

## **A New German-Irish Council? – Working Paper**

### **Background**

One of the recommendations put forward in the Review of German-Irish relations published in April 2018 was the establishment of a German-Irish Council consisting of Irish community and cultural groups in Germany to foster stronger regional connections and multiplier effects between Irish community and cultural groups.

At the biennial meeting of German-Irish societies and Irish community organisations on 13 October 2018, participants agreed that the establishment of a German-Irish Council would be a worthwhile undertaking and a steering committee was established to further explore the possibility. A questionnaire developed by the Embassy was subsequently circulated to gather input from the wider Irish community. This paper has been informed by the suggestions put forward during the October meeting, the questionnaire outcomes and the discussions of the steering committee.

#### 1) **Mandate of the Council**

It was decided that the Council should start small and then add more tasks and ideas as it takes shape. The following two areas were identified as the initial focus:

- I) Communication between and support for existing German-Irish societies and Irish community organisations in Germany. More precisely the Council should provide a platform for an exchange of knowledge, events, speakers, information and best practice.

The Council would aim to build on what is already being done regionally and informally, optimising this communication and expanding to a nationwide network. We realise that there might be a danger of an overload of information and this will be taken into account by the board of the Council.

- II) Linking existing German-Irish societies and Irish community organisations in Germany to counterpart German community organisations in Ireland.

Additionally, it is important to emphasise that the Council is not intended to be an intermediary between the individual organisations and, for example, funding sources. Therefore, it will not be an additional bureaucratic layer. Furthermore, it will not take over any of the tasks being done by the organisations themselves.

#### 2) **Board and Membership of the Council**

In terms of the board's make-up, representation of member organisations was identified as a priority, with regional and thematic representation viewed as important. The board will be elected every two years, with the possibility to re-elect sitting members.

The Embassy is on hand to assist with the coordination of board elections for the German-Irish Council, and will continue to play a support role for the lifetime of the Council.

For the establishment of the board, every organisation will be invited to voluntarily nominate one of their members. Should there be more than six nominees, elections of the board will be held, possibly via online vote. If there are six or less, these volunteers will make up the first board of the Council and remain in place for the next two years. The first election of the board will take place after the launch of the Council. As transparency was regarded as vital in the set-up and running of the Council, if elections are to be held, further information will be released closer to the time.

General membership of the Council will consist of the members of the Irish community organisations and German-Irish societies in Germany who join the Council.

### 3) Communication

The administrative work of the Council would mainly consist of maintaining a membership database and email circulation list, facilitating contact between organisations, and maintaining a database of performers and speakers of interest. Similarly, the chief objective of the Council's online presence will be to direct interested individuals to the right organisations, acting as a multiplier for the online presence of individual organisations and facilitating nationwide communication between organisations.

The Hiup online platform, which has been offered to the Council free-of-charge, was agreed upon as a suitable resource. It has the capacity to fulfil the functions identified as important for the Council. It is interactive, secure, private and user-friendly, and offers the possibility of hosting online courses on certain topics (e.g. digital welcome pack for new Irish), (video) blogs, events etc. It can be used as an internal forum, while parts of it can be made public and there is the option to grant different levels of access in terms of viewing and editing rights.

Every organisation could have their own site admin, which would mean that several people could post content and information, and maintaining the website would be a shared responsibility.

The Irish language should play a role in the Council as well. Both Irish and English should play a role in the set-up, marketing and branding of the Council.

### 4) Funding

The German-Irish Council will operate on a voluntary basis. Applications for funding for Council-led initiatives from available funding sources (e.g. Emigrant Support Programme), fundraising and/or sponsorship are the responsibility of the Council's board, with input from the wider membership as desired.

### 5) Launch

The Council will be officially launched in various German cities on St. Patrick's Day 2019.