

Evaluation of Combat Poverty Agency Strategic Planning Period 1996 -1998

FINAL REPORT

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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND TO, AND AIMS OF, THE REVIEW

This review of the work of the Combat Poverty Agency is intended as a contribution to the formulation of the next three-year strategic plan.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation had the following objectives:

- (i) To undertake a short initial assessment of the objectives, goal and actions in the Plan and comment on the appropriateness of these in relation to (a) the Combat Poverty Agency Act (b) the state of poverty in Ireland (c) the capacity of the Agency to deliver;
- (ii) To assess and comment on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Agency structures and systems currently in place to implement the Plan, in particular the new structures and systems which were put in place under the current Plan;
- (iii) To assess and comment on the extent to which the objectives, goals and actions have been met, including the identification of any barriers to their achievement, within the context of resources available;
- (iv) To assess and comment on the staff and Board's experience of delivering the Plan;
- (v) To assess and comment on the impact of the Agency in reducing and preventing poverty; social exclusion and inequality in Ireland, given the resources available;
- (vi) To assess and comment on the Agency's way of working with its key stakeholders; and
- (vii) To make recommendations based on the findings of the above which could usefully feed into the development of the Agency's next Strategic Plan and arrangements for its monitoring.

The focus of the evaluation has therefore been on relevant developments since the adoption of the current Strategic Plan in 1996. As such, results from the last Combat Poverty Agency review in 1995 were used as baseline.

1.2 APPROACH TO EVALUATION

The thrust of the evaluation has been qualitative - in that the bulk of conclusions and implications are drawn from the perceptions and experiences of key 'Stakeholders'. In gathering these, particular importance was be attached to:

- The 'external' or 'operational' environment – in the sense that developments and achievements within the Combat Poverty Agency can only be fully understood and interpreted if more general national trends and changes for the same period are taken on board.
- The active involvement of Agency staff and Board members, especially in considering the implications of conclusions for the development of future strategy. A sub-group within the agency was established to review reports; but feedback from all personnel and Board Members throughout the evaluation process was welcomed.

The evaluation was carried out in three phases:

The *first* stage in the process was a review of 'key developments and shifts' – both within the Agency and in the wider policy environment – since the more substantive review of the Agency was undertaken in 1996. This was necessary in order to provide a focus for more substantive consultations in Phase 2. But it was also considered important that Agency personnel and Board members had an early opportunity to comment on what they saw as key issues to pursue in subsequent consultations. An interim report, at the end of the first phase, contained an audit of developments in the operational environment; and identified key stakeholders and key issues to be explored in more depth in the second Phase (drawn largely from the audit).

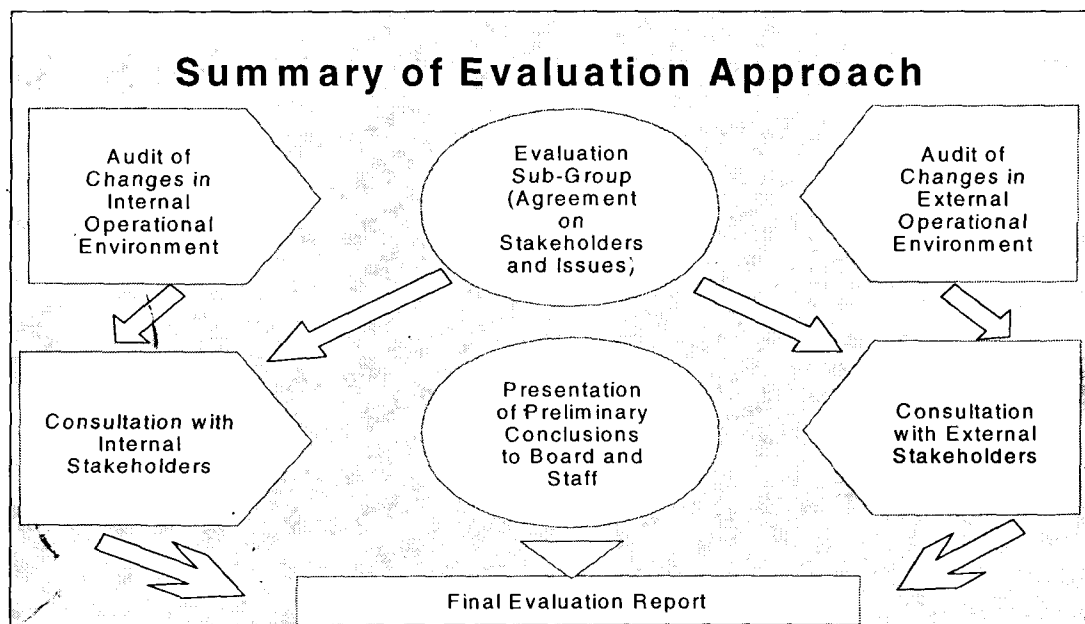
The *second* stage involved an in-depth consultation process, both within and outside the Agency. Results from this phase, and the first phase, were presented for discussion at a joint Board/Staff planning and review workshop in November.

The *third* Phase involved the preparation of draft and final reports.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

Figure 1.1 below summarises the various elements of evaluation fieldwork.

Figure 1.1: Summary of Methodological Approach



1.3.1 REVIEW OF OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Information needed for a review of the external operational environment was drawn from:

- Documentary and analytical material dealing with the level, nature and distribution of poverty in Ireland from 1995 to date.
- Policy-related material that has documented developments in the response to poverty during this period, in both the Irish and European contexts.

Information needed for a review of the internal CPA operational environment was drawn from:

- Internal and published estimates of ongoing resource allocations associated with various CPA activities since 1995.
- Annual reports, reports from the Agency's ongoing monitoring process and other relevant documents.
- Consultation with Section Heads, Agency Director and evaluation Sub-group.

1.3.2 CONSULTATION WITH INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

A pro-forma was developed to assist in recording input from Agency staff and Board members. This was intended as a way of ascertaining various perceptions and perspectives on achievements, obstacles and priorities (in accordance with formal CPA aims and objectives). Meetings were then held with:

- The Research, Projects, Information and Administration Sections.
- Agency Director.
- Board chairperson.

- Board Members (an additional questionnaire was distributed to Board members to collect feedback on procedural and structural aspects of the Board's operation over the last three years).

In addition to these structured consultations, some more focussed work was undertaken with one CPA-sponsored Programme – the 'Educational Disadvantage Demonstration Programme'. This particular Programme was selected since it was established *since* the last review in 1995; as well as the fact that CPA involvement in the Programme is spread across all Sections. Nexus participated in a meeting of networks participating in the Programme, and consulted with some project leaders.

1.3.3 CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

During this part of the evaluation process, two categories of external stakeholder were consulted:

- '*Working Partners*': that is, those agencies and organisations with whom the Agency has worked closely and consistently throughout the period the current Strategic Plan.
- '*Wider Interests*': that is, other groups and agencies with whom the Agency has had some working relationship during this time, but one which was less regularised.

'Working Partners' were interviewed directly about the nature of their relationship with the Agency, the results, outputs and impacts of that relationship, as well as their own perceptions about priorities regarding the Agency's next Strategic Plan. Individuals from the following agencies and organisations were consulted in this context:

- Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI);
- National Economic and Social Council (NESC);
- National Anti-Poverty Networks;
- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA);
- ADM Ltd.;
- Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT);
- International Fund for Ireland (IFI);
- Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (P&R) – Monaghan-based Programme Team.

A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was circulated to a wider group of 65 organisations, agencies and groups with whom the CPA had some relationship over the past three years. The intention here was to maximise the number of groups responding, so the questionnaire was restricted to a few key questions¹. The sample was constructed in cooperation with the Agency's Information Section, and was representative of:

- A range of excluded social groupings – including the elderly, youth, women, people with disability, refugees and asylum seekers, homeless.
- A reflection of voluntary as well as area-based groupings.
- Individuals (not consulted as working partners) within Government Departments.

¹ Although respondents did have the opportunity to make more detailed comments, and many availed of this opportunity.

- Different categories reflecting the Agency's 'user-base': for example, library users, 'Poverty Today' readers, journalists, publication users, academics etc.

A total of 65 questionnaires were distributed; 37 were completed and returned. Given the very tight time restrictions and the consequent lack of direct follow-up to the questionnaire, this represents a fairly high response rate of 57%.

Table 1.1 (overleaf) lists the organisations and groups responding the 'Wider Concerns' survey, under the different category headings.

Table 1.1: Organisations and Agencies Responding to 'Wider Concerns' Survey

Statutory:	<i>Government Departments (3)</i>	Finance; Tourism, Sport & Recreation; Justice, Equality & Law Reform
	<i>Agencies & Institutes (6)</i>	Aontas, Womens Institute, FAS, TCD Policy Institute, Trinity College, YouthStart.
Voluntary:	<i>Multi-Interest (4)</i>	Ireland Fund, N.I Voluntary Trust, Allen Lane Foundation, Katherine Howard Foundation.
	<i>Specific Interest (15)</i>	National Youth Federation, Youthlynx, Barnardos, Age and Opportunity, Travellers Visibility Group, Gay Lesbian Equality Network, Open Heart House, ITM, Irish Rural Link, Women's Aid, CAFE, NWCI, MS Ireland, National Committee on Racism & Inter-Culturalism, One Parent Exchange & Network.
Area-Based	<i>Multi-Interest (4)</i>	ICON, Greater Blanchardstown Development Project, AIM Project (Tallaght Partnership), Baldoyle Family Resource Centre.
	<i>Specific Interest (5)</i>	Special Project for the Long-term Unemployed (Tallaght), Kerry Diocesan Youth Council, Drogheda Youth Development, Community Women's Education Institute, Pavee Point.

SECTION 2: AUDIT OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EXTERNAL OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

This Section of the report is presented as a working assessment (or “audit”) of the most important developments since in the Agency’s general operational environment since 1996.

Given time and resource constraints, this is not a comprehensive review. It is rather intended as a means of acknowledging, and developing a working consensus on, pertinent changes to the “pre-1996” environment, which provided the rationale for the current Strategic Plan; as well as any current developments that will impact upon the next planning period.

The ‘Review of the Combat Poverty Agency’, published in 1996, contains:

“... an overview of poverty in Ireland, so as to provide a context within which the work of the Combat Poverty Agency can be assessed.” (Department of Social Welfare/Goodbody Economic Consultants, May 1996, p.16).

The operational context in this respect was seen as encompassing:

- Predominant concepts and accepted definitions of poverty; as well as discernible changes in these.
- The nature and extent of poverty – taking into account what is known about causal factors; key dynamics; and consequences for particular sections of the population.
- Responses to poverty: in other words, what are the main features of prevailing policy and practice designed to combat poverty?

It is important that these aspects of the operational context are revisited here, for two reasons:

1. On the one hand, they *influence or impact upon* the work of the CPA: they collectively define the challenges faced by the Agency, and the policy environment within which it must pursue its objectives. The evaluation of achievements and impacts must therefore take into account prevailing constraints and opportunities at the operational level.
2. On the other hand, they are, to some extent, *influenced by* the Combat Poverty Agency. The CPA seeks to contribute to an understanding of poverty, to initiate measures aimed at overcoming poverty, and to recommend on relevant aspects of policy and planning. It is within these fields, therefore, that the Agency’s impact should also be evident.

The following sub-sections address each of the three dimensions in turn, with the intention of establishing significant trends and changes in the past three years.

2.1 PREDOMINANT CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS OF POVERTY

The Goodbody (1996) report acknowledged a paradigmatic shift in how poverty had come to be understood and addressed throughout the 1980s. Influenced significantly by EU social and regional policy, the concept of 'multidimensionality' was at the centre of this new conceptual framework: in the understanding that the causes and effects of poverty cannot be seen solely in financial terms. Rather, they are 'multi-faceted' and are evident in a whole range of socio-economic circumstances and access to full social participation.

Conceptualised in these terms, 'social exclusion' had come to be at the centre of:

- EU rationale in framing development programmes;
- Consequently, anti-poverty strategy and thinking in Ireland, especially through the Poverty Programmes, Community Initiatives and some key aspects of ESF programming;
- The official Irish government interpretation of poverty, expressed most clearly in policy deliberations about a National Anti-Poverty Strategy².

It is clear that prevailing EU thinking on poverty will continue to have a significant influence on Irish policy; and it is therefore an important determining factor for the Agency in preparing the next Strategic Plan.

The Commission rationale for current revisions to Structural Fund mechanisms provide a very useful indication of thinking in this respect – and these will obviously impact directly upon measures to address poverty in Ireland (discussed in more detail in the Section 2.3 below). Decisions to revise the Structural Funds were informed by the Commission's First Report on Economic and Social Cohesion (November 1996). This established that disparities, as measured by income and employment, had actually increased *within* most Member States – even though some progress had been made on convergence *between* Member States. In explaining the need for revision to Structural Fund mechanisms, the Commission stresses the link between unemployment and poverty:

"...unemployment tends to weigh most heavily on the weakest social groups: young people, among whom one in five is out of work, women, whose unemployment rate is considerably higher than that for men, and those without qualifications. Half the unemployed have been so for more than a year. It is not surprising, therefore, that a growing number of people live below the poverty line and this poverty, a matter of concern for the future of European society, is growing fastest in some of the most prosperous and urbanised countries" (CEC, COM(1998) 131 final, Brussels, March 1998).

2 The Inter-departmental Policy Committee on NAPS adopted a working definition of poverty that incorporated inadequacy of 'material, cultural and social resources' – in addition to financial income – as causal factors; and the potential for exclusion from social participation as a major consequence of poverty.

This reflects the general thrust of the Title on Employment in the Treaty of Amsterdam where the need to promote employment in the Union, and to ensure equal opportunities for men and women, is emphasised.

The Commission's new Social Action Programme, launched in the Summer of this year, places similar emphasis on labour market integration – the practical implications of this, and other discernible shifts in EU thinking, for policy and programmes in Ireland is discussed in Section 2.3 below.

2.2 THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF POVERTY IN IRELAND

In setting the background for what is known about the extent and nature of poverty in Ireland, the 1996 Goodbody review referred to results of the 1986/87 ESRI study, and subsequent related studies by Nolan et al (1994) and Callan et al (1994). Indeed little primary research has been undertaken nationally since then to update the picture. 1994 figures confirm that 18.5% of households and 20.7% of the population were living in poverty³. A number of other factors are important to acknowledge, however, to update this situation for the CPA's current planning period. Some of these are:

- The growth in wealth creation that has occurred in parallel with the maintenance of poverty. Since 1991, Ireland has been the fastest growing economy in the European Union (OECD, 1995). Taxation and other distributional mechanisms, however, have failed to ensure an equal distribution of gains⁴; social policies (as in housing and education, for example) have failed to rectify the concentration of poverty within certain sections of the population and within particular areas.
- Inequalities in the distribution of wealth and opportunities have been more recently highlighted in comparative international terms (UN Human Development Report 1998). This study – based on 1995 estimates – ranks Ireland 16th out of 17 industrialised states examined with regard to the proportion of the population living in 'human poverty' (15.2% of the population). It also confirms that Ireland had the highest levels of functional illiteracy amongst these countries, the second highest level of long-term unemployment, and that Irish women had earned only 26.9% of all income for that year.
- The emergence of, at least the potential for, new forms of poverty. This is already evident in the particular vulnerability of refugees and asylum seekers, but is likely to become more important with the next stage of European integration (discussed below).

3 Based on an equivalence scale, and reflecting a poverty cut-off of £65 per week for an adult living alone (Nolan, Whelan, and Williams 1998) – cited by Sile O'Connor in 'Poverty Today', September/October 1998.

4 See Collins and Kavanagh in "Social Policy in Ireland", Healy and Reynolds 1998, on patterns of income distribution through taxation; also Callan, Nolan, Whelan, Whelan and Williams: "Poverty in the 1990s: evidence from the 1994 Living in Ireland Survey", establishing only a small reduction in overall levels of basic deprivation between 1987 and 1994.

- The particular impact of economic growth on the affordability of housing has contributed to a greater focus on homelessness and insecure housing conditions as contributors to poverty.

2.3 RESPONSES TO POVERTY

The development of responses poverty is obviously influenced directly by how the causes, consequences, nature and extent of poverty are recorded and interpreted.

The Goodbody report acknowledges such links by noting:

- At the level of income maintenance, government response to the identified poverty risk for the long-term unemployed through changes in the level and structure of social welfare payments.
- Within the context of a broader understanding of social exclusion and the 'multidimensionality' of poverty, the development of more holistic responses. For example, efforts to increase participation and promote an integrated approach to area-based development through the partnership model and, specifically, through LURDS.

Similarly, subsequent developments will influence the policy environment within which the next CPA Strategic Plan is framed. Some of the more important determining factors are:

2.3.1 AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL:

Increasing emphasis on relationship to the labour market and employment has already been noted as a key feature of EU thinking, evident in the Review of Economic and Social Cohesion, the Amsterdam Treaty, the Social Action Programme and revisions to the Structural Funds. Increasing focus on these as *causes* of poverty and exclusion will clearly have a direct influence on responses developed within the framework of the EU. There are already some indications of implications in this respect. For example:

- There are currently thirteen Community Initiatives. The proposal now is to reduce these to three. The one with the most relevance to poverty is described as being established to "develop and encourage ... new transnational cooperation to fight all sorts of discrimination and inequality *preventing access to employment*" (our italics).
- Implementation of ESF will be undertaken within the framework of annual 'national action plans' (NAPS!) for employment. While three of the five policy fields proposed ('promoting social exclusion', 'anticipating and facilitating economic and social change' and 'equal opportunities for men and women') imply a strategy beyond the confines of labour market measures, it is stressed that each must be pursued 'in line with the employment guidelines foreseen in the Amsterdam Treaty'. Furthermore, the draft regulation proposes 'a minimum level of investment' for activities within the latter two policy areas mentioned above.

- The Social Action Programme is seen by some as the Commission's way of 'testing the water'⁵ for a new Programme against poverty. A strong labour market orientation is again evident in proposals contained in this document. The three policy initiatives suggested are to do with: 'Jobs, Skills and Mobility', 'The Changing World of Work' and 'An Inclusive Society' (in that order). This is in marked contrast to the orientation of the Poverty Three Programme, based on multidimensionality, participation and partnership.

A further key development in the policy environment at European level is, of course, the establishment of European Monetary Union. A study currently being undertaken for the EAPN highlights a whole range of implications of EMU for policies designed to promote social inclusion⁶. The research to date has raised serious questions about individual countries' capacities to ensure non-discriminatory employment practices and policies; to guard against regressive taxation policies; and to prepare for the degree of labour mobility that could theoretically ensue. The inherent danger is seen as one where EMU members are forced to start a process of 'downward harmonisation' or a:

"...race to the bottom regarding their price and wage levels, social standards, and social security systems as a consequence of the reduced range of sovereign policy options". (EAPN, Nexus, op.cit.)

2.3.2 AT THE IRISH LEVEL

Again using the Goodbody report as a 'baseline', a number of developments in the Irish policy environment are important to acknowledge in assessing recent CPA achievements and planning new strategy. The most important of these are around:

- Developments in the peace process: notwithstanding inherent difficulties, the current environment is 'post-settlement', with the expectation that formal structures and procedures for cross-border co-operation will be established.
- Developments around the NAPS: in fact the Strategy was launched after the Goodbody review (April 1997), and is only now moving from the planning to first implementation phase.
- Significant changes in the nature and extent of EU funding for programmes and activities central to the work of the Agency. The government proposal to designate part of the country as Objective One status is obviously of paramount importance. Equally important, however, in whatever way the regional debate is resolved, is the question of mainstream Irish support for anti-poverty initiatives that will inevitably lose a European support base in the longer term.
- The question, currently on the Commission and Council of Ministers agenda, of how lessons from the experiences of partnership are utilised is also important. And the future of this model in Ireland will be undoubtedly shaped by the reform of local government structures and procedures.

5 See Brian Harvey: "European Hints of New Programme Against Poverty", Poverty Today September 1998.

6 EMU: Implications for Disadvantaged Groups, EAPN, Nexus (ongoing)

- Ongoing developments within the broader 'social partnership' model: particularly the extent to which the Partnership 2000 is succeeding in addressing agreed commitments on social inclusion and equality. The role of the Community Platform, and especially the establishment of the Anti-Poverty Networks, signifies a substantive change to the pre-1995 environment in this respect.
- The resolution of outstanding issues in relation to the Green Paper on the future of voluntary statutory relationships is also of obvious importance. Although these are due to be resolved by the middle of 1999, debate and discussion on the interpretation and implementation of proposals is likely to continue for a considerable period of time thereafter.

2.4 IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGES IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

This evaluation seeks to incorporate an understanding of these current trends, so that the more recent impact of the Agency can be assessed within a realistic context: but also so that decisions on the next Strategic Plan can be taken within the framework of an agreed policy scenario. *Some* of the important questions to be addressed in this respect are about:

- The role of the Agency in continuing to promote a more holistic paradigm of poverty and exclusion, while at the same time maximising the potential benefits of more narrowly defined labour market and employment initiatives on the part of the most poor and most excluded.
- The usefulness of setting more long-term targets that would allow progress to be measured on a whole range of indicators beyond income poverty (in the light of UN statistics on gender and educational inequality for instance). While targets in relation to employment and income are specific within the NAPS, for example, they are less so in relation to other indicators of social exclusion.
- Actively informing and promoting a poverty strategy that would allow for the continued support for the community and voluntary 'infrastructure' that has been successfully developed. The specific challenge is about an approach to mainstreaming activities that promote both the capacity to participate and the capacity to influence – within the inevitable environment of decreasing EU support for such actions.
- Developing all aspects of the Agency's work in a way that will enhance its capacity to support, advise upon and influence relevant activities that have a cross-border dimension. The challenge main challenge here will be about ensuring that poverty and social exclusion remain on the agenda of any structures that may be established as a result of the Agreement – and possibly about supporting and informing specific initiatives that may have a particular poverty or exclusion focus.

Some of these questions are relevant to a whole range of 'stakeholders', within the Agency and outside it. Others will have a specific relevance to particular functions and sections within the agency. Initial proposals on how these and other questions

should be pursued with which stakeholders are contained in Section 4 of this document.

As a general conclusion, however, it is worth emphasising that many of the more important developments within the operational environment are difficult to predict. Strategic activity during the next planning period will inevitably be carried through during a period of change. The developments that are the most difficult to predict are also, arguably, within some of the most important operational fields – certainly including the effects of lessening EU support in vital areas; changes to partnership and local government; and the future of the Belfast Agreement.

At the same time, the current Strategic Planning period has seen the introduction of far-reaching changes within the Agency itself. These are discussed in Section 3 (below): again using the Goodbody reporting period as a baseline.

SECTION 3: AUDIT OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INTERNAL AGENCY ENVIRONMENT

Using 1996 – and the beginning of the current Strategic Plan – as a baseline, the intention here is to document and review changes in the operation of the Agency itself, including:

- Changes in resource profile: including available personnel and resources.
- Discernible trends in the commitment of these resources. For example by development targets (category of disadvantaged benefiting from Agency support); by development theme (for example, health, education, research, etc.); by the nature of intervention (whether financial assistance, advice, capacity building, etc.). Trends in resource commitment are also important to analyse across the broader organisational categories: such as commitments to advising and influencing national policy, administering and maintaining the organisation itself, liaising with other agencies, evaluating performance, adding to the body of knowledge etc.
- Changes in procedures and structures: meaning the mechanisms through which the activities listed above are delivered.

Again, this is not intended as a comprehensive review. It is rather a framework within which some key developments are recorded⁷, and which can provide a context for analysis of evaluation findings presented in Section 4.

7 Drawn, at this stage, only from documentary sources – annual reports, reports to Board Performance Assessment Reports especially.

3.1 CHANGES IN RESOURCE PROFILE

The Goodbody report contains a profile of CPA personnel and resource trends from 1987 to 1995. During this period, the number of staff increased from 11 to 18; and income increased from £660,409 to £2,123,423. The report recommended the creation of four additional, permanent, posts. The Table below shows the changes in personnel numbers as a direct result of this, and also shows trends in total income since 1994.

Table 3.1: Summary of Staffing and Resource Trends (1995-1998)

Year	Posts	Total Income
1994	17	
1995	17	2,123,423
1996	17	2,107,500
1997	20	2,340,148
1998	20	2,322,690

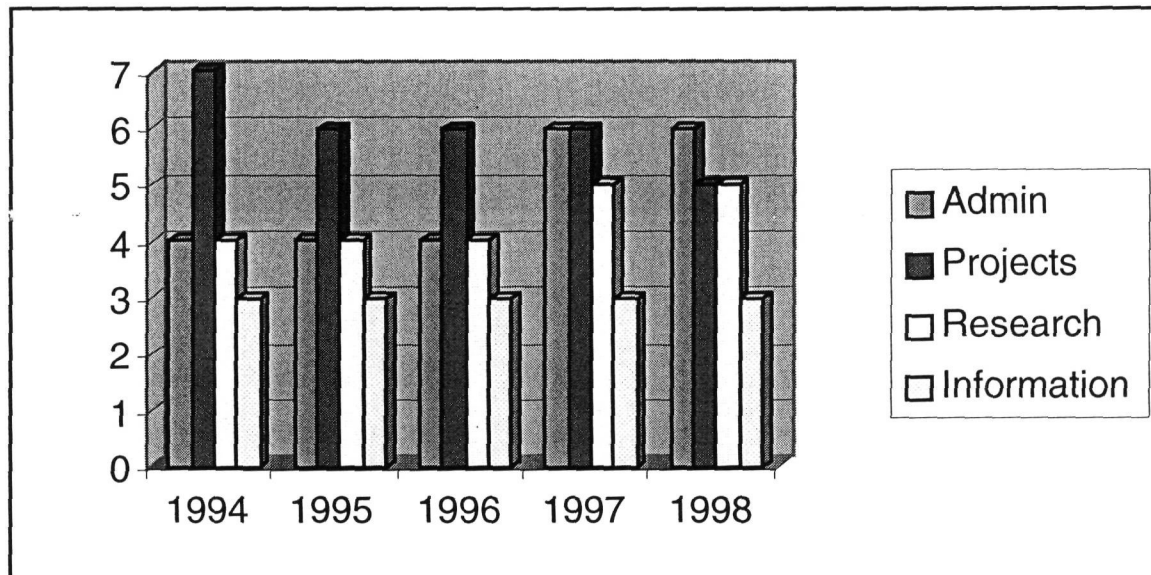
One of the permanent posts above is included on the basis of two part-time posts; and another is included on the basis of two job-share posts. They do not take into account two other posts that were created on a temporary contract basis.

Income (and related expenditure) has remained fairly constant for the last three years – with fluctuations relating mainly to staffing costs.

3.2 CHANGES IN THE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

Figure 3.1 below summarises changes in staff commitments to different areas of CPA activity since 1994.

Figure 3.1: Changes in Staff Numbers for Different Areas of Agency Activity (1994-1998)



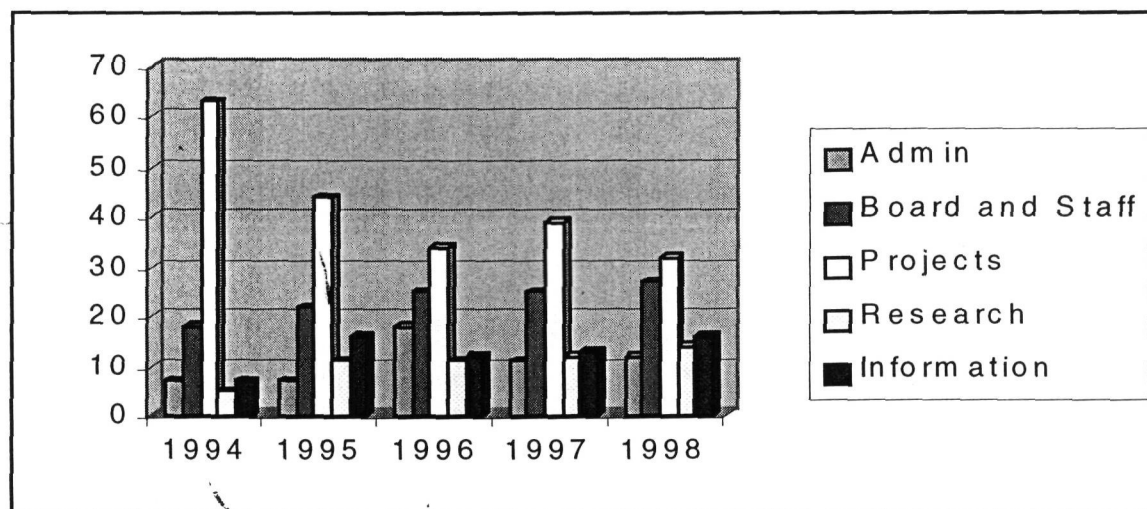
The current planning period (since 1995), therefore, has seen:

- The number of staff committed to the Information Section remaining constant at 3;
- Numbers of Research staff increasing from 4 to 5;
- A fall in the number of staff working in the Projects Section (6 to 5);
- The most significant increase in the case of Administration (where the staff complement increased from 4 to 6).

Figure 3.2 (overleaf) summarises the proportionate resource allocation to each Section of activity. It demonstrates, since 1995, an increase in the proportion of resources expended on all activities with the exception of:

- Expenditure on Project activities, which fell from 42% of total expenditure in 1995, to 32% in 1998.

Figure 3.2: Summary of Changes in Resource Commitments (1994:1998) - % of Total Annual Expenditure



Since the 1995 review, more emphasis has been placed on the Agency's policy advisory role (reflected in structural changes cited below). In terms of the commitment of resources, this has had implications across all Agency functions, rather than being restricted to a single function. For example, both the Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage and the more recent Drugs Policy Programme are examples of initiatives that incorporated the objective of informing national policy through local experience.

3.3 CHANGES IN PROCEDURES AND STRUCTURES

The current planning period has seen significant changes in internal CPA structures and procedures. These are summarised below.

3.3.1 CHANGES IN STRUCTURES AND 'INFRASTRUCTURE'

As part of the effort to strengthen the Agency's policy advisory role, new specialist Board, or Policy, Advisory Committees (PACs) were established in 1997. These provide expert external advice on:

- unemployment and educational disadvantage;
- community and local development; and
- tax and social welfare issues

Four staff Policy Action Teams (PATs) were also established to improve information exchange amongst different areas of activity; to identify policy issues and make policy proposals; and to assist in ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Further significant developments have been associated with the Agency's involvement in supporting the peace process. In organisational and structural terms this has meant:

- The development of a joint management arrangement for the delivery and implementation of the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (in collaboration with ADM Ltd.). This has entailed ongoing cooperation at staff level in the border counties, and participation on Local Advisory Committees.
- The formation of a joint committee (with ADM Ltd. and the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust) to deliver a cross-border community reconciliation measure.

A Board sub-committee on Finance and Personnel was established in 1996.

With regard to technical and physical infrastructure, it is also important to note that:

- The Agency moved premises in June 1996; and
- An on-line communications system has been designed and implemented.

3.3.2 PROCEDURAL CHANGES

Important changes have also taken place in operational procedures. The most significant of these were:

- Initiation of human resource development will lead to the adoption of a range of values, policies, procedures and entitlements for the Agency⁸.
- A new system of staff performance, evaluation and development was introduced in 1996.
- Increased attention was given to monitoring and evaluating progress towards the achievement of CPA Objectives and implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- Formalised flexitime working was introduced;
- A new post of 'Head of Organisational Management and Development' was created and filled.
- A new Executive Officer post was also created and filled⁹.

Table 3.2 (overleaf) summarises the most significant changes in structures and procedures during the current planning period.

8 "Human Resource Development Policy for the Combat Poverty Agency": Anne Connolly Consulting, October 1998

9 This does not include Research Officer post also created

Table 3.1: Summary of Infrastructural and Procedural Changes Internally (1995-1998)

Infrastructure	Procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Establishment of PATS; <input type="checkbox"/> Establishment of PACS; <input type="checkbox"/> Managers, Working Groups & Programme Meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Board Sub-committee on Finance & Personnel; <input type="checkbox"/> P&R Management; <input type="checkbox"/> P&R Sub-committees; <input type="checkbox"/> IT Strategy; <input type="checkbox"/> New Premises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> System to Monitor and Evaluate Strategic Plan and Work Programme; <input type="checkbox"/> Head of Organisational Management and Development; <input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility in Work Time. <input type="checkbox"/> Development of HRD Strategy;

It is clear, therefore, that changes in the external operational environment have been paralleled by significant procedural and structural changes within the CPA itself.

SECTION 4: RESULTS OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

Consultation with key stakeholders, as outlined in Section 1, was undertaken to establish:

- Direct outcomes of particular parts of the Agency's work over the last three years, as perceived by the different Stakeholders.
- Possible impacts of these on the wider environment.
- Perceived reasons for these outcomes – whether positive or negative.
- The implications of this for Agency policy, procedures, activities and structures in the future – again as perceived by various stakeholders.

Results from internal consultations are presented below under the five Objectives of the Combat Poverty Agency. Further sub-sections then present the results of consultations with working partners are wider concerns.

4.1 INTERNAL CPA CONSULTATIONS

4.1.1 OBJECTIVE 1: PROMOTING SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

In general terms (that is, taking into account feedback from all Sections of the Agency and from Board members) the most important *achievement* under this Objective is perceived to have been in the development and maintenance of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). While the development of NAPS has also been influenced by other external factors, the particular CPA contribution is seen as being, firstly, in maintaining momentum and 'keeping it alive'; and, secondly, in developing poverty-proofing mechanisms and procedures. Other significant achievements under Objective One were identified as:

- Considerable progress being made in 'dialogue with key interests' through the establishment and maintenance of Policy Advisory Committees.
- Production of the 'Child Poverty Calendar' and an increase in Agency capacity to use media effectively as important in pursuing public education goals.
- The 'Living in Ireland' survey as the most important contributor to building research infrastructure.

There was almost unanimous agreement amongst respondents on the barriers to achieving targets under Objective 1:

- Externally these were identified as a general 'lack of political will'; and a more general lack of awareness about the need to promote social solidarity – the latter

being attributed, to some extent, to the maintenance of negative or non-supportive stance by mainstream media.

- Being 'under-resourced' and 'under-staffed' were consistently seen as the principal internal barriers; although the absence of a 'strategic focus' and the clear establishment of priorities were seen as impacting negatively upon the Agency's capacity to effectively advise policy makers, contribute to the development of NAPS, and maintain dialogue with key interests.

Table 4.1 below summarises feedback from Board and Staff on the achievement of Objective One targets.

Table 4.1: Summary of Board and Staff Perceptions of Agency's Achievements in Promoting Social Solidarity

	Achievement	External Barrier	Internal Barrier
Advising Policy Makers	<input type="checkbox"/> Influencing NAPs <input type="checkbox"/> Influencing Public Policy Agenda	<input type="checkbox"/> Political Will and Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/> Time and Resources <input type="checkbox"/> Agreeing Priorities
Developing NAPs	<input type="checkbox"/> Keeping it Alive <input type="checkbox"/> Poverty Proofing	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Commitment/ Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Time and Resources <input type="checkbox"/> Space and Strategic Focus
Dialogue with Key Interests	<input type="checkbox"/> Establishment of PACs	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of clear/agreed Agenda	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus and Priority
Public Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Child Poverty Calendar <input type="checkbox"/> Media Work	<input type="checkbox"/> Negative Image (Media)	<input type="checkbox"/> Demands on Staff
Research Infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/> Living in Ireland Survey		<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Resources
Overall Objective 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining NAPs	<input type="checkbox"/> Absence of Political Will	<input type="checkbox"/> Under-Resourced and Under-Staffed

4.1.2 ADDRESSING THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

There was universal agreement that the Agency had achieved more under the second goal of this Objective ('Addressing Educational Disadvantage') than the first ('Tackling Long-term Unemployment').

In tackling long-term unemployment, research work undertaken on circumstances of people aged 18 to 21 years was seen as the most significant Agency contribution. However, real progress has been hampered by the inability to 'find a niche' within the unemployment debate; and by a lack of 'inhouse' Agency expertise on longterm

unemployment. The need to develop a relevant and current 'poverty' perspective on LTU is even more important in the light of the changing EU policy environment (documented in Section 2).

The Education Disadvantage Demonstration Programme was singled out by most as the most important Agency contribution to addressing the causes of poverty. Perceived as especially important was the progress made in influencing Department of Education policy. Our direct consultations with participants in the Programme show that positive perception is shared by them. The most important achievement of the Programme to date, as expressed by participants, is the bringing together of various interests at local level – and the realisation amongst these actors of the benefit and necessity of maintaining this level of co-operation, to both improve service delivery and to positively influence policy.

The greatest potential barrier, or threat, to future progress was seen by Programme participants as the danger of the necessary support infrastructure not being provided. In this context, the need for the CPA to provide support and policy analysis was especially highlighted; as was the fact that this might require very specific 'inhouse' expertise to successfully move local results to the level of national policy. Lack of 'time and resources' was identified by CPA Board and Staff as the most significant barrier; but several also pointed to very wide range of policy interests involved. The very broad 'spectrum of stakeholders' means that the challenge of addressing the causes of poverty in education requires a capacity to influence policy beyond the specific educational dimension.

Table 4.2 below summarises internal feedback on achievements under Objective Two.

Table 4.2: Summary of Board and Staff Perceptions of Agency's Achievements in Addressing the Causes of Poverty

	Achievement		External Barrier		Internal Barrier	
Tackling LongTerm Unemployment	<input type="checkbox"/>	18-21 year-olds Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	'Finding a Niche'	<input type="checkbox"/>	Clear Focus of LTU Expertise
Addressing Educational Disadvantage	<input type="checkbox"/>	Educational Disadvantage Demonstration Programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	Spectrum of Stakeholder Interests	<input type="checkbox"/>	Time and Resources
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Influencing Dept. Education Policy				

4.1.3 ADDRESSING THE CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY

The most significant achievement under this Objective, as identified by internal stakeholders, was within the goal of 'empowering the excluded'. However, due to resource constraints, much time is spent 'maintaining a base' in this respect – that is

ensuring that contacts and working relationships are maintained with the range of interest groups representing various aspects of exclusion.

Support to the Community Development Programme (CDP) was viewed as an important element of this work, as was the development of resource materials for the community and voluntary sector. However, 'community development work' in general, and work within the CDP in particular, were seen by some as being impeded by a lack of clarity about what the exact role of the Agency should be.

This, combined with the pressure of maintaining the existing workload, meant that it has been difficult to develop a longer-term strategic approach to 'empowering the excluded'. Difficulties in developing a long term strategic approach were also acknowledged as a barrier to effectively 'supporting the peace process' – although in this case it was mainly attributed to the pressure to allocate programme resources in a short period of time.

Research undertaken in collaboration with the Howard Foundation on the quality of life in local authority estates– and the contribution of this to the policy debate - was the most frequently cited achievement in terms of 'addressing the spatial dimensions of poverty'. But contextual uncertainty (especially in relation to probable regional and local government changes discussed in Section 2) was seen as the principal barrier in this respect.

Table 4.3 below summarises internal feedback on achievements under Objective Three.

Table 4.3: Summary of Board and Staff Perceptions of Agency's Achievements in Addressing the Consequences of Poverty

Achievement		External Barrier		Internal Barrier	
Empowering the Excluded	<input type="checkbox"/> Support to CDP	<input type="checkbox"/> Clarification of Role in CDP		<input type="checkbox"/> Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Clarity of Role
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resource Materials				
Addressing Spatial Dimensions	<input type="checkbox"/> Contribution of Research to Policy Debate – Howard Study	<input type="checkbox"/> Contextual Uncertainty (Regionalisation & Local Govt.)		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Supporting the Peace Process	<input type="checkbox"/> P&R Programme	<input type="checkbox"/> Pressures to Spend - Lack of time to Strategise		<input type="checkbox"/> Effective Links: Dublin & Monaghan	
Overall Objective 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 'Maintaining the Base'	<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty in taking long-term Strategic Approach		<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty in taking long-term Strategic Approach	

4.1.4 REDUCING POVERTY

The Two goals under Objective 4 for the CPA are about 'Improving the Social Welfare System and 'Promoting Redistribution and Tax Reform'.

There were markedly fewer 'achievements' acknowledged by Board and staff under these headings. In fact, as Table 4.4 overleaf indicates, the most important activities identified related to research undertaken, and contribution to debate – rather than to any discernible changes to the tax or welfare systems as a result of CPA intervention.

The most formidable barrier to be identified in both these cases was government reluctance to pursue a more equitable strategy.

However, the fact that the Agency lacked specific economic expertise was seen by several people as an important barrier to the achievement of both parts of Objective 4. Related to this is the need, cited by two respondents, for a current and up-to-date review of the Social Welfare system.

Table 4.4 below summarises internal feedback on achievements under Objective Four.

Table 4.4: Summary of Board and Staff Perceptions of Agency's Achievements in Reducing Poverty

Achievement			External Barrier			Internal Barrier		
Improving Social Welfare System	<input type="checkbox"/>	Women & Poverty Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reluctance of Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lacking Economic Expertise		
			<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of Current Review				
Promoting Redistribution and Tax Reform	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keeping Low Income Households high on Agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>	Government Orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lacking Economic Expertise		

4.1.5 DEVELOPING THE AGENCY

Some of the important developments under this Objective have already been noted in Section 3.

As Table 4.5 overleaf shows, there was widespread acknowledgement of the positive achievements associated with the creation of new posts, moving to new premises, upgrading the Agency's IT capacity, staff training, the Human Resource Development programme, flexitime, and the establishment of Policy Action Committees.

However, with regard to the quality of services developed by the Agency, the most frequent mention was made of:

- An increase in the quality of the Agency's written output – although this had also increased the work intensity required, and the resources available were not sufficient to meet existing demand.
- Higher standards in the development and delivery of library services, with the mismatch between available resources and demand also being cited in this respect.

In addition to the PACs, several respondents also referred to the retention of the Board Chairperson for a second term as an important facilitative factor in the 'efficient use of Board and external members'. Respondents in this case included both Staff and Board members.

The most important external barriers in relation to achievement of Objective 5 were seen as lack of resources and time (for staff development or in relation to the time people can commit in a voluntary capacity). Inflexibility in staffing approvals was also cited as an external barrier.

Internally, the need for continued work on staff development/training, the role of administrative staff, and standardisation of the IT system were identified.

Table 4.5: Summary of Board and Staff Perceptions of Agency's Achievements in Reducing Poverty

Achievement		External Barrier		Internal Barrier
Strengthen/ Develop Administration Support Structures	<input type="checkbox"/> New Posts <input type="checkbox"/> Flexi-time <input type="checkbox"/> Premises	<input type="checkbox"/> Inflexibility in Staffing Approvals	<input type="checkbox"/> Recognising & Accommodating Admin Staff role	
Strengthen/ Develop Capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Successful Upgrading <input type="checkbox"/> IT	<input type="checkbox"/> Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of follow-up training <input type="checkbox"/> Standardisation of system	
Skills/ Resources of Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> HRD Process <input type="checkbox"/> Training	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of resources for Staff Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of follow through on Staff Development	
High Quality Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased Quality of Written Output <input type="checkbox"/> Library	<input type="checkbox"/> High Demand in relation to Resources Available	<input type="checkbox"/> Work Intensive	
Efficient use of Board & External Members	<input type="checkbox"/> PACs <input type="checkbox"/> Retention of Board Chair	<input type="checkbox"/> Time people can contribute voluntarily	<input type="checkbox"/> Limits on Staff time to Service	

4.1.6 FUNCTIONING OF CPA BOARD

Additional feedback was sought on the functioning of the Board during the current strategic planning period, through consultation with the Board Chairperson and Board Members.

Board Members were asked to complete a short questionnaire aimed at ascertaining their views about the advantages and disadvantages of current structures and procedures.

The most frequently cited advantages of the current Board system, as shown in Table 4.6 overleaf, were in relation to breadth of interests and expertise represented.

Also perceived as important was the positive contribution made by staff to the decision-making process – through the provision of support, assistance or relevant skills.

Table 4.6: Functioning of Board (Structures & Procedures) – Advantages As Perceived by Current Members.

Representation of Appropriate Expertise and Interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Range of different views/approaches aids discussion and exchange of information. (X) ➤ Good mix of interests and expertise currently. (XX) ➤ Breadth of representation – private sector view in with public, voluntary/community. (X)
'Turnover' or Cycle of Representation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It's OK to keep some people and to bring in new people. (X) ➤ Ensures continuity. (XX)
Assistance or Supports to Decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Invaluable and very impressive quality and level of skills from staff at Board meetings. (XXX)
'Distribution' of Decision-making (i.e. at Board and sub-structure levels).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Allows members to focus/contribute more intensely on some issues/tasks. (X)
Participation and Contribution by Board Members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Meetings are well prepared and chaired. (X) ➤ Reasonably balanced. (X)

X Denotes mention by one Respondent

While the current 'mix' of interests represented was seen as an asset, however, some disadvantages were also associated with a broad representation of expertise and interests. As Table 4.7 overleaf indicates, some saw that an 'over-reliance' on specific areas of expertise can, on the one hand, undermine the contribution from more practical or broadly-

based experience; on the other hand, it can in some important areas become neglected due to lack of representation of specific expertise in that area.

It is also clear from responses that the decision-making process is seen as one that requires a significant amount of associated work – mainly related to the breadth of policy and strategic areas covered, and to the volume of background reading needed. However, there was an acknowledgement that the efficiency and quality of decision-making had improved over this planning period, due mainly to the quality of staff support and to the delegation of some work to sub-committees.

There was also some acknowledgement of the potential for role confusion – related to some extent to the time needed for new members to ‘integrate’; but also to the breadth of policy areas covered. The latter point is likely to have increased in importance given the expansion of the Agency’s work into wider policy areas over the last three to four years; and is likely to increase even more given trends in the operational environment discussed in Section 2.

Table 4.7: Functioning of Board: (Structures & Procedures) – Disadvantages As Perceived by Current Members.

Representation of Appropriate Expertise and Interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Takes a while to learn what different interests there are. (X) ➤ Risk that areas with no ‘expert’ on board get neglected. (X) ➤ Over-emphasis on Expert views – sometimes common sense reaction doesn’t get through. (X) ➤ Role confusion. (X) ➤ Lack of feedback/reaction from people/groups (X)
‘Turnover’ or Cycle of Representation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If you miss the July meeting it looks like a whole new board, as this meeting often clashes with other deadlines, etc. (X). ➤ Can inhibit sense of Team. (X) ➤ Can take a while for new members to become familiar and fully integrate. (XX)
Assistance or Supports to Decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sometimes the sheer volumes of material and time to read it is a problem. (X) ➤ Need to ensure papers are circulated sufficiently in advance for proper consideration. (X) ➤ Heavy workload on staff. (X) ➤ Lack of knowledge. (X)
‘Distribution’ of Decision-making (i.e. at Board and sub-structure levels).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of clarity about role. (X) ➤ Too wide a remit for PACs, especially Educational Disadvantage and L.T. Unemployment. (X)
Participation and Contribution by Board Members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It takes a little while to be confident about participation at the beginning... Also, not possible to know about all issues. (X) ➤ Difficulty in going into depth due to wide range of issues and sometimes short time available for responding. (x)

X Denotes mention by one Respondent

4.1.8 SUMMARY OF INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Results of the internal consultation on achievements and barriers show a significant degree of consistency amongst different Sections of the Agency, and amongst Board members. Overall, the most important Agency achievements were seen as being in:

- Supporting and implementing the National Anti-Poverty Campaign
- Establishing and supporting the Educational Disadvantage Demonstration Programme
- Completion of research on women and poverty, unemployment and 18-21 year olds, and the spatial dimensions of poverty.
- Maintaining working relationships with wide spectrum of groups in the community/voluntary sector.
- Operationalizing Policy Action Committees in a way that has contributed positively to the efficient use of Board and external members as resources, as well as broadening and deepening dialogue with key interests.
- Increasing the quality and effectiveness of written outputs, library service provision and use of the media.

Less progress has been acknowledged in:

- Tackling long term unemployment
- Improving the Social Welfare system
- Promoting redistribution and tax reform

There is also widespread agreement on the lack of resources as the principal barrier to the achievement of aims. A situation exists where most available time and resources are being invested in maintaining the existing level of activity; and less in longer term strategies, analysis or planning.

Related to this is the difficulty cited, for some areas of the work, in developing a focus of establishing priorities (noted especially in work addressing long term unemployment, promoting dialogue with key interests and empowering the excluded)

The absence of specific in-house expertise in macro-economics and long-term unemployment was also identified as a barrier (in relation to Objectives 2 and 4)

Government orientation and lack of political will remains an obstacle to the achievement of CPA objectives in the view of most internal stakeholders – impacting negatively especially upon the provision of advice to policy makers, efforts to improve the social welfare system and to promote redistribution in society.

4.2 CONSULTATION WITH WORKING PARTNERS

Results of consultations with selected 'Working Partners' are summarised below, under relevant CPA Objectives.

4.2.1 OBJECTIVE 1: PROMOTING SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Almost all people consulted shared the view of internal stakeholders in respect of the Agency's role in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. This was seen as being positive.

However, one respondent did point to the need for more clarity about the precise Agency role in the development of NAPS.

The other main areas of achievement in relation to Objective 1 emerged as:

- A broadening of the Agency's sphere of influence in relation to policy influence and dialogue. There was a recognition, related to NAPS to a large extent, of the CPA becoming actively engaged in policy debate beyond the realm of social welfare policy.
- A noticeably higher public profile (linked by one respondent to an increased 'professionalisation' of the Agency's public image).
- Related to this is the assessment (made by two respondent organisations) that the ESRI/CPA working relationship has become more effective during the current plan period. Success has been attributed to a combination of pursuing relevant research topics *and* communicating the results in a timely and professional manner. The ESRI themselves acknowledge the mutual benefits associated with the relationship.

On the negative side, one respondent felt strongly that much more needed to be done by the Agency in the area of advising policy-makers. The criticism here was about the need for more attention to be paid to the 'dynamics' of decision-making at government level; and to design appropriate and timely responses with this in mind.

4.2.2 ADDRESSING THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

As was the case in internal Agency consultations, progress in tackling longterm unemployment was not identified by working partners as an area of Agency achievement; but the Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage was singled out by one respondent as a particularly important area of impact.

4.2.3 ADDRESSING THE CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY

The most significant impacts to be identified by working partners under this Objective were in relation to empowering the excluded; and to supporting the peace process.

Positive assessments regarding the former ('empowering the excluded') were about the Agency's role in:

- Providing a strategic approach and analysis in relation to poverty. This allowed particular projects and programmes to strategize beyond a short-term horizon (Anti-poverty networks); and to make the links between individual actions and a more programmatic approach (NIVT, P&R, IFI).
- Encouraging innovative approaches to community-based activity; and producing resources important to the continuation of that activity (ADM).
- Providing a link between local activity (or lessons from anti-poverty work in practice) and representation of social exclusion interests at the level of national policy formation (NESC, ADM, Anti-poverty Networks).

One respondent pointed to the lack of clarity in relation to the Agency's role in the Community Development Programme – a concern echoed by internal Agency respondents.

Feedback from all three 'cross-border' sources was particularly positive in terms of the Agency's perceived impact on the peace process. Again, the capacity to bring a 'strategic approach' to projects and decision-making fora was perceived to be especially relevant. The importance of the Agency's role in 'keeping social exclusion on the peace agenda' was stressed by two respondents, particularly since no equivalent Agency exists for the North.

4.2.4 REDUCING POVERTY

Feedback from working partners on Objective 4 fairly much mirrored the assessment made by internal respondents. This was not highlighted as an important area of impact; although two respondents did acknowledge the knock-on effects of a more successful Agency publicity strategy.

More recent research has shown that overall public awareness of poverty appears to have increased; and that people are more favourable towards prioritising poverty as an issue for policy¹⁰. The Agency can certainly take credit for at least some of these developments. But it is difficult (and certainly early) to make links between this and any real interventions that reduce levels of poverty

4.2.5 SUMMARY OF WORKING PARTNER FEEDBACK

It is clear that the Agency's closest working partners perceive its most important impacts to have been in contribution to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, building the community and voluntary sector, producing and 'marketing' research and information, providing a strategic understanding and approach, and positively supporting the peace process.

Weaknesses identified were almost exclusively confined to relationships with government – especially in relation to clarification of roles and functions re the NAPS, the CDP and the general approach to policy advice.

Table 4.8 (below) summarises some of the principal points made by working partners.

10 'Public Perceptions of Poverty' by Research and Evaluation Services, January 1999

Table 4.8: Summary of 'Working Partner' Responses

- ❑ *DSCFA*: Lack of clarity over role re CDP, NAPS involvement, policy influence and support for networks. Positive and effective relationship with ESRI; need for consideration of the 'dynamics' of policy influence.
- ❑ *ADM*: Positive Influence on Representation of Disadvantaged Interests in Local Development (Resource Provision and Strategic Advice); Development of Innovative Approaches; Educational Disadvantage Demonstration Programme.
- ❑ *ESRI*: Importance of Programmatic Approach to Research (Reflecting Complexity and Relevance of Topics); Mutual Benefits; positive influence on NAPS.
- ❑ *NESC*: Importance of ESRI/CPA Links re Research Agenda; Linking the Levels of Partnership Involvement for Community/Voluntary Sector.
- ❑ *NIVT*: Giving Added Policy Dimension to Grant-giving role (Good Practice etc); 'Keeps Southern Issues on the Agenda'; Social Inclusion Core to Peace.
- ❑ *P&R*: Strategic Experience Important in Deepening Discussion, Shaping Projects (Pre-development Work), and Considering Follow-on.
- ❑ *IFI* (Communities in Action): Important Input to Project Selection; Coherent and Strategic Approach to Poverty; Mutual Benefits of Achievements in North and South.
- ❑ *Anti-Poverty Networks*: Continued support for development of community/voluntary sector; Positive influence on NAPS

4.3 CONSULTATION WITH WIDER CONCERNS

This Section summarises results from the survey of 'wider concerns', or stakeholders with whom the Agency has had less formalised and more sporadic contact during the current planning period.

4.3.1 NATURE OF CONTACT OR WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AGENCY

Before going on to look at the assessment of CPA impact, it is important to firstly acknowledge the working relationship between the various respondents and the Agency – especially how these differ for the various sectoral interests.

Figure 4.1 below shows that most contact from statutory respondents would have been through participation in Agency-organised events or activities. Those who had been in receipt of Agency grants or funding were obviously not Government Departments. Here the definition of statutory extended to publicly instituted non-voluntary agencies or programmes - for example Aontas or the Youthstart Programme (see Table 1.1 for categorisation). Half said they used the Agency as a source of information and advice; with a lesser number saying they actually liaised on particular areas of policy.

Figure 4.1: Nature of Relationship between Statutory Respondents and the CPA (%)

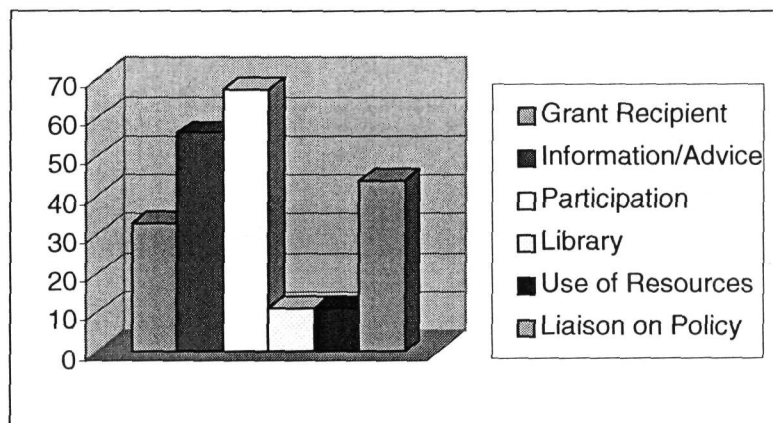
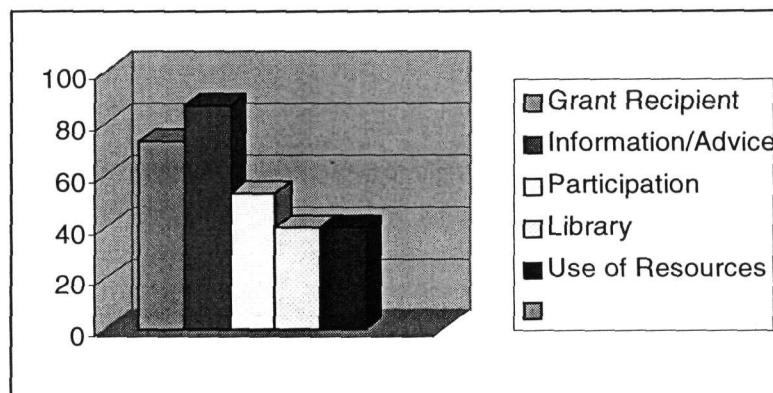


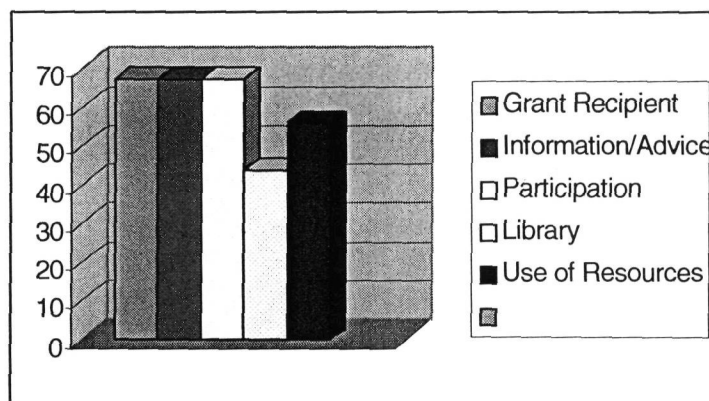
Figure 4.2 (below) shows that voluntary organisations were more likely to make use of resources provided by the Agency; but that seeking information and/or advice was the most common reason for contact. None of these agencies reported liaison with the CPA on policy-related matters.

Figure 4.2: Nature of Relationship between Voluntary Group Respondents and the CPA (%)



Community or area-based groups, on the other hand, had a much broader range of contact with the Agency (across a spectrum of functions), shown in Figure 4.3 below. Again, no community groups identified 'policy liaison' as a reason for contact with the Agency. However, as with respondents from the broader voluntary sector, it is likely that some part of the 'information and advice' contact would have been related to policy matters. This specific question may be worth pursuing, and monitoring, in future evaluation exercises.

Figure 4.3: Nature of Relationship between Community Group Respondents and the CPA (%)



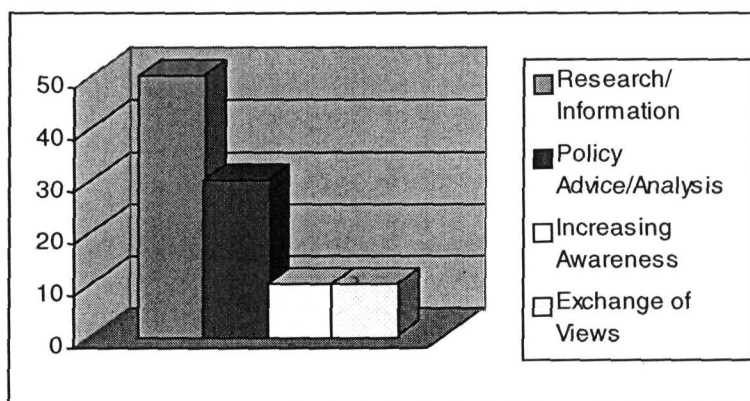
4.3.2 MOST IMPORTANT PERCEIVED BENEFIT FROM CPA CONTACT

All respondents were asked an open-ended question about what they perceived to be the most important benefits or advantages associated with their contact with the CPA. Answers were subsequently grouped under broad category headings represented in the Charts below.

Less than 30% of statutory agencies responding cited benefits to do with policy advice or analysis as being the most important in their CPA contacts over the planning period (Figure 4.4 below).

Comparatively more value was placed on 'information provided' or 'research produced' by the Agency by these respondents.

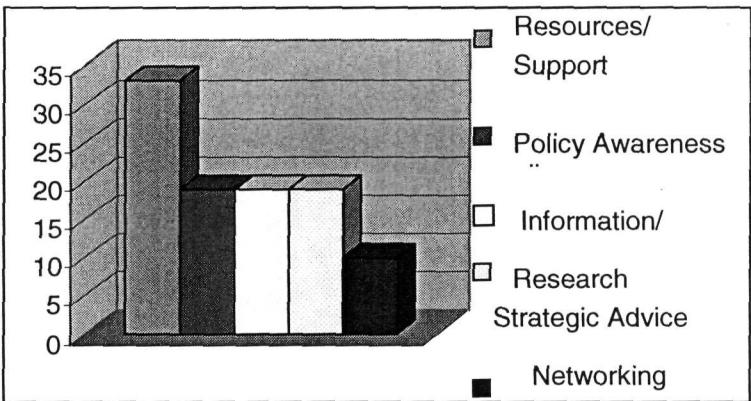
Figure 4.4: Most Important Benefit from CPA Contacts – Statutory Respondents (%)



Only one statutory agency responding cited ‘increasing awareness’ as the most important benefit.

Voluntary agencies, on the other hand, were more likely to place value on the Agency’s role in providing them with advice and ongoing support (Figure 4.5 below).

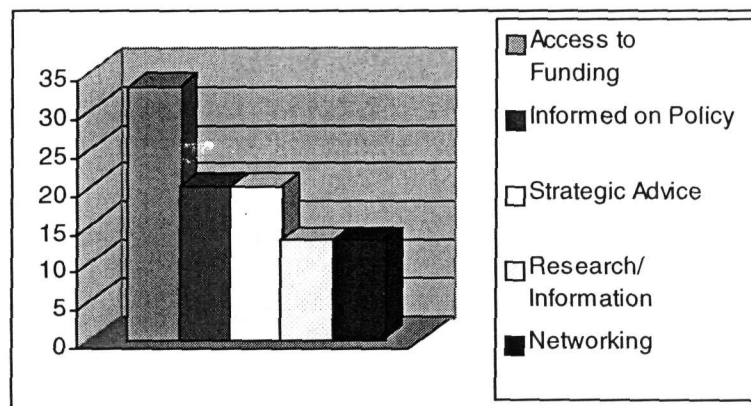
Figure 4.5: Most Important Benefit from CPA Contacts – Voluntary Respondents (%)



It is significant that the most important benefit identified by community-based respondents was ‘access to funding’ (Figure 4.6 overleaf). In all these responses (30% of the total) there was an acknowledgement that funding would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to access elsewhere.

Community groups placed a similar emphasis to voluntary groups on the benefit gained from Agency contact in relation to accessing information on policy developments, and in accessing strategic advice and support. In other words, while community and voluntary groups did not specifically approach the agency on policy-related issues, many of them nevertheless acknowledged a greater awareness of policy as being a key benefit of their ongoing contact.

Figure 4.6: Most Important Benefit from CPA Contacts – Community Sector Respondents (%)

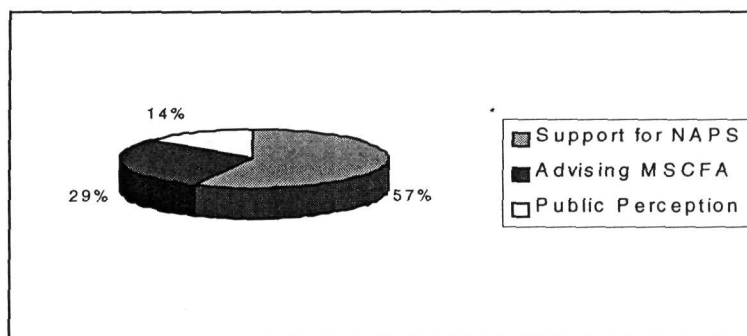


4.3.3 MOST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES FOR NEXT PLANNING PERIOD (AS IDENTIFIED BY 'WIDER CONCERNS')

In articulating what they saw as the most important priorities for the next planning period, there were again differences of emphasis amongst statutory, voluntary and community-based respondents.

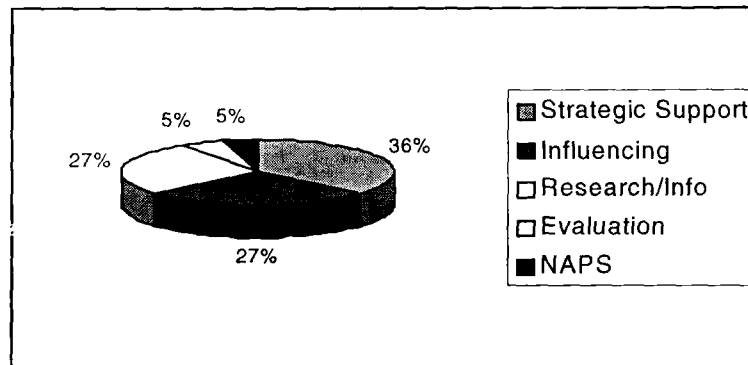
Figure 4.7 (overleaf) shows that statutory respondents tended to place more emphasis on Agency support for the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, and for advising the Minister for Social Community and Family Affairs.

Figure 4.7: Statutory Priorities Identified for Next Planning Period



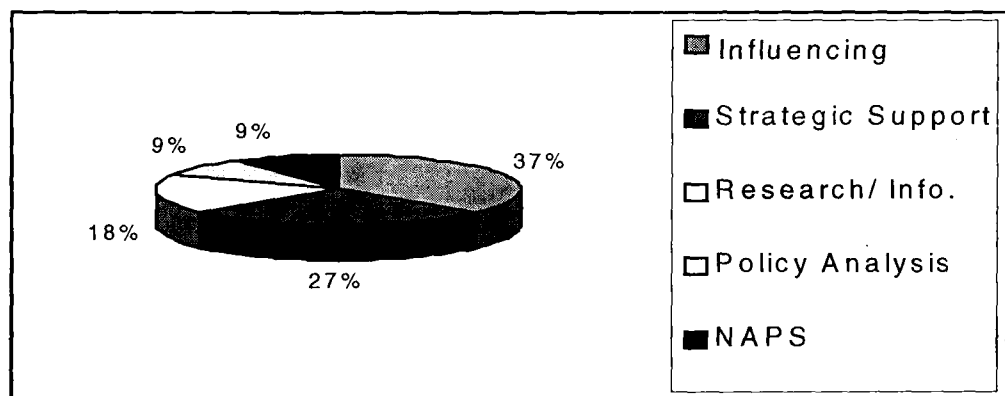
While some voluntary organisation also identified NAPS as a priority, a greater number emphasised the need for the Agency to continue providing strategic support to organisations and programmes; and to influence policy at a broader level (Figure 4.8 below).

Figure 4.8: Voluntary Organisation Priorities Identified for Next Planning Period



The latter area of concern (influencing policy) was identified by Community-based groups as the most important future priority for the Agency (Figure 4.9 below) – with the need for ongoing strategic support also being emphasised.

Figure 4.9: Community Group Priorities Identified for Next Planning Period



Both community-based and voluntary groups (18% and 27% respectively) identified research and/or information provision as high priorities for the next planning period.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The analysis contained in Section 2 and 3, confirmed by subsequent stakeholder consultations, points to the current planning period as one typified by very significant and ongoing changes in the Agency's external and internal operational environment.

Within this context, there is agreement amongst all stakeholders that the most significant areas of impact for the Agency over the last three-to-four years have been in:

- Developing and maintaining the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- Facilitating the debate on equality and the need for inclusion at a national level – raising public profile.
- Supporting and promoting the Community/Voluntary Sector.
- Supporting the Peace Process.

The most important facilitative factors in these achievements have been:

- The development of new structures to ensure broad policy focus.
- Particular initiatives that combined all Agency functions (the Educational Disadvantage Demonstration Programme was identified in this context by a range of both internal and external respondents; the Drugs Policy grants Scheme was identified as being of strategic importance by a number of internal respondents.)
- Dynamism and commitment at Board and Staff levels.
- "A foot in both camps": in the sense that the maintenance of a close working relationship with the community and voluntary sector has strengthened the legitimacy of interventions at the level of national policy debate; and legitimacy at the national level has in turn added weight to the community/voluntary sector itself.

Progress in achieving Objectives 2 and 4 is less apparent; and the main reasons for this are related to:

- A very clear mismatch between resources available to the Agency and the scale of the Objectives overall. As well as limiting the amount of progress that can be made in relation to particular targets, lack of resources also severely limits the extent to which the Agency can develop a longer-term strategic approach – as opposed to merely maintaining current levels of activity and choosing very selectively the limited areas of work where expansion can take place. This is more apparent within the Projects and Information Sections.

- The specific absence of ‘inhouse’ expertise in a number of key areas: identified particularly in the fields of longterm unemployment, taxation and school-based education¹¹.
- Lack of clarity over the precise role and function of the Agency with regard to some of its most important engagements – notably NAPS and the Community Development Programme. This, and other questions raised in the discussion about policy influence, highlights the need to plan for clear and measurable procedures and structures governing the ongoing relationship between the CPA and the DCSFA..
- Prevailing question marks over the political will to seriously tackle the issue of poverty at the national level.

Bearing these limitations in mind, the impact of the Agency’s work in the last three years has been substantial – consistently verified by a wide range of stakeholders. It is also worth noting the very significant levels of goodwill towards the CPA itself, and an almost universal acknowledgement of the unique contribution being made.

However, this evaluation (by definition a ‘stakeholder’ evaluation) depended heavily on consultations with interest groupings that have had ongoing dealings with the Agency. One approach worth considering for the future (to get a more broadly representative feedback) would be to establish a wider panel or observatory that could be approached periodically for perceptions and interpretations of CPA outputs and impacts.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR NEXT STRATEGIC PLANNING PERIOD

Feedback from different stakeholders on priorities for the next strategic planning period are summarised in Annexes 1 and 2. The most important general areas of agreement are about:

Building on Current Achievements; especially in relation to:

- NAPS, and the necessity to facilitate implementation and monitoring
- Educational disadvantage, building on the work being undertaken at Programme level and translating lessons learned into practical policy options.
- Child Poverty
- National Networks, especially focussing on the potential to develop formal linkages between the ‘exclusion constituency’ within communities and its representation at national decision-making and planning level. The possibility of involving constituent organisations in a programme of economic education could be considered. This could have the benefit of strengthening consensus amongst

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various interest groups around key budgetary questions; and of strengthening the capacity of representative groupings to present and argue the positions adopted.

- Community Development

Creating Space for Developing New Strategies / Positions; especially in relation to:

- Long Term Unemployment
- Tax Reform / Redistribution
- Housing
- Relationship between Community/Voluntary Sector and the State
- Immigration and new poverty

These areas are typified by change (often unpredictable) within the operational environment, and the role of the Agency in developing strategic analysis and promoting common understandings will be important in the early stages of the plan.

Maintaining and Building Intra-Agency Co-operation; especially concentrating on:

- Developing a capacity to respond in line with new understandings
- Prioritising and focusing

In general terms, there is a strong case to be made for building upon the achievements already made in linking practice to policy. Consideration should be given to create a more formally structured policy function within the Agency. This would mirror what is already provided through the PACs, and would give a practical focus for bringing forward all policy-related implications of Agency activities and interventions. This is justified on several fronts, including:

- The expressed needs of people consulted within the community and voluntary sector;
- Statutory feedback on the need for practical policy statements.
- The well established (and arguably unique) strengths of the Agency with regard to contextual analysis;
- The unique position of the CPA at the interface between sectoral representation/experiences and government;
- The changing operational environment itself: in that an ongoing capacity to interpret contextual shifts will become more necessary

We suggest that a separate policy post should be created – linking to all Sections and to the PACs. In this way, the experience and lessons from more innovative actions can be incorporated into a more formal policy strategy. A more formal

'service' on 'policy strategy' could also be offered to groups benefiting from grants to undertake research, evaluation or local actions.

It is difficult to see how significant progress can be made on any of these fronts in the absence of additional resources. We would see the immediate need for an increase in resources that could allow for the appointment of suitable personnel to address:

- The general policy development area described above;
- The links between longterm unemployment and social exclusion – in both the policy and innovatory action contexts;
- The macro-economic issues relevant to a comprehensive review of the social welfare and taxation system.

5.3 FRAMEWORK FOR ONGOING EVALUATION

Some attention was also given, as part of this evaluation exercise, to future evaluation, and specifically how this could be built into ongoing activities. Proposals in this respect are contained in Appendix 2.

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF STAFF AND BOARD ASSESSMENTS OF PRIORITIES FOR NEXT STRATEGIC PLAN

Priorities Identified by Staff - Objective 1

	Future priority
Advising Policy Makers	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional Expertise (Economic) <input type="checkbox"/> Poverty proofing
Developing NAPs	<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure Political Commitment <input type="checkbox"/> Public Consciousness <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & Evaluation
Dialogue with Key Interests	<input type="checkbox"/> Build Constituency/ Forum <input type="checkbox"/> Increase negotiation capacity
Public Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Programmatic and Creative Approach
Research Infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/> Further links with External Research <input type="checkbox"/> More Qualitative Work
Overall Objective 1	<input type="checkbox"/> NAPS & public perceptions

Priorities Identified by Staff - Objective 2

Future priority

Tackling Long-Term Unemployment

- ☐ Identifying specific 'niche'/policy/ strategic position

Addressing Educational Disadvantage

- ☐ Achieving Balance: women/children/youth/ adults
 - ☐ Transferring lessons to Policy
-

Priorities Identified by Staff - Objective 3

Future priority

Empowering the Excluded

- ☐ Identify/Redefine CPA role in Community Development
- ☐ Support participatory democracy strategies
- ☐ Transfer lessons to policy

Addressing Spatial Dimensions

- ☐ Motivate Local Govt./ Authorities
- ☐ Addressing regional isolation
- ☐ Transfer lessons to policy

Supporting the Peace Process

- ☐ Transfer Lessons to Policy
 - ☐ Building social exclusion work on cross-border basis
-

Priorities Identified by Staff - Objective 4

Future priority	
Improving Social Welfare System	<div><input type="checkbox"/> Reviewing and monitoring Welfare Policy directions</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> Highlighting Needs/ Responsibilities</div>
Promoting Redistribution & Tax Reform	<div><input type="checkbox"/> Highlighting Needs/ Responsibilities</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> Developing Alternative Strategies</div>

Priorities Identified by Staff - Objective 5

Future Priorities	
Strengthen/Dev Admin. Support Structures	<input type="checkbox"/> Organisational Structure/ Pinning of Admin Section <input type="checkbox"/> Integration of Administration and other sections <input type="checkbox"/> More staff
Strengthen/Dev IT Capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Update skills
Skills/Resources of Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Implement HRD Recommendations <input type="checkbox"/> Additional Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic targets
High Quality Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Improve customer service standards
Efficient use of Board & External Members	<input type="checkbox"/> Continue to develop means of servicing Board

APPENDIX 2: COMMENTS ON FUTURE OPTIONS FOR ONGOING MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR THE AGENCY

The Table below is based from extracts from internal monitoring reports for 1996 and 1997. While these reports allowed for distinction to be made between 'outputs', 'outcomes' and 'impacts', the Table here draws out only the comments recorded as 'impacts'.

1. SUMMARY OF 'IMPACTS' RECORDED UNDER EACH OBJECTIVE AND ACTION HEADING

OBJECTIVE	1996	1997
➤ Promoting Social Solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Some Tax & Welfare issues Implemented>>>> ➤ Raised Awareness re Community Arts ➤ Influenced NAPS Actions>>>> ➤ Ensured Community Involvement in NAPS>>>> ➤ Influenced some Govt. and Opposition Policies and Actions ➤ Development of Evaluation Expertise in Community Sector >>>> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Policy Influence re Lone Parents & CE/Household Indebtedness ➤ Influence on MABS ➤ Impacted on NAPS Reporting ➤ "Influenced Policy Debate"
➤ Addressing the Causes of Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Influenced Debate on Welfare/Work Transition>>>> ➤ Raised Awareness of Drugs/Poverty Links ➤ Developed Policy on Anti-Poverty Networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Contribution to National Policy on Interaction of Tax/Welfare System ➤ Highlighted Issue of Disability ➤ Highlighted Need to Focus on Disadvantage in Western Counties ➤ Impact on Early School Education ➤ Input into Funding of Womens' Education ➤ Impact on 'Breaking the Cycle' Scheme
➤ Addressing the Consequences of Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Raised Awareness of Drugs/Poverty Links>>>> ➤ Assisted AP Networks on Policy Influence>>>> ➤ Developed Policy on AP Networks>>>> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Contribution to Policy (Irish and EU) on Area-based Approaches ➤ Identification of Disadvantaged Areas ➤ Stronger Social Component in URBAN Programme ➤ Contributed to National Policy Debate on Drugs/Poverty Links ➤ Input into P&R Decision-making Process

<p>➤ Reducing Poverty</p>	<p>➤ Influenced Debate on Levels of SW Payments & Structure>>>></p> <p>➤ Influenced Debate on Child Income Support & Minimally Adequate Rate>>>></p> <p>➤ Influenced Debate on Demographic & Pensions Policy>>>></p> <p>➤ Influenced Debate on Credit & Debt Issues>>>></p>	<p>➤ Contribution to National Policy Analysis on Levels of Social Welfare</p> <p>➤ Promoted Support for More Inclusive Family/Range of Family Income Supports</p> <p>➤ Influenced National Lottery Review Group</p> <p>➤ Informed C&AG's View on SWA</p> <p>➤ Influenced Debate re Tax Reform for Low Income Groups</p> <p>➤ Contributed to Debate on Impact of Budget Tax Measures</p> <p>➤ Influenced National Minimum Wage Commission Deliberations</p>
<p>➤ Developing the Agency</p>	<p>➤ More Flexibility>>>></p> <p>➤ Improved Cross-Sectional Work>>>></p> <p>➤ More Efficient Monitoring>>>></p> <p>➤ Improved Access to Database</p> <p>➤ Staff Input to Board>>>></p> <p>➤ Increased Language Proficiency>>>></p> <p>➤ Better Meeting Needs of Stakeholders>>>></p> <p>➤ Increased Recognition??/Capacity??</p>	<p>➤ Enhancing Promotional Opportunities</p> <p>➤ More Efficient Internal Communications</p> <p>➤ Clarity in Superannuation Policy</p> <p>➤ Better Planning and Review of Work</p>

>>>> (Repeated for 1997)

In reviewing the current method of collecting monitoring information, and in planning for future monitoring and evaluation, several points can be made:

1. Many Issues listed as 'Impacts' above could be accurately described as outputs. For example conferences, meetings, policy papers, support activities etc. are not impacts as related to the objectives. They rather constitute facilitative processes through which an impact on the particular objective may or may not accrue. For most of these indicators, further questions need to be asked about what has changed as a result –and how exactly has this contributed to the promotion of social solidarity; tackling the causes or consequences of poverty; or reducing poverty?
1. Secondly, some activities are seen as having an impact on more than one Objective. This is undoubtedly true, and an obvious advantage in strategic terms. However, it is not possible to get a sense of where the main impact may have been – For example, did 'raising awareness of the drugs/poverty link' do more for addressing the causes or the consequences of poverty?
2. It is also difficult, from the information as currently collected, to draw meaningful conclusions about the 'cost' of impacts. It is important, especially when working within an environment of limited resources in the first place, to relate outputs to inputs. It could, be for example, that very significant progress has been made in certain areas through a small resource commitment; or that a large amount of time and energy in another direction has yielded less significant results.
3. The possibility of separating the 'Developing the Agency' Objective into two could be considered: with indicators to do with internal efficiency and general

some work in collecting updates but it should eliminate the possibility of 'multiple counting' of outputs that is likely to persist with the current system.

2.1.2 INTERIM REVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS

It is only at this stage (maybe half-way through the planning period) that information from all the 'action-lines', and from the financial monitoring system, should be re-aggregated to address overall Agency objectives. The review should allow for a collective analysis of:

- Progress in achieving outputs – especially reasons for success or underachievement, as well as possible implications for re-scheduling or reallocation.
- Relationship of 'outcomes' to impacts. How consistent are the identified outcomes with the main objectives of the Agency? Again, were there 'hoped-for' outcomes that have not materialised so far? Are there unforeseen outcomes? How can established outcomes be grouped under the objective headings? Is there a need for re-allocation or re-planning based on these conclusions? Can new 'hoped-for' outcomes be formalised on the basis of experience to date?

This kind of review should be possible to undertake in a day – but only if information is collected and collated before-hand.

2.1.3 END OF TERM EVALUATION

The end of term review should follow the same procedure as above – in terms of collecting and interpreting internally-generated data. But, as the last review did, it should also:

- Allow for structured feedback from Board members.
- Collect feedback from external working partners. These consultations would hopefully be more focussed if the evaluation process is already based on specific lines of activity. It could allow for, eg, discussing the specific (perceived) impact of the Agency, in two or three specific areas of activity, with relevant partners.
- Collect feedback from wider interests. The sample we used in this evaluation could be tightened up to form a 'panel' of stakeholders, representative of a wider range of interests with whom the Agency works.
- Consideration could be given to consulting a wider range of interest groups still – that is, groups or interests with whom the Agency may not have developed meaningful working relationships – Trade Unions? Employers? Teachers? Social Workers? EU officials? The establishment of such a panel or 'sounding-board' would not take very much extra effort and could yield some useful feedback on how impact is seen at a broader level.
- Updating the review of external environment – very important if cumulative outcomes are to be translated into some understanding of impacts. It is especially important to revisit the prevailing definitions of poverty and exclusion; the extent

and nature of poverty and responses to poverty. This will provide a context for reviewing the Agency's impact at a national and European level; it will also provide the context for understanding the challenges presented by the subsequent strategic planning period.

The overall conceptual framework for what is proposed is summarised in the Figure below. Basically the bottom half of the diagram is confined to internal monitoring, based on actions and programmes. The top part (important at interim and final review stages) looks at the broader questions of CPA impact on the broader operational environment.

The left-hand side of the diagram is about description and monitoring; the right-hand side is about evaluation and assessment.

