type of scheme is that run by The Aisling Return to Ireland Project, financed under the Emigrant Support Programme, which provides annual supported holidays to Ireland for long-term, vulnerable Irish in Britain who cannot afford to visit Ireland.

#### ***5) Encouraging philanthropy to support Ireland***

Ireland has a very poorly developed indigenous philanthropic set-up, but has been very successful in cultivating philanthropy in the diaspora. The Ireland Funds, International Fund for Ireland (IFI), and Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) are prime examples. Over the past thirty years, the Ireland Funds have raised more than €300m to be spent on projects in Ireland, IFI more than €850m, and AP more than €1.2 billion. The Ireland Funds are currently going through a period of introspection as the Peace Process in Northern Ireland and the economic success enjoyed by the Republic of Ireland has largely removed some of the rationale for expenditure in Ireland. It is likely that the Ireland Funds will increasingly seek to position itself in terms of a number of global responsibilities and will channel donations to trouble spots and needy regions.

### ***6) Developing business networks***

The Irish state has invested heavily and successfully in seeking inward investment and building business partnerships with the Irish diaspora globally. The Industrial Development Agency (IDA) with 14 offices outside of Ireland is responsible for the attraction and development of foreign investment in Ireland. While it targets any company which might potentially locate in Ireland it has a successful track record of recruiting businesses owned and/or run by Irish or Irish-descent entrepreneurs and managers. Enterprise Ireland with 31 offices outside of Ireland is the state agency responsible for the development and promotion of the Irish business sector and in assisting international companies and entrepreneurs who are searching for Irish suppliers or are interested in investing in Irish companies. At present, Enterprise Ireland supports, through in-kind or financial aid, over sixty Irish business networks around the world with over 30,000 members. These networks are used to support the work of these members whether they are located in Ireland or not, but are also used strategically to help market Irish business and products and to enable Irish companies to expand into new territories and markets, and to encourage inward investment into Ireland. An example of the latter is the recently established Irish Technology Leadership Group (ITLG), comprising Irish people in senior positions in the high tech world in Silicon Valley, who are seeking to invest in Irish companies, partly because they want to make a contribution to promoting Ireland but also because they see this initiative as a good and profitable enterprise for their members as well. The ITLG comes closest to mimicking the work of the Chinese, Indian, and Taiwanese diaspora outlined in Saxenian's much vaunted work on diasporas in Silicon Valley California.

Unlike other countries such as Scotland and Chile who have placed emphasis on developing a single elite business network of high-level achievers amongst the diaspora, Ireland has adopted a much more plural approach that aims to foster a number of business networks and to grow a wide base of contacts and expertise. Some of these were initially seeded by Enterprise Ireland such as Techlink-UK and Biolink Ireland-USA and others were started by the diaspora. In the main, networks are owned and run by their members and function as social/business networking sites, many of whom also organise regular

face-to-face meetings. In addition there are numerous Irish business forums and chambers of commerce. For example, the Asia Pacific Business forum links 11 Irish business groups in the Asia Pacific and the Gulf to facilitate an exchange of ideas and resources and to leverage reputation and connections, whilst the Irish Chamber of Commerce USA is a transnational economic network with 13 chapters across the USA. The Ireland Funds events also provide an important business networking function. The breadth and depth of these business networks given the size of Ireland is exceptional, although there are still many possibilities for expansion, especially with respect to both generalist and specialist networks.

### ***7) Encouraging return migration and providing return facilitation services***

Since 1993, approximately 40 % (in excess of 200,000) of all migrants to Ireland have been returnees (primarily those who left Ireland in the 1980s and to a lesser extent the 1950s). During the years of the Celtic Tiger, given the strength of the Irish economy and the lure of well paid jobs, proactive programmes were perhaps not needed to entice Irish people to return to Ireland. Consequently, Irish returnees were treated in the same fashion as other desirable skilled migrants. For example, from the mid-1990s, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and FAS organised a series of overseas trade fairs aimed at attracting talent to Ireland. These fairs were predominately aimed at potential overseas immigrants, but also encouraged Irish diasporians to consider returning home. To aid those thinking of returning, a number of organisations that provide advice to returnees are funded under the Emigrant Support Programme. For example, Crosscare Migrant Project (formerly Emigrant Advice), provides information through its 'Returning to Ireland' service on the statutory services and entitlements available to those 'coming home'.

The Emigrant Support Programme also provides grants to support the Safe Home Programme a registered charity which advises and counsels older Irish emigrants considering a return to Ireland and assists those who decide to do so. Safe Home also works closely with the Department of the Environment, Local Government and Heritage,

which provides funding to voluntary housing bodies to make up to 25% of accommodation available to elderly returning emigrants who satisfy eligibility criteria.

Whilst economic, family, and cultural factors play a role in attracting talent back to Ireland, on foot of Richard Florida's work, cultural factors, and in particular qualities such as openness, tolerance, cosmopolitanism, and acceptance of different lifestyles have been deemed to be of growing importance. Without wishing to comment on the validity of this assertion, it is clear that policy decisions in a number of areas have also created a background or atmosphere which might play a part in bringing talented diasporians back home.

- Firstly, rising immigration in the past decade has brought returning 'internationalized' diasporians back to Ireland, swollen the number of foreign-born nationals to a historical all-time high, and diversified the country's immigrant stock.
- Secondly, there has been considerable debate in Ireland over the extent to which its rapid integration into the world economy has triggered widespread secularization and a new outward looking post-colonial, European, and globalised national identity.
- Thirdly, after a relatively slow start, cultural and tourism policy has vigorously sought to exploit the nation's cultural, artistic, and literary heritage and has offered tax breaks and other incentives to contemporary artists, film makers, media moguls and writers to promote national development.
- Fourthly, successive waves of urban regeneration in the principal cities have created a number of new gentrified, cosmopolitan quarters attractive to young professionals

### **8) Developing an affinity diaspora**

Ireland has no official policy of seeking to develop an affinity diaspora<sup>3</sup>, but it does undertake some initiatives that create a partial, de facto affinity diaspora. In the main this is through the creation and fostering of country to country business networks that seek to build mutual cooperation and dependencies. For example, the Ireland Turkey Business Association (ITBA) creates links between Turkish business people in Ireland and Irish businesses and also helps Irish businesses seeking to do business in Turkey. A number of these networks are supported by IBEC's (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) Export Orientation Programme (EOP). In addition, in-kind or financial support is given to diaspora organisations of other countries based in Ireland. There are now a number of these operating in Ireland (see Table 1 for a sample). Finally, the state undertakes international development work that aims to help a nation and its peoples whilst at the same time create visibility and new markets and opportunities for Irish businesses.

**Table 1 - Examples of 'New Irish' Diaspora groups in Ireland**

- Afghan Community and Cultural Association of Ireland
- Algerian Community in Ireland
- Association of Chinese Professionals in Ireland
- Brasilforall
- Centro De Apoio De Brasileiros Na Irlanda (CABI)
- Congolese Irish Partnership
- Indonesian Irish Association
- Ireland-India Council
- Irish Council of Chinese Social Services
- Irish Sikh Council
- Irish Sudanese Solidarity Group
- Korean Catholic Church in Ireland
- Kurdish Women's Association
- Latvian Society in Ireland
- League of Filipino Nurses
- Lithuanian Association in Ireland
- Lithuanian Business Association
- Nigerian Association Ireland

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<sup>3</sup> An affinity diaspora is a collection of people, usually former immigrants and tourists or business travellers, who have a different national or ethnic identity to a nation state but who feel some special affinity or affection for that nation state and who act on its behalf, whilst resident in the state, after they return home, or from a third country

- Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO) Ireland Branch
- Polish Information and Culture Centre in Dublin
- Romanian Community of Ireland
- The Romanian Society of Ireland
- Association of Cameroonians Living in Limerick and Country

*Summary of existing initiatives: Key aspects of Ireland’s emigrant state*

Table 2 summarises the above discussion and draws attention to some of the key aspects associated with Ireland’s emigrant state.

**Table 2 – Summary of Irish State supported diaspora policies/programmes**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>INDICATIVE INSTITUTION/POLICY/PROGRAMME</b>
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT APPARATUS FOR OVERSEAS POPULATIONS</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs – Irish Abroad Unit Network of embassies and consulates around the world Participation in EU, UN, WHO, OECD and OECD Government’s Emigrant Services Advisory Committee (formerly known as Díon) Enterprise Ireland and Business Networks President’s Office : Moral and Cultural support for engaging the diaspora
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE CONECTING DIASPORA AND HOMELAND</b>	Emigrant media including Emigrant News Online and RTÉ, plus a plethora of Irish newspapers and radio stations broadcasting online. Irish socio-cultural websites such as IrishAbroad.com and Europeanirish.com Government supported online services, including Irish Network of Great Britain, Crosscare Migrant Project and EAN

<p><b>EXTENDING CITIZENSHIP : PROVISION OF WELFARE SUPPORTS</b></p>	<p>Emigrant Support Programme (coordinated by Irish Abroad Unit)</p> <p>Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas</p> <p>The Department of Education and Science - overseas child abuse victim redress; grants for overseas Irish to attend Irish third level institutions</p>
<p><b>CULTURE AND SOCIAL BUILDING OF THE DIASPORA INCLUDING TOURISM POLICY</b></p>	<p>Ireland's Cultural Policy and Culture Ireland</p> <p>Irish clubs and local organizations abroad</p> <p>Worldwide celebrations of Saint Patrick's Day</p> <p>Research Centres such as the John Hume Institute for Global Irish Studies (University College Dublin), Irish Diaspora Forum</p> <p>Irish University Alumni Societies</p> <p>Tourism Ireland</p> <p>National Archives of Ireland and Irish Ancestral Research Association</p> <p>Emigrant Support Programme community &amp; heritage funding</p>
<p><b>PHILANTHROPY</b></p>	<p>The Ireland Funds</p> <p>The International Fund for Ireland</p> <p>The Atlantic Philanthropies</p>
<p><b>BUSINESS NETWORKS</b></p>	<p>Enterprise Ireland, Industrial Development Agency (IDA)</p> <p>Specialist Knowledge Networks : the Irish Technology Leadership Group, Biolink USA-Ireland, Techlink UK-Ireland</p> <p>Professional Knowledge Networks : Irish Network New York, Irish Network San Francisco, Irish Professional Network of London</p> <p>Transnational Business Networks : "Irish-other nationality" business associations</p> <p>Global Knowledge Networks : Asia Pacific Ireland Business</p>



	Forum, The Ireland Funds Global Irish Economic Forum
<b>RETURNEES</b>	FÁS sponsored international recruitment fairs The Department of Social and Family Affairs – funds emigrant advice services (including for returning Irish) Crosscare Migrant Project (Emigrant Advice) Safe Home programme Dept of Environment capital assistance programme The Aisling Return to Ireland Project - annual supported holiday to Ireland for long-term, vulnerable Irish in Britain
<b>AFFINITY DIASPORA</b>	IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) Export Orientation Programme (EOP) Ireland’s International Development work (e.g. Irish Aid)

### **3. How might these programmes be extended and augmented?**

The primary purpose of the Exploring Diaspora Strategies workshop was to share and learn experiences with other countries. It is therefore intended to organize a subsequent workshop to explore in depth what lessons Ireland can draw from international strategies. In this section, we detail *our* initial ideas and the ways in which existing programmes and schemes might be developed, supplemented, and augmented, reflecting on our interpretation of the workshop presentations. We would see our suggestions as starting points for wider discussion, debate and research; as potentially useful pointers as to areas the Irish state might wish to focus upon as it moves forward to articulate a fuller and more coherent diaspora strategy.

#### ***1) Administrative structures in support of diaspora strategy making***

Yevgeny Kuznetsov from the World Bank argues that the key question in the formulation of any diaspora strategy needs to be: *how can government provide a coherent centralised*

*framework to assure diverse bottom-up initiatives that fit specific local circumstances?*

We would regard this as a first order question when thinking about establishing strategies and securing their sustainability. As the Armenian example of the 1990s shows, inappropriate domestic institutions can limit, undermine, and constrain how a country can relate to its diaspora and significantly impoverish this relationship.

As noted above, whilst the Irish Abroad Unit has a pivotal role, Ireland's engagement with its diaspora is being instigated by a variety of state organisations, voluntary groups, and private interests. The mantra at play is 'let a thousand flowers bloom'. We support this model. It does not make sense to force all existing programmes into a centralised single organisation responsible for overseeing and managing them. Such an outcome would, we believe, do significant damage to programmes and schemes already in place and functioning effectively. It is more important to develop a clear rationale and a strategy for how Ireland will engage its diaspora over the medium to long term, setting in place clear aims and goals for each programme and its operator, and an over-arching framework and channels of communication that would enable the effective and efficient sharing and coordination of ideas, resources, services and so on, between operators. *It might well be useful however to task one agency or unit with the job of coordinating the various strands of the strategy across departments and agencies to ensure a continuity of effort, avoid duplication, and undertake the effective monitoring of progress. The DFA (perhaps the Irish Abroad Unit itself) would appear to us to be the natural candidate.*

## ***2) Building infrastructure, building new bridges: creating and fostering information flows and portals***

We recommend that the Irish state create a website portal that provides *links to* (but not content) all diaspora programmes and the networks/projects that they support and all other sources of information, advice, social and business networking, etc., of potential interest to diaspora members. At present, there is no one site that captures the full diversity of Internet sites (portals, social networking sites, blogs, clubs, societies, business forums, etc) and provides up to date links to them all. Our advice is that this

*remains a portal* – it does not provide its own content or networking facilities. There are many well established and successful sites performing this function. It would be a folly to create something that directly competes with these sites for two prime reasons – first, it would unnecessarily undermine such sites and the good work that they do; second, it would create significant additional costs (server hosting, web creation, content delivery, daily maintenance, etc). The portal should simply provide a comprehensive and user-friendly means for users to browse, search and link to the plethora of other websites that already exist. The web site ScotlandisthePlace.com provides an illustrative example.

A number of countries have now established formal channels for counselling its diaspora on domestic and diaspora issues. For example, Jamaica has established the Jamaican Diaspora Advisory Board, India has created the Prime Minister's Global Advisory Council of Overseas Indians, and Norway (Norgestinget), Finland (Ulkosuomalaisparlamentti), Sweden (Utlandssvenskarnas parlament), France (Assemblée des Français de l'étranger) and Switzerland (Organisation des Suisses de l'étranger) have recently established expatriate parliaments. India and Jamaica both hold broader conferences with members of the diaspora. In the Indian case, the conferences are held twice a year, in India in January and overseas each September. In Jamaica's case a diaspora conference of invited delegates meets every two years, with regional conferences held in interregnum between the biennial Conferences. We think it is important for the Irish state to consider establishing similar such arrangements for Ireland. In the first instance, we suggest that a diaspora forum should be established that meets twice a year – once in Ireland, once abroad – to discuss the relationship between Ireland and its diaspora with a view to tackling any pressing issues, reflecting on existing programmes, formulating new programmes, and seeking counsel of domestic issues. This would extend further than the kind of constituency envisaged by the Global Irish Economic Forum, though this is a positive first step.

The maintenance and generation of Irish-mindedness should be a key aspect to any Irish diaspora strategy. To that end, the Irish state should consider carefully the implementation of a programme to help finance websites and Internet ventures that seek

to better inform and mobilise the Irish diaspora at different scales (local, regional, etc). Our suggestion is for two schemes. The first would be a five year programme aimed at supporting a small number of key sites such as Crosscare Migrant Project, Emigrant News, IrishAbroad, EuropeanIrish, etc. The second would be a fund that website owners can apply to for funds to help re-image, re-brand, extend and re-launch their product. In addition, the state should consider specific funding for RTE to develop services for the diaspora, including satellite broadcasting abroad.

The Irish diaspora is a magnitude of order larger than the population resident in Ireland. The amount of expertise, knowledge and experience amongst them is therefore also of an order of magnitude larger. In addition to having a general diaspora forum, it might prove fortuitous to establish a number of specialised advice forums on specific issues such as banking, investment opportunities, health, education, and so on, which could be consulted by the Irish state and its agencies for advice and guidance. The example of the Global Irish Economic Forum might be rolled out in the context of specific sectors, or to promote the cause of certain parts of Ireland – perhaps the lagging regions.

### ***3) Extending citizenship: offering welfare assistance to diasporians living abroad***

Ireland is one of the few countries to actually provide welfare to overseas groups – most others work principally to uphold the rights and entitlements of their citizens in other countries. At present, the Emigrant Support Programme remains significantly focused on supporting vulnerable elderly Irish in Britain and the United States. There are good reasons for this. They were the generation that sent home billions of remittances before the Celtic Tiger years, and are the demographic most in need of welfare support. In recent years, the programme has expanded to provide funding for services to other vulnerable groups, including Irish prisoners overseas, homeless emigrants, and those suffering from particular difficulties, including mental health and alcohol abuse issues. The programme's geographic range has also expanded. These are both positive developments, and should continue.

In addition, how money is disbursed, and how it might best reach the most needy groups, and be spent in a transparent and accountable way should be a priority consideration as budgets tighten. Building efficient relationships with existing welfare/community groups serving diaspora populations is a challenge. On the one hand these groups have significant expertise, knowledge, contacts, and access. But on the other hand their pre-existing *raison d'être*, forms and modes of functioning might not easily be reconciled with the needs of funders. Working to achieve optimum disbursement of funds therefore is an ongoing task.

#### ***4) Building diasporic Irish-mindedness***

The fostering and maintenance of a sense of Irish-mindedness needs to be a key goal of any diaspora strategy. Irish-mindedness is a prerequisite for creating a sustainable relationship with the Irish diaspora – if one does not feel or have affinity to Ireland why would one maintain a relationship with and do work for and alongside Ireland? As already noted, the Irish diaspora is undergoing something of a transformation. It is vital that as this transformation occurs Irish-mindedness is maintained and strengthened. Along with the initiatives already discussed we think that the following programmes will be of significant benefit.

- Facilitate and nurture social networks. The primary role for the Irish state with respect to the development of social networks is facilitation and nurturing. Some of this work can be achieved through in-kind support provided through embassies, consulates and state agencies. However, we suggest the establishment of a dedicated social networking fund – perhaps similar in administration to the present Culture Ireland programme – that organisations can apply to support their activities.
- Develop a supported programme of summer schools for higher education students from the diaspora (especially those in Irish Studies and Business Studies) with a scheme to maintain the relationship into the long term.

- Extend the Aisling Project, or creating a similar parallel scheme, to enable vulnerable Irish abroad of all ages to visit Ireland. Greater emphasis could be put on the diasporan youth. We suggest that teenagers and young adults who have never been to Ireland be encouraged to discover the country, to experience life here, so as to further and deepen the knowledge of and attachment to the homeland and Irish culture inherited from their family and Irish community overseas. To that effect, a scheme similar to Israel's funding of 'first-time trips' for the Jewish youth from around the globe could be given consideration. Although highly ideological and controversial with regards to its political implications, we believe it is an initiative worth exploring as the basis to building a long term relationship.
- Invest in and develop genealogical supports for those researching their family history. Genealogical research has exploded in recent years, especially with the growth of the Internet and the digitisation of records. Indeed, tracing the family tree has become a significant practice of identity formation and production. Access to Irish records is limited and what exists is often provided as a cost service. There should be a programme of digitisation of genealogical records and access to these records should be free as a service to the diaspora that buys significant goodwill.
- Establish a research programme that engages the diaspora and in particular creates and populates diaspora community archives, undertakes oral histories, collects photo archives, and examines present-day life of the diaspora as a means to stimulate interest in Irish identity and culture. We suggest the creation of a diaspora research fund that organisations can apply to support their activities.
- Further promote the Irish language through workshops and summer schools that could be organised outside of Ireland following the model of Ciste na Gaeilge. These could be either organised by the Irish state or by non-governmental organisations but with state funding. In addition travel grants could be made

- Develop school curriculum and project materials concerning Ireland and the Irish diaspora suitable for second-level teaching and project work in diaspora communities.
- At present the Irish state has no formal method through which to recognise and honour members of the Irish diaspora who have made significant contributions to the Irish state and to the diaspora itself. Perhaps the nearest such awards are honorary degrees from the state's university sector. Somewhat ironically many of the Irish diaspora are being rewarded by the British state through the Queen's honours list for services to Northern Ireland and peace and reconciliation. We would therefore suggest the founding of an award to recognise the achievements of members of the diaspora (somewhat similar to Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award of the Indian state). Such an award needs to have strict criteria to establish and protect its value. First, it should not become part of any other national recognition awards system. Second, it is strictly limited to members of the diaspora (who need not be Irish citizens, but do claim Irish ancestry), who are acknowledged as performing significant work for the diaspora/Ireland, and who have been living overseas for a minimum of ten years. Third, the number of awards per year should be limited to 3 to 10. Fourth, decisions on the recipients need to be made by a non-partisan committee made up of Irish residents and the diaspora. The awarding of the honour needs to take place through a high visibility ceremony.

### ***5) Encouraging philanthropy to support Ireland***

Ireland has a one of the world's most impressive traditions of diasporic philanthropy. The Ireland Funds and The International Fund for Ireland have been very successful at cultivating philanthropic relationships with the diaspora. Indeed the Ireland Funds has become an authority on sourcing philanthropic monies that it assists in teaching would-be

charities the art and science of philanthropy. Meanwhile, as Chuck Feeney increasingly opens the lid on the activities of Atlantic Philanthropies, it is clear that Ireland – in particular Irish education – has been significantly impacted upon by diasporic philanthropy. Outstanding success notwithstanding, three issues might be worth pondering over in regard to the future benefits to be procured from diasporic philanthropy:

- As the recession bites, philanthropy is perhaps more vulnerable to consumer conservatism, retrenchment and prudence than other activities. For projects that have historically been dependant upon philanthropic support for (to some degree) their existence (for instance the crucially important PRTL scheme funding research in the Higher Education section), the question of sustainability now becomes important. Given that much important and valuable work is completed in the voluntary sector through ‘soft’ money, this is part of a more general challenge. Helping groups continue to source money, or providing interim funds to allow them to continue to function, would be of real help.
- Peace in the North and the affluence of the Celtic Tiger has meant that Ireland per se has become less of a destination for philanthropic givers. Whilst many funds still allocate a majority to Ireland, vulnerable groups in the Irish diaspora and parts of the developing world are becoming worth alternatives. But as the recent rekindling of (small but worrying) trouble in the North and the rise of new vulnerable groups in Ireland hit hardest by the recession appear, it seems that Ireland itself might consider bringing forth worthy projects for donation and giving. In other words, Ireland needs to rethink its case as a recipient of philanthropic giving in order to provide meaningful and worthy projects suitable for the times in which we live.
- Most of the existing philanthropic networks focus on a very elite group of successful individuals with Irish ancestry. Their aim is to create relationships within donors/givers/philanthropists that are ‘an inch wide and a mile deep’.



### ***6) Developing business and knowledge networks***

Both the IDA and Enterprise Ireland have strong track records in building business partnerships with companies overseas and fostering well developed knowledge networks. At least four areas nevertheless might provide a focus for future work:

- There is a need to develop a much stronger record in venture capital investment (as in India, Chile, and China) in Irish businesses. We recommend that Enterprise Ireland seek to facilitate the creation of more ITLG type networks, wherein successful Irish entrepreneurs and business leaders are encouraged to invest in and nurture Irish start up companies or existing small-to-medium sized businesses who demonstrate high potential for growth, this being matched with institutional and financial support from the Irish state through agencies such as Enterprise Ireland. This might include mobilising the diaspora to invest venture capital in university incubator companies. We recommend state support for events such as the December 2008 “Silicon Valley comes to Ireland”: this was put together by ITLG to showcase Ireland’s talents to a delegation of entrepreneurs from the United State, some of Irish descent. As highlighted by a founding member of ITLG, this delegation only came to Ireland to visit technological parks and university incubators because of the links that have been fostered through regular contacts with ITLG members (Global Irish Forum at University College Dublin,

- Armenia has been successful in luring diaspora investment into infrastructure projects through the mechanism of Public Private Partnerships. Of course the concept of diaspora funded PPPs would need to be fully thought through, but there is scope to prospect for capital in areas where PPPs have so far failed. Whilst Ireland has been hugely successful in attracting capital for projects in education and transport initiatives, it has failed to secure sufficient capital to support the regeneration of disadvantaged social housing estates. Of course capital in the diaspora works on the same maxim of profit maximisation and perhaps now is not an opportune moment to court investment in property. On the other hand, now is the best time to secure the most competitive contracts and the introduction of diasporic capital, talent and energy might broker to completion projects which otherwise will not happen.
- In addition to the many business networks that Enterprise Ireland either run or facilitate we believe it might be productive to consider implementing a scheme similar to GlobalScot and ChileGlobal. GlobalScot targets high achieving members of the Scottish Diaspora (almost 50% of the 840 GlobalScot members operate at company Chairman, CEO or President level) who are specially selected and invited to join. The scheme works by partnering GlobalScot members with Scottish companies, with the former providing mentoring, advice, contacts and so on to the latter that will help them expand their business globally. There are clearly many highly successful business people of Irish descent around the globe and any help they could give directly to Irish businesses has to be of value, so a

- Ireland's economic policy is presently driven by a 'smart economy' rhetoric that prioritises innovation and the creation of a knowledge economy. Part of its strategy through Science Foundation Ireland has been to try and encourage worldclass scientists to move to Ireland. This strategy could be usefully accompanied by a drive towards partnering scientists in the diaspora, along with technologists, engineers, and social and economic academics, with Irish institutions. This strategy has worked well for India with eminent overseas Indians serving the cause of science and technology and the cutting edge sectors through institutional engagement as visiting fellows, chairs, members of high level committees, research partners, and so on, without requiring permanent relocation.

#### ***7) Encouraging return migration and providing return facilitation services***

Irrespective of unemployment levels, prospecting for talented individuals remains a major goal of all advanced nations. Whilst recruiting talented diasporians overseas back to Ireland to work in leading TNCs and indigenous companies remains important, it is now possible to broaden the range of work which might be undertaken. Possibly programmes might include:

- Facilitating professional mobility for people of Irish descent, who are not European-Union passport-holders, and who are willing to come and work in Ireland, for a certain period of time or permanently, through the issuing of a special visa regime similar to what has been implemented by India for doctors,

- Marketing developments in Irish education to attract both families with younger children to return as well as children of diasporians who might wish to return to study in Ireland.
- Extending the possibility to apply for subsidized accommodation to any returnees – beyond the vulnerable elderly diasporians willing to come back to Ireland targeted by the existing Safe Home programme – on a temporary basis. This would give them some time to find suitable housing for themselves and their families or, if it is not already the case, to find a job that would allow them to privately rent or buy a place of their own in Ireland. Such a temporary housing facilitation scheme could encourage return migration of younger members of the diaspora whose skills and energy would potentially contribute to the reconstruction of the Irish economy in the aftermaths of the current economic crisis.
- Hosting a Homecoming event like Scotland to attract a significant volume of diaspora members to visit Ireland and to encourage them to consider making the move more permanent. A possible, good target year might be the centenary anniversary of the 1916 Rising (2016).
- Preparing a ‘welcome back’ package for diaspora visitors that contains social, cultural, economic, and logistical advice. Strategically place these packs in key entry points (airports and ports) and hotel rooms and guest houses, and work with HR managers in TNCs, and with international search, selection, and recruitment firms, to distribute packs to appropriate people. Ensure this pack is made available electronically on diaspora and government sponsored websites.

- Putting together a scheme that eases the relocation of belongings from abroad. An example has been set by Jamaica with respect to the repatriation of automobiles.
- Continuing to use the arts, culture, and cosmopolitanism, to present Ireland as a desirable place to live and work.

### ***8) Developing an affinity diaspora***

Ireland has done relatively little to foster the creation of an affinity diaspora and yet this group has much that it can offer Ireland in terms of expanding and developing new business and trade abroad. There are a number of ways this might be achieved.

- A version of the successful Scottish Networks International scheme that places foreign-national postgraduate students with Scottish companies for 3-12 months might be developed. The aim is that the student will form a bond with the company and if and when the student leaves Scotland they will help their partner company and also other Scottish companies do business wherever they settle. In effect they will continue to play for 'Team Scotland' regardless of where they are resident in the world. There is much potential for Irish partnerships with East European, Indian, Chinese and North American students to open up potential avenues into these areas.
- Consideration should be given to the facilitation and fostering of Ireland-Other Country Associations that could help Irish businesses expand into new markets.
- Additional efforts can be made to support the work of other country's diaspora organisations in Ireland as a way of developing supportive relations (see Table 1).
- A 'Team Ireland' ambassadorial scheme could be developed that recruits foreign national business people to represent and act on behalf of Ireland.

- The state could work with Irish universities with regard to overseas alumni that might help Irish businesses in local contexts.

*Summary of potential new existing initiatives*

Table 3 summarises the above discussion and outlines potential new programmes that Ireland might add to its emigrant state.

**Table 3 – Summary of possible extensions to and new diaspora policies/programmes**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT/AUGMENTATION</b>
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT APPARATUS FOR OVERSEAS POPULATIONS</b>	Irish State to consider formally appointing the DFA (perhaps IAU) to be co-ordinator of Ireland's diaspora strategy (a role which critically requires light networking and not a muscular command)
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE CONECTING DIASPORA AND HOMELAND</b>	<p>A state-sponsored website portal should be created that provides <i>links to</i> (but not content) all diaspora programmes and the networks/projects that they support and all other sources of information, advice, social and business networking, etc.</p> <p>A diaspora forum should be established that meets twice a year – once in Ireland, once abroad – to discuss the relationship between Ireland and its diaspora</p> <p>Rewarding diasporians who make a significant contribution to Ireland and the diaspora through an awards scheme</p>
<b>EXTENDING CITIZENSHIP : PROVISION OF WELFARE SUPPORTS</b>	IAU budget to be expanded, focus continuing to broaden to other vulnerable Irish abroad including youth, homeless, and undocumented Irish, and geographical reach continuing to widen

<p><b>CULTURE AND SOCIAL BUILDING OF THE DIASPORA INCLUDING TOURISM POLICY</b></p>	<p>A programme should be developed to help finance websites and Internet ventures that seek to better inform and mobilise the Irish diaspora at different scales</p> <p>A dedicated social networking fund should be established</p> <p>A homecoming style event should be considered</p> <p>The state should consider specific funding for RTE to develop services for the diaspora, including satellite broadcasting abroad</p> <p>Extend the Aisling Project, or creating a similar parallel scheme, to enable vulnerable Irish abroad of all ages to visit Ireland</p> <p>Invest in and develop genealogical supports for those researching their family tree</p> <p>Develop a supported programme of summer schools for higher education students from the diaspora</p> <p>Continue promoting the Irish language through language workshops and summer schools organised outside of Ireland, parallel to the Ciste na Gaeilge intensive summer courses</p> <p>Develop school curriculum and project materials concerning Ireland and the Irish diaspora suitable for second-level teaching and project work in diaspora communities</p> <p>Establish a research programme that creates and populates diaspora community archives, undertakes oral histories, and examines present-day life of the diaspora as a means to stimulate interest in Irish identity and culture. This should be supported by the creation of a diaspora research fund that organisations can apply to support their activities</p>
<p><b>PHILANTHROPY</b></p>	<p>A strategy should be formulated to develop philanthropic relationships with non-elite members of the Irish diaspora</p>

<p><b>BUSINESS NETWORKS</b></p>	<p>Facilitate the creation of more ITLG type networks, wherein successful Irish entrepreneurs and business leaders are encouraged to invest in and nurture Irish start up companies or existing small-to-medium sized businesses who demonstrate high potential for growth</p> <p>Establish networks of other professional groups such as doctors, lawyers, finance, and other producer services</p> <p>The state markets specific investment opportunities (including PPPs) in infrastructural projects or specific businesses to diaspora investors</p> <p>Implement a highly skilled professional partnering programme</p> <p>Implement a scheme similar to GlobalScot and ChileGlobal targeting high achieving diaspora members.</p> <p>Implement a student mentoring scheme that places the brightest Irish graduates with top diaspora companies</p>
<p><b>RETURNEES</b></p>	<p>Facilitate professional mobility for people of Irish descent, who are not European-Union passport-holders and who are willing to come and work in Ireland, temporarily or permanently, through a special visa regime</p> <p>Market developments in Irish education to attract both families with younger children to return as well as children of diasporians who might wish to return to study in Ireland.</p> <p>Extend the possibility to apply for subsidized accommodation to any returnees – beyond the vulnerable elderly diasporians willing to come back to Ireland targeted by the existing Safe Home programme – on a temporary basis, so as to give them some time to find suitable housing and/or a job for themselves and their families.</p> <p>Host a Homecoming event like Scotland to attract a significant volume of diaspora members to visit Ireland and to encourage them to consider making the move more permanent.</p>



	<p>Prepare a 'welcome back' package for diaspora visitors that encourages them to consider moving to Ireland.</p> <p>Prepare a scheme that eases the relocation of belongings from abroad.</p>
<p><b>AFFINITY DIASPORA</b></p>	<p>Develop a scheme that places foreign-national postgraduate students with Irish companies</p> <p>Develop new Ireland-Other Country Associations that could help Irish businesses expand into new markets</p> <p>Support the work of other countries' diaspora organisations in Ireland</p> <p>Develop a 'Team Ireland' ambassadorial scheme that recruits foreign national business people to represent and act on behalf of Ireland</p> <p>Work with Irish universities with regard to overseas alumni that might help Irish businesses in local contexts</p>

#### 4. What should be the ethos of an Irish diaspora strategy?

Finally, we wish to end by posing a more philosophical question about Ireland's diaspora strategy; that of what its underlying ethos ought to be. There exists much rhetoric in public policy and academic circles concerning how the nature of the diaspora, and how the relationship with the diaspora, should be conceived and practiced. This rhetoric includes: 'global Irish network', 'let a thousand flowers bloom', 'the vulnerable Irish', 'governing in a globalised world', 'an inch deep and a mile wide', 'networks for innovation', 'strategy without tactics', the 'emigrant state', 'light incubation', 'the global knowledge economy', 'the smart economy', 'transnational citizens and transnational citizenship', 'strategies from below and from above', and so on. There is merit in thinking a bit more about this, not just for the sake of providing slogans for a strategy, but

because any strategy has more gravitas if it is founded on secure political, social, economic, cultural, and moral ideals.

We particularly caution against lapsing into an over-emphasis on the economic potential of business networks, even given the present economic climate. It would be remiss not to set any diaspora strategy into the context of the transformations which have occurred in the world economy in the past months and the movement of the Irish economy into recession. It is now estimated that the Irish economy will contract by approximately -4% to -10% in the next twelve months. Clearly, the changing economic circumstances will have ramifications for diaspora policy, affecting as it will remittance transfers, philanthropy, the extension of welfare entitlements, migration patterns, tourist flows, and the functioning of economic networks. But to imprint the stamp of time onto Ireland's diaspora policy would be to potentially skew the range of relationships which need to be built. A diaspora policy formulated in Ireland in the 1970s would have been wholly inadequate to deal with the situation which prevailed in the 1980s, and one formulated in the 1980s would have had very little to say to the realities, needs, and demands of 1990 Ireland. A bigger, longer term, vista is required.

It is critically important that any diaspora strategy seeks to develop a reciprocal relationship between Ireland and its diaspora. It would be a great folly to view the diaspora as a primed resource waiting to be exploited, as some economic commentators have suggested. Rather the diaspora should be viewed as a precious resource to be tended, valued and re-energised. Ireland should aim to grow in partnership with the diaspora for the mutual benefit of each other. In other words, it should be a strategy that people buy into not one that individuals, organisations and networks are co-opted into. It is important to remember that the sustainability of any strategy will ultimately rest on the motivations of volunteers and cannot be fulfilled through conscripts.

Similarly, with regards to the management of policies and programmes we firmly believe it is essential to maintain the light and flexible approach adopted successfully to date. We feel it would be a mistake for the state to try and centrally manage and run the

various programmes and schemes or to try and assume the work or mandate of existing or new diaspora organisations or networks. Indeed, our opinion, based on analyses and reflection of what other countries have done, is that an overarching, rigid and highly formalised diaspora strategy or framework, wherein the state owns and runs the programmes receiving state funds, will prove largely ineffective over the long term. Rather the state's role should be to guide, facilitate, add-value, coordinate across, and help fund schemes, and to maximise the capacities and potential of organisations. In other words, the state and its agencies should help existing networks and organisations, and establish new, light and flexible schemes and networks. This 'light' approach should be taken for four principle reasons:

- 1) It will sustain and create more organic networks and schemes that are more likely to be sustainable into the future.
- 2) It will enable flexibility and avoid overly formulaic and heavily structured schemes that constrain and co-opt rather than enable and encourage participation.
- 3) It will enhance and produce relationships that are of mutual benefit as no one party is dominant.
- 4) It will reduce the costs and administrative burden for all parties.

Another critical characteristic of any successful strategy is that it seeks to embrace the full diversity of the diaspora – Irish-born to someone several generations from initial emigration, wealthy or poor, located in a diaspora stronghold to someone quite remote, and so on. In other words, the strategy needs to recognise that the Irish diaspora is not a homogenous community but that there are many different Irish diasporas. Instead, it is better to consider the diaspora as a loose affiliation of independent groups of different ages, classes, religions and so on, located in different countries and embedded in varying contexts. A key assumption of David McWilliam's vision for engaging with the diaspora is that it is most energised by myths of Gaelic, Catholic, Republican traditions. Whilst this identity exerts a powerful lure, it cannot touch or speak to a variety of important diasporic constituencies. The cultural complexities of diasporic identity needs to be appreciated if an appropriate set of tactics are to be deployed. Furthermore, it is

important that the diaspora understands the reasons and ethos behind any diaspora strategy. Failure to impart this information will delimit buy-in and participation.

## **5. Ways forward – Towards a diaspora strategy for Ireland**

Leading institutions around the world are now prioritising diaspora strategies as policy initiatives and a raft of countries are seeking to re-energise their diaspora. In this short paper we have set out what programmes Ireland presently operates, how these programmes might be productively extended, possible new programmes, and made the case for framing these programmes through a coherent, overarching diaspora strategy. We are firmly of the opinion that it is in the interest of the Irish state and its peoples, the Irish diaspora, and the New Irish diasporas in Ireland to work towards and realise an Irish diaspora strategy. If carefully formulated, all parties will gain significantly – socially, culturally, politically and economically – from such a strategy.

For us, the next stage is an element of government, most likely the IAU, to formulate a strategic plan for the development of a diaspora strategy. It is important to think about how the diaspora might be usefully and meaningfully consulted in this process. This might prove a challenging exercise, but also represents an opportunity to provide a test bed for new methodologies of communicating with the diaspora. We note Scotland's plan in July 2009 which is asking all interested parties to attend the Scottish Parliament to make – in a Dragon's Den format – a case/pitch as to what they think ought to go into a diaspora strategy and how it might be best organised. The more formal consultation procedures adopted in India and Jamaica might also provide interesting exemplars.

Once a draft strategic plan is in place, we suggest a second diaspora strategy workshop be organised bringing together relevant government departments and agencies of the leaders of the diaspora organisations to explore and refine the plan into a framework that can be taken forward to be adopted by government in time.

For us, it is essential that Ireland produces and implements such a strategic framework. Through a coherent, coordinated and open strategy it will be possible to not only think of

Ireland as a globally connected nation of 70 million people, but to act as a globally connected nation, harnessing Irish talent for the benefit of Ireland *and* the diaspora wherever it is. Surely this is an ambition worthy of pursuit?