

# Through Irish Eyes

**Irish attitudes towards the UK**

## **Acknowledgements**

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Behaviour & Attitudes for conducting the survey – in particular Des Byrne, Vivian Chambers and David Fanning

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## Foreword

**Through Irish Eyes** is a thought-provoking study, written for us by the UK-based knowledge consultancy firm River Path Associates, based on an extensive piece of opinion and attitude research carried out on our behalf by the Dublin-based market research agency Behaviour & Attitudes. The British Council ran an ambitious programme of research to find out what young people think and feel about the UK in over 30 countries in 1999 and 2000. **Through Irish Eyes** is connected to this bank of research, however, it is deliberately distinct and necessarily different from this earlier work. The unique and complex relationship between Ireland and the UK requires a rather unique treatment to capture, understand and reflect some of the nuances that underpin this special relationship today.

We want **Through Irish Eyes** to stimulate fresh debate and thinking about the relationships within and between these islands. To help us achieve this, we are planning with our Irish partners, the Institute for British-Irish Studies at UCD and the Irish Association for Cultural, Economic and Social Relations, an annual Irish/UK cultural relations seminar. Our aim each year will be to provide a forum for engagement on a range of issues and themes of mutual interest to Ireland and the UK. The inaugural seminar takes place in February 2004 at the Mansion House in Dublin, where we will launch **Through Irish Eyes** and discuss some of the key themes emerging out of this fresh research.

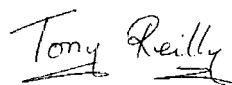
**Through Irish Eyes** has provided us with a real opportunity to inform both the texture and content of our engagement with Ireland's successor generation. If, as the results of **Through Irish Eyes** suggest, there has been a significant re-calibration in the relationship between the UK and Ireland, then our programmes and the way in which we interact

with partners and audiences needs to be modified accordingly. At a more concrete level, if concerns remain about arrogant or superior attitudes, we need to remain on our guard during interactions with our Irish partners. Mutuality and working for mutual benefit with our Irish partners needs to be real, not rhetorical. If, as the evidence suggests, there is a low appreciation of the UK's contemporary creative, cultural and scientific achievements, we need to find opportunities to expose audiences in Ireland to fresh and recent examples of the UK's creative ideas and recent achievements. We can use **Through Irish Eyes** to assist in the design, delivery and evaluation of future programme activities in Ireland.

*"Familiarity breeds contempt. How accurate that is. The reason we hold truth in such respect is because we have so little opportunity to get familiar with it."* Mark Twain

**Through Irish Eyes** confirms our hunch that levels of familiarity between Ireland and the UK are unprecedented in the context of bi-lateral relations between the UK and other overseas countries. There are many reasons for this – historical, geo-political, cultural and linguistic. However, Mark Twain's sobering reminder that familiarity doesn't translate automatically into a favourable or positive disposition, should keep us on our toes in the context of UK-Irish relations.

I hope you find **Through Irish Eyes** an interesting, thought-provoking and useful insight into how the Irish successor generation currently views the UK.



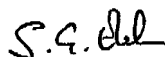
**Tony Reilly**  
Director, British Council Ireland

## Foreword

The depth, diversity, and complexity of the relationship between Ireland and the UK is remarkable. Our ties are rich and diverse: the UK is the largest market for Irish goods, and Ireland is the UK's fifth most important market in the world. The two governments, led by the personal commitment of the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister, continue to work closely to find a lasting political settlement in Northern Ireland. We are close partners in Europe. Our trade unions, professional bodies and voluntary sectors work together to help their communities, in some cases on an all-Ireland basis. In culture, sport and academic life there is an enormous crossover. Theatres in the UK are full of Irish plays. British television is full of Irish actors and presenters, and our football teams are full of Irish players. Millions of Irish people live and work in Britain, and thousands visit every year.

This close relationship and familiarity has changed how we see each other. As Tony Blair said in his address to the Oireachtas in 1998, 'my generation in Britain sees Ireland differently today and probably the same generation here feels differently about Britain'.

Because the relationship is so important to us, it is vital that we know what people think and feel about us, and, perhaps more importantly, to know why they hold that view. It is for these reasons that we jointly commissioned the Through Irish Eyes research. I hope that you will find the results useful, interesting and challenging.



**HE Stewart Eldon CMG OBE**  
**British Ambassador**

## **Preface**

### **Terms of Reference**

The British Council and the British Embassy in Ireland collaborated to carry out independent research on attitudes to the UK in the 21st century among young Irish people, to form the basis for future objective setting and strategies. The long-term objective of the research is to inform and shape programmes that will foster greater mutual understanding between the UK and Ireland.

Results of the survey will be used:

- To form a baseline of reliable data to be used for targeting work, and for measuring the effectiveness of programmes and activities.
- To test hypotheses about the UK's image and to explore ways to improve and re-shape this in the future.
- To provide credible evidence of attitudes towards the UK in Ireland.

### **Through Irish Eyes Seminar**

*Through Irish Eyes* will be launched at a seminar to be held in Dublin on February 11th 2004. The day's proceedings will be based on three key themes that emerge from the research:

- Irish attitudes towards their own and the UK's political, social and economic relationships with Europe and the USA (Boston to Berlin).
- The effects of the peace process and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement on the relationships within and between the islands.
- Multiple identities within and between these islands: Irish attitudes towards, and relationships with, British culture, media, science and sport.

## Biographical Notes

River Path Associates<sup>1</sup> wrote *Through Irish Eyes* for British Council Ireland and will facilitate the launch seminar. River Path is a knowledge consultancy, providing research, strategic counsel, and creative solutions to public, private and not-for-profit sector organisations.

Victoria Collis is a director of River Path and leads on projects for a range of clients including Vodafone and the British Council. Her paper *Culture, Organisation and the Progressive Unionist Party*, which explores the relationship between social and political engagement among loyalist communities in Northern Ireland, will be published in 2004.

Mick Fealty is editor of the acclaimed online news portal Sluggie O'Toole<sup>2</sup>. In 2003, he co-authored *A Long Peace?*, a major think piece on the future of Unionism in Northern Ireland. At River Path, he has led on research projects for a range of private and public sector clients, specialising in bespoke qualitative research and interviews with demanding, high-level audiences. Mick continues to teach the Irish language to adults.

Dublin-based research agency Behaviour & Attitudes<sup>3</sup> carried out the field research for *Through Irish Eyes* on behalf of British Council Ireland and the British Embassy. Des Byrne is one of the founders of Behaviour & Attitudes (1985) and has worked in market research for over thirty years. He is a founder member of the Marketing Society of Ireland, a full member of the MRS (UK) and a former national representative to ESOMAR (The European Society of Opinion and Market Research). Des was responsible for the quantitative aspects of the research.

David Fanning has a Bachelors Degree in English and History and an MPhil in Irish Studies. His academic work has focussed on an examination of the historical and cultural dynamics that have shaped modern Irish society. His MPhil thesis explored the influence of politics and nationalism on modern Northern Irish poetry. Since joining Behaviour & Attitudes in 1997, David has developed considerable experience in advertising and brand communications with a particular focus on the youth market.

Vivian Chambers has a Bachelors Degree in English and Philosophy. He joined Behaviour & Attitudes early in 1999 and quickly settled into qualitative methodologies, taking particular interest in semiotic approaches to branding and communication strategies. His experience has led him to encompass a broad spectrum of research areas. These range from work in food and drink, internet development, advertising and medicine to telecommunications, confectionery and packaging development.

David and Vivian were responsible for the qualitative phase of the research project.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.riverpath.com>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.sluggeroole.com>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.band.ie>

## Introduction

Ireland has undergone rapid change over the past decade. With the fastest growing GDP in Europe and one of the lowest unemployment rates, it has eradicated the poverty that led many of its citizens to emigrate to the UK and elsewhere throughout the 20th century. Key beneficiaries of the emergence of the Celtic Tiger, the successor generation of adults under 40, are the focus of this study.

*Through Irish Eyes* explores this well-positioned and confident successor generation's view of 21st century Ireland's relationship with the UK through three key perspectives:

- Attitudes towards both Ireland and the UK's political, social and economic relationships with the rest of Europe and the USA.
- Attitudes towards the effects of the peace process and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement on Northern Ireland and relations with the UK.
- Attitudes towards, and relationships with, British culture, science, media and sport.

As Chapter 2 discusses, respondents are largely positive about the quality and development of Ireland's relationships with the USA and Europe, although they see themselves as being much closer to the former. They also have reservations about the UK's relationships and are unsure about the quality of its position as a mid-point between the two.

In Chapter 3, improved relationships between the Irish and British administrations are explicitly linked to the peace process. The quality of the relationship between Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern is seen as a symbol of both countries looking forward and shedding their pasts. However, while the majority of respondents would like to see a united Ireland in the future, commitment to achieving this in the short term is, at best, lukewarm.

Chapter 4 explores a range of attitudes to British culture - from positive views of the UK's growing multiculturalism and its pop music and TV, to low awareness of many art forms, and a pervasive view that British industry is outdated, with its science good in theory, but less so in practice. Views on sport and the media are also mixed, and add a second caricature of Britishness to that pictured in Chapter 1.

The conclusion discusses evidence for the hypothesis set out at the end of the first chapter, that while the UK is becoming increasingly tangential to Irish identity, politically and economically, the two countries remain closely tied through shared cultural reference points, both modern and historical.





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# Chapter 1

**Post-Colonialism:** Ireland's Changing Identity



## Celtic Tiger

*"I think the big difference is that we are more educated and have better opportunities...  
I think that our affluence and education attracted companies to come into this country and  
have given us the economic growth that we have today"*

Focus group participant, male 30+

In March 2003, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern delivered an address to the World Bank on Ireland's exceptional economic progress throughout the 1990s, identifying five main ingredients in its success.

First, he charted a transformation of the political environment in Ireland, driven by the peace process in Northern Ireland and the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. He argued that as a result, politics has become increasingly focused on ideas of partnership and equality.

Second, he talked about the progress of Ireland's education system through funding, testing and curriculum development programmes. Alongside actions to encourage widespread take-up of information and communications technologies, Ireland's emphasis on education has produced an increasingly educated workforce.

Third, and related to the first point about mutual respect, he described a series of national partnership agreements put in place to support economic, fiscal and social policies designed to develop Ireland. Partners included government, employers, unions, farmers and representatives of civil society.

Fourth, he recognised that accession to the EU in 1973 had proved an important turning point for Ireland. From the development of the rural economy using financial support from European partners, to free access to wider markets, membership has been key to transforming Ireland's economy.

Finally, he pointed to Ireland's success in attracting direct foreign investment, partly as a result of other measures. Today, overseas companies employ 7.59% of the labour force directly, account for 51% of all exports and generate over 14 billion euro of expenditure in the Irish economy.

Each of these five ingredients is clearly identified by respondents throughout the **Through Irish Eyes** research as part of their sense of national identity in the 21st century:

*"We used to be feeling sorry for ourselves as a population, kind of take the victim role"*

*"We are a lot more affluent, a lot more wealthy"*

*"We have more money now, and we have a better chance of education"*

*"Our educational system is better"*

*"In the last few years with the Celtic Tiger...we have built up a very good relationship in Europe"*

The overarching sense of Ireland's emergence as a successful and affluent post-independence state is set in the context of how its relationship with the UK has developed and changed:

*"We care less (about the UK)... they are not as important any more, we have other perspectives"*

*"They're not as big as they think they are"*

*"The newer generation of English would have a different view of the Irish altogether"*

These expressions of the UK's diminishing importance to Ireland have their roots in a history of economic reliance in the early years of independence. In the 1930s, the UK was Ireland's only significant market, accounting for over 90% of exports, as well as being its major supplier of imports. Although it remains Ireland's biggest market today, the UK's share had fallen to 33% by 1990, and now stands at 22%.

For many respondents, their freedom to enjoy high standards of education and a flourishing economy is attributable directly to the sacrifices and changes made by their parents' and grandparents' generations. Groups in the qualitative sample aged over 30 were most likely to recognise the benefits they have inherited and the recent nature of Ireland's emergence as an affluent state:

*"I think that a lot of the changes that happened were handed to my generation on a plate"*

*"What I was saying about our parents leading the way is probably true when you consider when they were being brought up...things were an awful lot stricter"*

The successor generation are key beneficiaries of the emergence of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, and as a result are largely confident in the position Ireland occupies in the world, particularly in relation to the UK.



## A Shared Past

*"We can construct a...relationship that can repair the damage of history and heal the wounds that have festered too long between our two neighbouring islands - a relationship based on friendship instead of hostility...on trust instead of fear...on partnership not rivalry and... on equality not on superiority."*

Alban McGuinness in *Changing Shades of Orange and Green*, 2002

In 1949, Ireland left the Commonwealth, severing the last of its formal links with the UK. Yet for many years to follow, the two countries remained closely tied economically and socially, in particular through extensive emigration to the UK, driven chiefly by the need to find employment outside Ireland.

Although by the mid-90s the balance of migration between the two countries had shifted, as many Irish émigrés returned and increasing numbers of British people chose to relocate to Ireland, the legacy of this close relationship is still evident in the successor generation that is the primary subject of *Through Irish Eyes*. 28% of this sample has lived in the UK at some point, while 85% has either family or friends there. A recent paper for the British Council by Simon Partridge indicates that 5% of Ireland's population currently lives in London.

The qualitative data too supports the recent nature of Irish people's experience of the UK as a place to go and make a living, particularly among groups aged over 30:

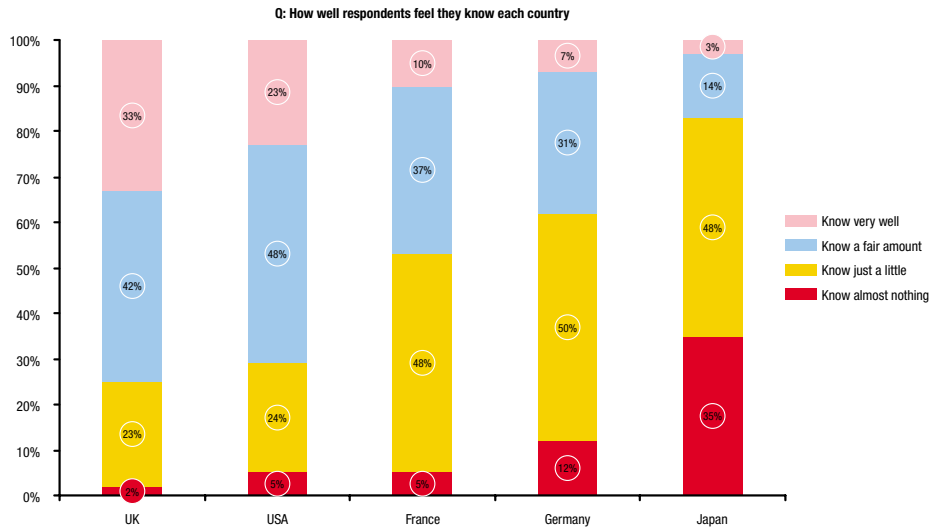
*"When I was growing up in a bar...a lot of the customers used to know a lot about cities in England, they would talk about these cities like I would talk about Galway"*

*"My dad worked in Birmingham and I would go there fairly regularly and he used to know everything about it"*

*"You went to Dublin on the way to England"*



This close relationship in terms of population movements is borne out in the sample's view of how well they know the UK, compared with other countries. As Figure 1 shows, 75% of respondents feel they know the UK very well or have a fair knowledge, while only 2% feel they know almost nothing about it. It is notable that the second most familiar country, the USA, was also a major destination for Irish émigrés in the past.



**Figure 1: 'I would like to ask your opinion about five different countries. You probably know some of these better than others. Using the categories on this card, I would like you to tell me how well you feel you know each country. In making your choice, take into account any of the ways you have learned or heard about each country.'**

First hand knowledge of the UK is also evident in the qualitative data:

*"I went to the Tate Modern. It was really cool"*

*"It's one of the first things you notice when you go to England. All the different types of people and restaurants"*

*"I lived for a short time in Worthing close to Brighton and I remember meeting people there who had never been to London"*

This depth of experience of the UK is also borne out in the wider sample of the Barometer Survey, where 19% say they know the UK very well, compared with 11% for the USA and just 5% for France and Germany. Overall, 58% have at least a fair knowledge of the UK, and just 5% say they know almost nothing, compared with 12% for the USA, 20% for France and 30% for Germany.

Comparisons are less straightforward when respondents are asked to describe how favourably they feel towards each country. Although Figure 2 shows that broadly speaking, favourability towards a country seems to increase with familiarity, respondents were more inclined to have negative feelings towards both the UK and the USA than to less well-known countries. Further, respondents were less likely to feel 'very favourably' towards the UK than to either the USA or France.

Some of this evidence can perhaps be attributed to the time at which the research was carried out, particularly given the context of France's strong showing. 7% of those who were unfavourably disposed towards the UK mentioned the Iraq War. Further, the full successor generation sample was largely negative in its view of the war, with 61% saying they disapproved of the UK's involvement with the war, something that also emerged in the qualitative sessions:

*"You want to believe Blair but at the back of your mind you're not sure. I think Iraq changed a lot of people's opinion of him"*

*"He definitely made a mistake over Iraq. He lost an awful lot of credibility over that"*

However, more of the sample also felt 'very favourably' towards the USA than any other country considered, which suggests reactions to the war are not the only significant factor tempering attitudes towards the UK. Qualitative evidence suggests this may lie in continuing memories, often handed down through families, of the UK's history as a colonising power in Ireland:

*"(My nana) got very annoyed...saying how can you call them terrorists, they are soldiers fighting for your freedom...for your nationality, for your country...and your sense of Irishness"*

*"There was a deep resentment among that generation, even though they were working in England"*

*"It's going to take a long time to wash the rivalry off"*

*"They kept the Irish down for so long and now everyone has caught up with them"*

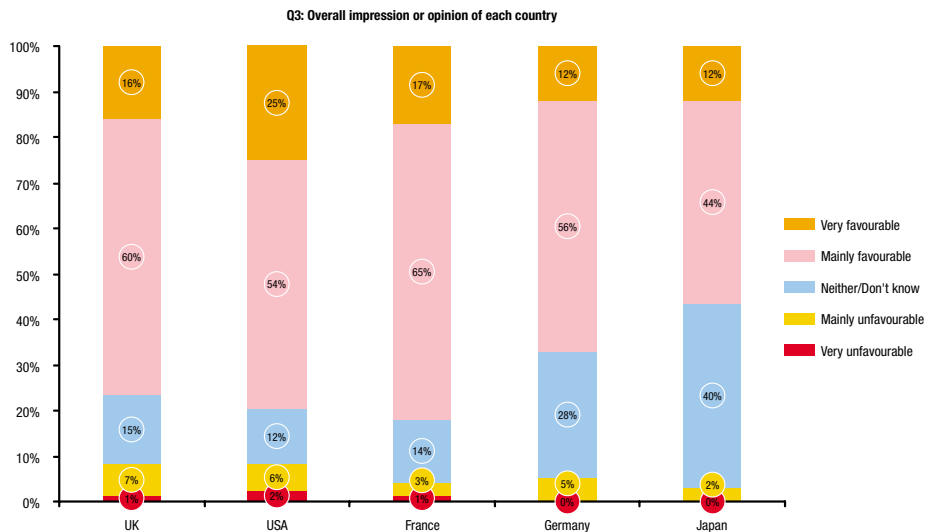


20% of those who were unfavourably disposed towards the UK in the quantitative sample cited historical reasons. A further 18% complained about 'superior attitudes', again perhaps partly a vestige of the past, particularly when taken in conjunction with qualitative remarks:

*"I hate those English accents you get on the DART"*

*"They are that little bit more reserved, that little bit more distant with each other than you would have here"*

*"When you were talking of a class society...there is an impression I have of an educated English gentleman"*



**Figure 2: 'Now using the categories on the card, please tell me how favourable or unfavourable your overall opinion or impression of each country is. Take into account any of the things that you think are important. Remember it is your overall opinion or impression that we are interested in.'**

Nevertheless, it is clear that the majority of the successor generation sample is broadly favourable in its attitude towards the UK. Key reasons given for being well disposed included similar culture and interests (16%) and having direct contact with the UK through friends, relatives and having lived there personally (28%). The qualitative evidence too points to these factors:



*"I find the BBC and their documentaries very good"*

*"It is just that you have the same sense of humour as the English, we find English films funny, really relate to them, therefore we end up watching them more so than - I would prefer to watch an English film more so than an American film"*

*"London city is beautiful"*

*"I would say they are a generous race overall"*

*"I suppose in terms of other nations we are closest to the Brits"*

Interestingly, the relationship between familiarity and favourability is simpler in the Barometer Survey. The two best-known countries - the UK (19%) and the USA (20%) - are most likely to be viewed very favourably, and 78% of this sample has a broadly favourable view of the UK, compared with 74% for the USA. This perhaps indicates a less vehement response to the Iraq War among the wider population. Neutral responses to the two best known countries are also significantly lower than those for Japan and Germany, the two least well known countries, suggesting the link between familiarity and the ability to ascribe an emotional response is extremely robust.

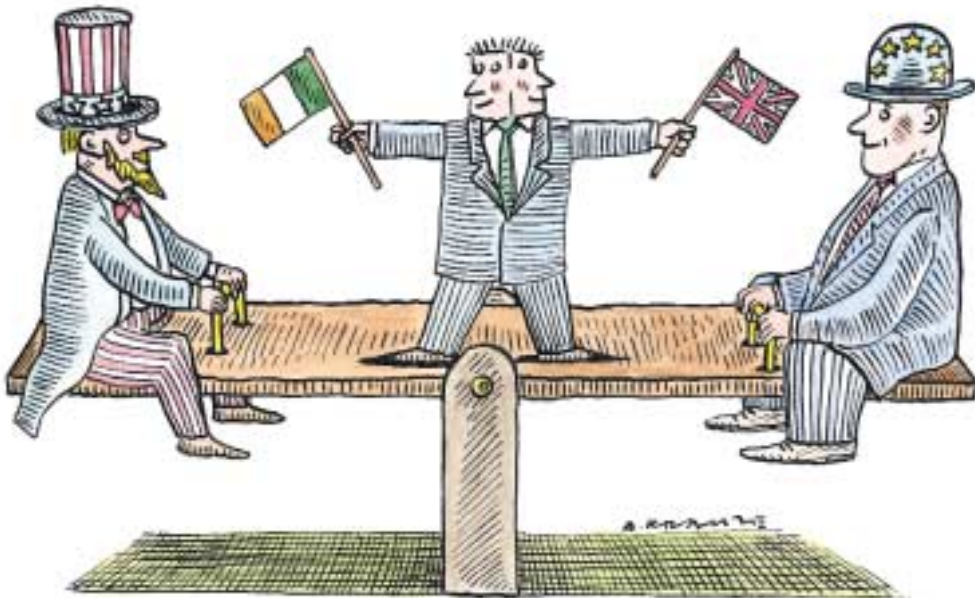
*"We're a lot closer to them than we think. I mean you'd rather live there than France. And we're all interested in the same things"*

Ireland's history as part of the United Kingdom is clearly a strong contributing factor to the fact that the successor generation feels it knows the UK well, and for many there is a strong sense of shared culture and interests. However, that same history leads some respondents to feel less favourably disposed towards the UK than this level of knowledge would generally indicate. This evidence suggests that while Ireland has long discarded its formal ties to the UK, informally it remains close, both in terms of its understanding and shared current experience, and to a lesser extent in terms of its memory as a nation.

The evidence set out in this chapter suggests a hypothesis for ***Through Irish Eyes*** that characterises the successor generation's attitudes toward the UK. While it seems that the UK is becoming increasingly tangential for Irish people politically and economically, the two countries appear to remain closely tied through shared cultural reference points, both modern and historical. Research findings connected with the three key ***Through Irish Eyes*** themes that follow will be analysed to develop or dispel this idea.

# Chapter 2

**Between Boston and Berlin:** The USA-Europe Axis

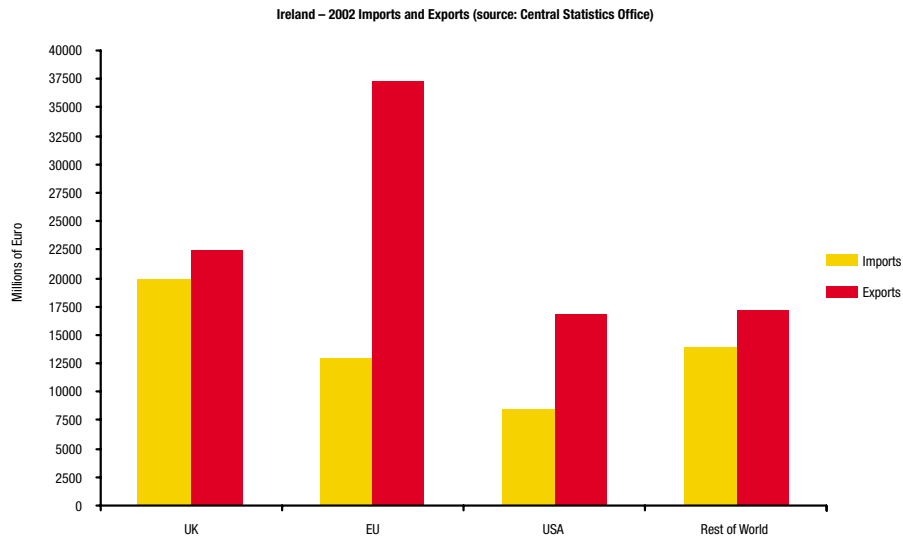


## Balancing Act

*"We are wedged between the great continental economic tectonic plates of Europe and the US. When we indulge ourselves with Boston/Berlin carry-on we are implying that we straddle both worlds: the European and the American."*

David McWilliams, Sunday Post October 12th 2003

Membership of the EU, along with efforts to attract multinationals to develop in Ireland, have both contributed significantly to the development of new markets for Ireland in recent years. While the UK remains the single largest export market, both the EU and the USA are now central to Ireland's economy, as Figure 3 shows:



**Figure 3: Ireland - imports and exports by region (2002)**

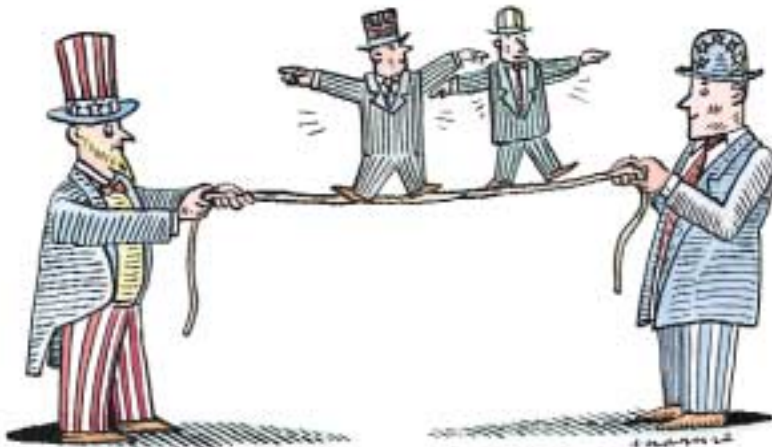
In spite of the greater economic significance of the EU to Ireland, the successor generation surveyed for *Through Irish Eyes* is extremely clear in its belief that Ireland is closer to Boston than Berlin, economically, socially and culturally, at a ratio of almost 3:1. One reason for this may lie in how important they perceive Ireland to be to the USA and Europe in turn. Editorial comment in the Limerick Leader in 2000 puts this in context, when it says that 'while Ireland only accounts for 1% of total EU economic activity, Irish trade makes up over 5% of total merchandise trade between the EU and the US – a share significantly larger than that of... Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands and Sweden.'

A second important factor may be the significant presence of US-based corporations in Ireland. Indeed Fintan O'Toole suggests that Ireland's identity may be too closely bound with the US: "Thirty years of being an off shore economic dependency of the United States have left us with a society that is seen by an increasing number of its young people as a pale imitation of the Real Thing across the Atlantic." (O'Toole 1990, cited in Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin, 2002).

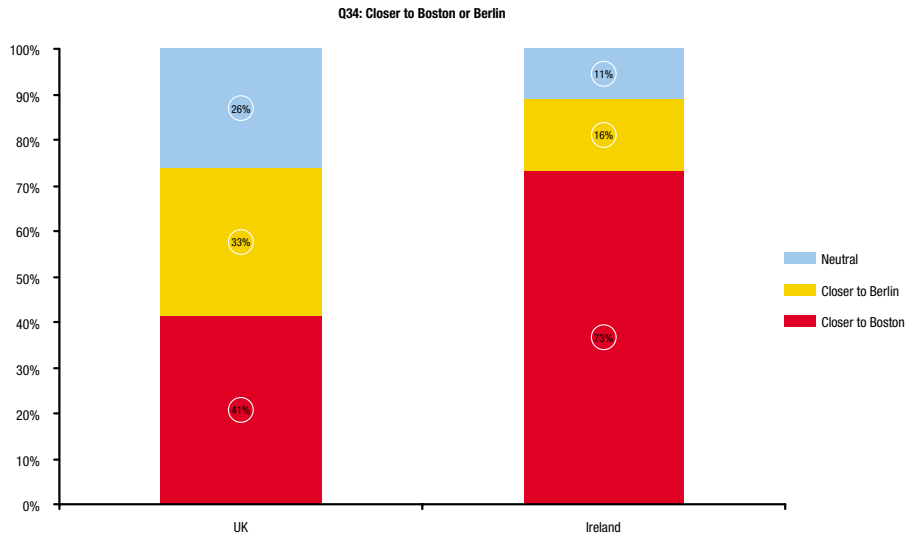
Third, there is evidence that while Ireland is extremely enthusiastic about its involvement in the EU, Irish people also have a clear view of themselves as being Irish rather than European. A Eurobarometer survey in 1998 showed that 82% of Irish people believed it was good for their country to be part of the EU, ahead of any other country. At the same time, Ireland is second only to the UK in rejecting the label 'European' in favour of its national identity, a finding that has been replicated year on year.

*"I think we still hang on to our Irishness but I think it is harder...I don't think Irish people ever call themselves European whereas people in France...will refer to themselves as European. I think Irish people will always call themselves Irish, I think that in that way we are kind of clinging onto some of our identity"*

Finally, it is clear from the quantitative survey for *Through Irish Eyes* that the successor generation is simply more familiar with the USA than it is with either France or Germany. As Chapter 1 discussed, the figures demonstrate a robust correlation between familiarity and favourability, which may explain why the sample was so clear in its view of closer proximity to Boston than Berlin.



Views on the UK's position on the same axis are more evenly balanced as Figure 4 shows:



**Figure 4: ‘Would you say [the UK/Ireland] is closer to Boston or Berlin in economic, social and cultural terms. Using this card could you indicate where you think [the UK/Ireland] fits?’**

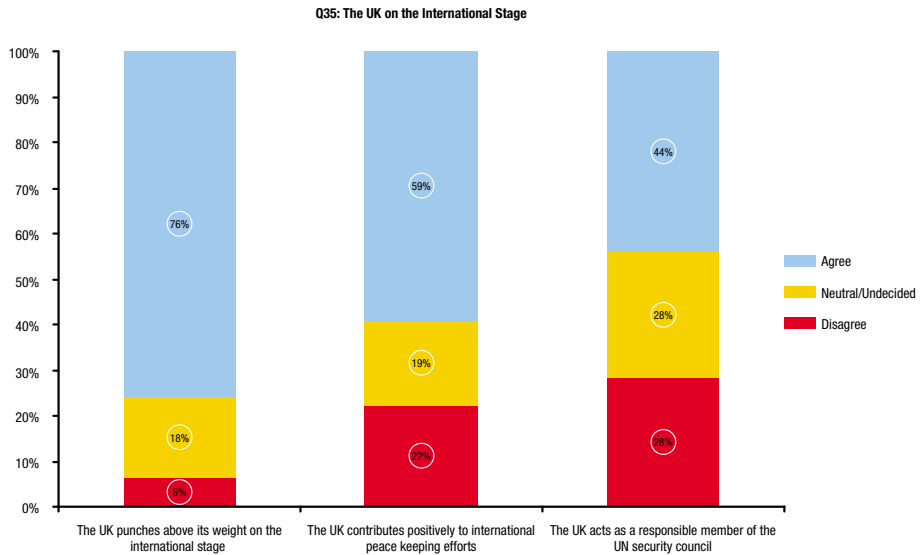
Although the quantitative evidence might suggest that the sample sees the UK as a central force between the USA and Europe, there is no evidence from the qualitative sessions to back this up. Overall, the qualitative evidence indicates that the successor generation believes that balancing relationships between the USA and Europe is a problem for the UK, connected with an overdeveloped and outdated sense of its importance in the world:

*“I think they are a bit confused, they had this thing about friendship and America since World War II, but now...they are pulled between Europe and America”*

*“Their history is that they go for allies, they go for big guys”*

*“They see themselves as being up there, a great power with America but really they are not, and they are afraid of losing that”*

However, the successor generation does have a relatively positive view of the UK's contribution on the international stage. As Figure 5 shows, three in four respondents believe that the UK punches above its weight as an international player, which suggests that while there is a sense among respondents that the UK is less important than it once was, it remains a key player.



**Figure 5: ‘Do you agree or disagree with any of the following views in regard to the UK’s international role?’**

Views on the UK’s role as a peacekeeper and a member of the UN Security Council were less positive, with a significant proportion of respondents remaining undecided on the latter. This uncertainty can be linked explicitly to widespread disquiet about the UK’s role in the Iraq War, as discussed in Chapter 1. Further, some qualitative evidence suggests support for the view that the UK’s involvement is directly linked to its desire to remain close to the USA:

*“The Americans wanted every country in the world to join in the war on Iraq, and the British were the only ones who responded”*



Perhaps the most significant difference between the way the successor generation in Ireland views its own and the UK's relationships with the USA is the idea that while Ireland's links are largely economic in nature, the UK remains close to Boston for geo-political reasons. This distinction builds on the contrast between the UK as a slightly faded political power, becoming less important to Ireland year by year, and Ireland as a young country that has developed quickly and effectively.

*"I was very surprised to see that people (in England) seemed to be stuck in a rut really over there, they have this long-established way of looking at things and find it very difficult to change"*

*"There is a bigger class divide than there is in Ireland"*

*"I think that Germany won the peace and England won the war and that sums up a lot"*

*"The differences (between the UK and Ireland) are more subtle, I find that the English would be more arrogant in their attitude"*

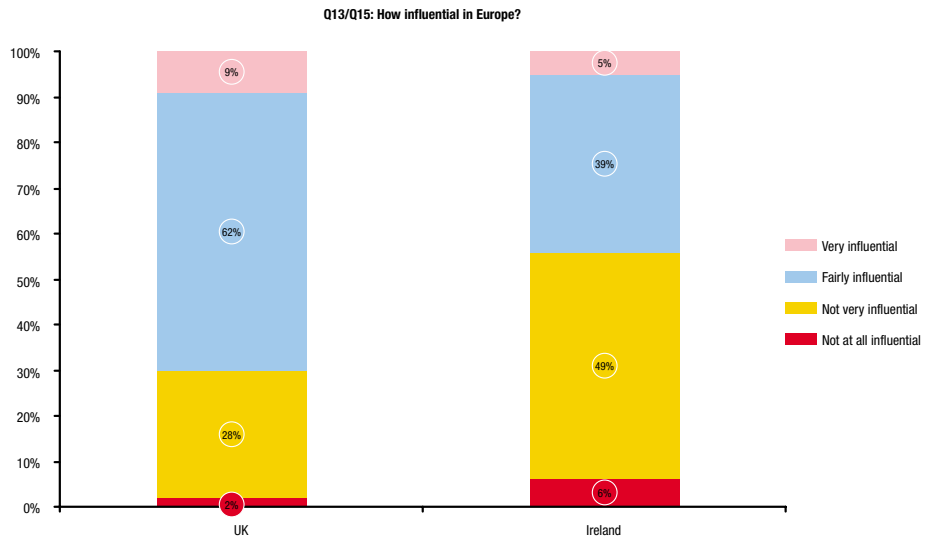
*"I still think they see us as a poor country. That hasn't gone away"*

## The European Question

*"They need to take a more European angle and not so British...they need to go through Europe, they will attract more people if they do portray themselves as more part of a team"*

Female focus group participant, aged under 30

The successor generation sees the UK as being significantly more influential in Europe than Ireland, which reflects its positioning at a midpoint on the Boston/Berlin axis, discussed above. As Figure 6 shows, 71% believe the UK has at least reasonable influence, compared with 44% for Ireland, in spite of the UK's position outside the common currency:



**Figure 6: 'And how influential a role would you say (the UK/Ireland) has in the European Union?'**

These figures contrast somewhat with opinions about how constructive a role the UK plays in the EU, compared with Ireland, where 39% of the sample says it does not believe the UK plays a constructive role in Europe, compared with 15% for Ireland. Figures 6 and 7, taken together, indicate that the successor generation believes that while Ireland is a more constructive member of the EU, it has less influence as a member than the UK.

This picture can be linked back to views of the UK as a state that 'punches above its weight' on the international stage, despite being less influential than it once was. However, the qualitative evidence suggests that the successor generation strongly believes the UK is making a mistake in its approach to Europe:

*"The English seem to be waiting to see if (the Euro) will work and then they will join, instead of taking it on and making it work - it's a weakness"*

*"They are basically stepping back and saying, oh we are not going"*

*"They know that Europe has become another entity...eventually America will be competing with Europe for trade"*

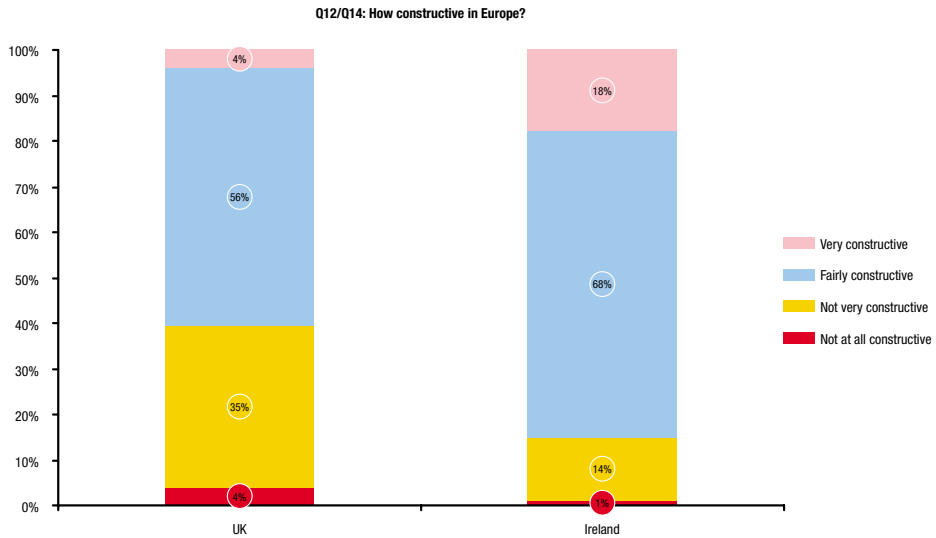
*"They are not committed Europeans"*

*"They and Sweden and Denmark are the only three countries (still outside the Euro), and all of a sudden they will be out on a limb"*

*"I think that they are making a lot of blunders as well"*

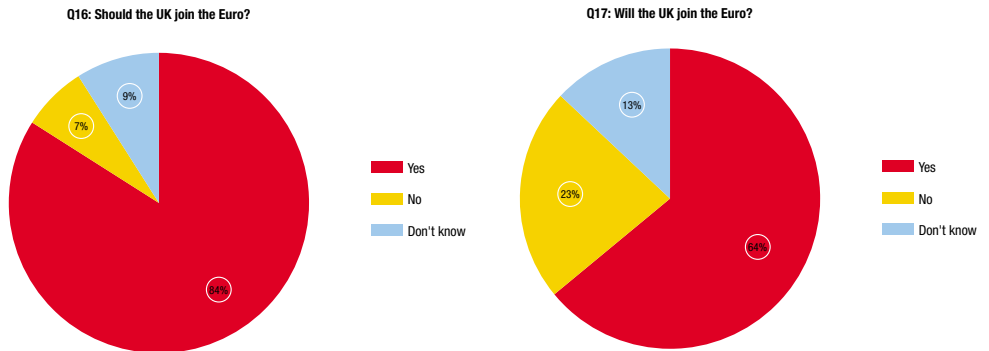
*"If they don't adopt the Euro they are going to be in serious trouble"*





**Figure 7: ‘Thinking non-specifically about the role played by (the UK/Ireland) in the European Union. Do you think that the UK/Ireland adopts a very/fairly/not very/not at all constructive role?’**

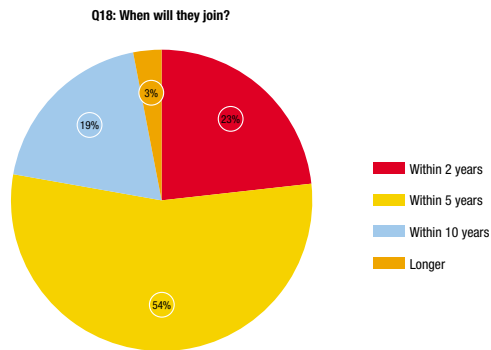
The successor generation is overwhelmingly convinced that the UK should join the Euro, perhaps as a result of Ireland’s own positive experience in Europe. 84% of the sample believes the UK should join, but a less resounding 64% believes it will and almost one in four respondents believes it won’t:



**Figure 8: ‘In your view should the UK join the Euro or not? Irrespective of whether you think they should do so or not, do you think the UK will join the Euro or not?’**

This gap between the course of action the sample believes the UK should take, and the one it thinks it will adopt is more obvious when respondents are asked when the UK is likely to adopt the common currency.

As will be seen in Chapter 3 on the prospect of a United Ireland, the 64% of people who believe the UK will abandon sterling for the Euro see it as a long-term issue. Just under one in four of this sample believes it will happen within the current government term, while almost as many believe it will be 6 years or longer before the UK decides to become part of the Eurozone.



**Figure 9: 'How soon do you think they might join?'**

The successor generation's attitudes towards the UK's role 'between Boston and Berlin' has much in common with the sense that the UK is a somewhat faded power, as was explored in its relationship to Ireland itself in Chapter 1. The UK's position between the USA and the EU is seen by many as a weakness, and an inflated sense of its importance relative to the world. However, respondents are more generous in their agreement that the UK punches above its weight internationally, and is influential on a European level. Broadly, this evidence supports the hypothesis that the UK is becoming more tangential to Ireland politically and economically. However, respondents' belief that despite a less constructive attitude, the UK is more influential in Europe than Ireland, also hints at the successor generation's memories and stories of Ireland pre-Celtic Tiger.

# Chapter 3

Peace in our time? UK-Irish Relations



## Looking Forward

*'In the north they love England but hate the English; in the south they hate England but love the English'*

old story, told by Des O'Malley in Changing Shades of Orange and Green, 2002

As the evidence of Chapter 2 showed, views on the UK's involvement in politics at an international level are somewhat jaundiced on aggregate. However, the successor generation's attitudes towards the quality of UK-Irish relations have a different and more positive flavour. 81% of the sample believes relations between the British and Irish administrations are 'excellent', 'good' or 'very good', while only 2% say they are poor.

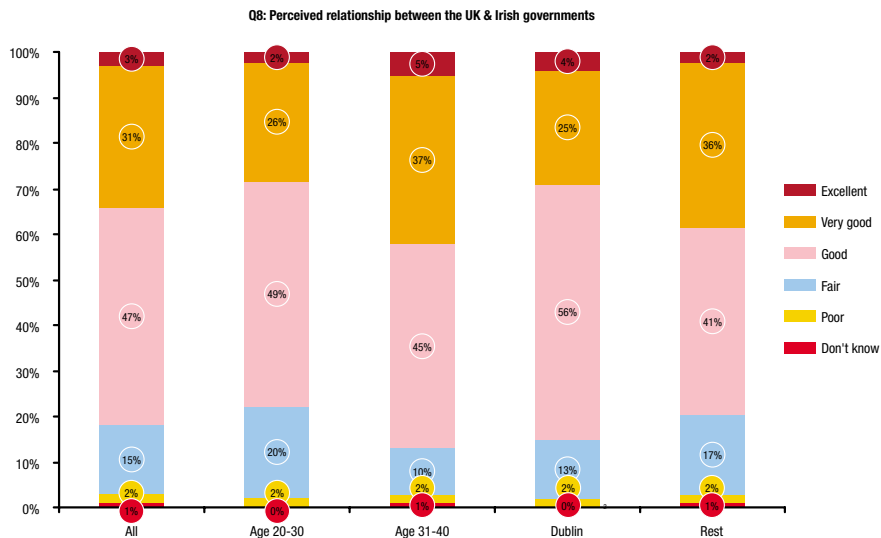
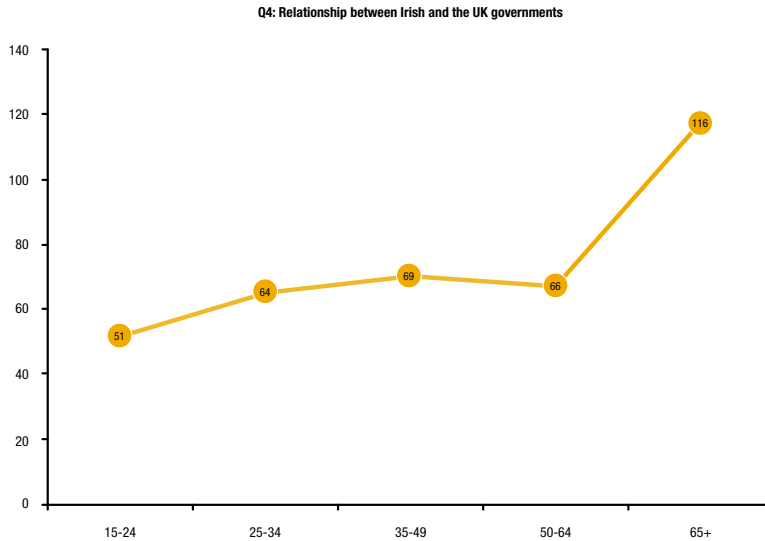


Figure 10: 'Can you think now for a moment about the relationship between the Irish government and the government of the UK. Which of these phrases best sums up your view of that relationship at present?'

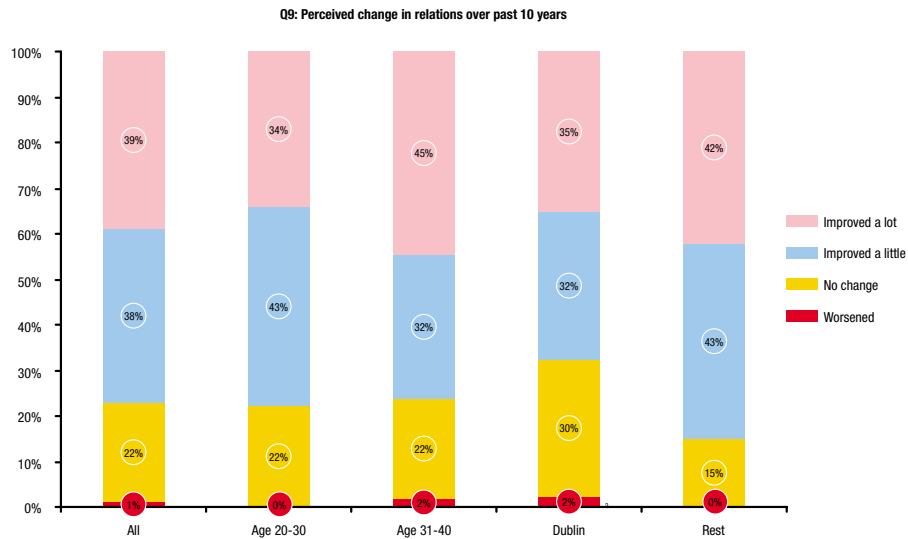
Respondents aged over 30 are slightly more optimistic in their view than the younger section of the sample, a picture that is supported by the Barometer survey figures. Here, 64% of the sample rates relations as 'excellent', 'very good' or 'good', a proportion that rises from the youngest age group to the oldest.



**Figure 11: 'Proportion of Barometer sample describing relations between governments as good-excellent'**

This tendency for respondents to be more or less optimistic about UK-Irish relations based on age may reflect the depth of improvement they have experienced in their lifetime. Indeed, the same bias towards the older age group is recognisable when respondents are asked about whether relations have improved over the past decade:





**Figure 12: ‘And do you think that relationship has improved or disimproved over the past 10 years?’**

As with the question about the quality of relations between the administrations, data from the Barometer survey shows a tendency for the sample to be more enthusiastic about the depth of improvement over the last 10 years. The qualitative evidence adds to this picture.

Taken from the over 30 groups:

*“There was an improvement in the relationship...I think it is now they are saying that maybe the Irish weren’t such a bad enemy after all”*

*“Even Major had a reasonable relationship with Ireland and he’s a Conservative”*

*“The Blair era being a more integrated and open one, friendlier”*

Taken from the under 30 groups:

*"The rich men at the top of the pyramid (in Ireland)... they are the ones improving the relationship with England"*

*"I suppose Tony Blair has helped there with the process up North"*

The qualitative groups are specific in identifying the combination of Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair as an important factor in this improved relationship:

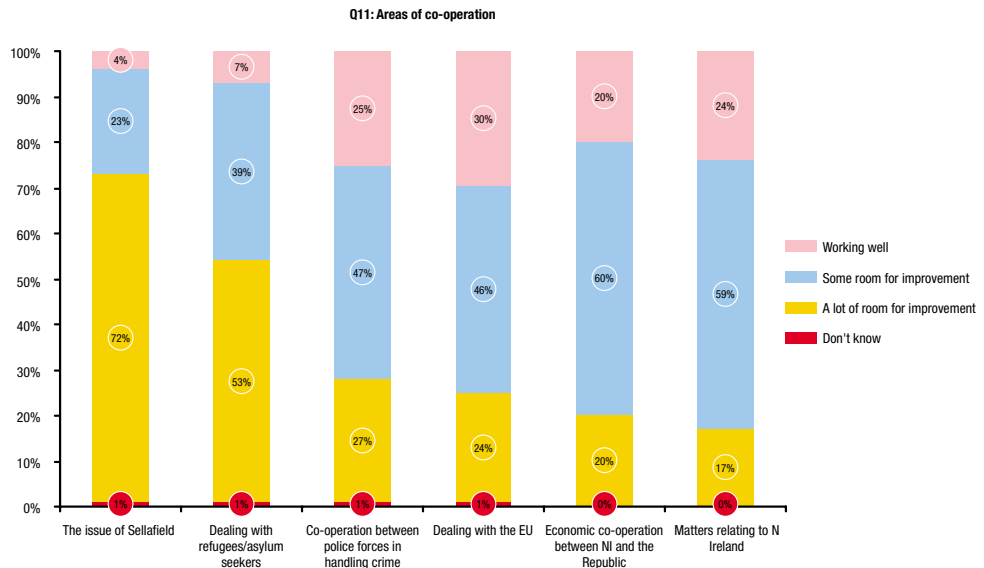
*"I think overall it has to do with the two figureheads you have in charge of the countries, Blair and Ahern. They work well together, the same age bracket, they seem to be on one line of thought"*

*"It's moved on so much from Thatcher and Major. Blair just grabbed Northern Ireland by the scruff of the neck"*



Quantitatively, this sense of a sea change in relations with the advent of the Labour government in 1997 is borne out when the successor generation is asked about its views on a number of key British establishment icons, including both Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher. 37% of respondents said that when they came across references to Tony Blair in the media, the effect was to make them better disposed to the UK. By contrast, just 10% said the same of references to Margaret Thatcher. While the sample was largely either agnostic or less well disposed to the UK in the light of references to the British establishment, Tony Blair was the most popular figure in the list, which also included Winston Churchill, the British police and the Royal Family.

74% of the successor generation sample described the UK as a modern country, with just 13% believing it remains traditional. This figure further supports the idea that this group has an image of the UK as a country that has become more forward looking in recent years, not least in its relationship with Ireland. Figure 13 also suggests that the sample broadly believes the governments are performing reasonably well across a range of UK-Irish issues, with only 17% believing there is 'a lot of room for improvement' in the way it handles matters concerning Northern Ireland, and 20% on the question of economic co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland.



**Figure 13: 'I am going to read out to you certain areas of possible co-operation between the Irish and UK governments. For each one I would like you to tell me whether you feel things are working well there, or whether there is some room for improvement or a lot of room for improvement'**

Two important exceptions to this picture, which is largely replicated in the Barometer survey figures, are dealing with refugees and asylum seekers and Sellafield. The qualitative groups had much to say on the latter subject and related environmental concerns, which many saw as an example of British arrogance:

*"When you mention the environment, the first thing you think of every time is Sellafield"*

*"It is unbelievable what they are pumping into the sea, you can see it from the air, up along Blackpool, all that stretch of coast, the amount of stuff that they are pumping out into the sea there is unbelievable"*

*"What they have done is...instead of putting [nuclear waste into the Irish Sea] one day...they are leaking into it every day...a slow amount, hoping that people would just shut up about it and not cause problems, they don't care"*

*"They are very poor on (environmentalism)"*

Indeed, when the successor generation group is asked about the UK's commitment to the environment, responses are evenly split, with 36% agreeing that the UK is committed to protecting the environment and 36% disagreeing.

On balance, the successor generation has a positive view of the relationship between the Irish and British administrations, and believe this has been strengthened by the partnership of Blair and Ahern, particularly evidenced by the peace process in Northern Ireland. This, along with the strong sense that relations have improved - particularly among the (older sections of the samples) - supports the idea that although the UK is becoming more tangential to Ireland, relationships are normalising as memories of the past begin to fade. Indeed, perhaps the very fact that the UK is perceived to be less important by this group drives the sense of progress and the possibility of a fruitful future.

## The Island of Ireland

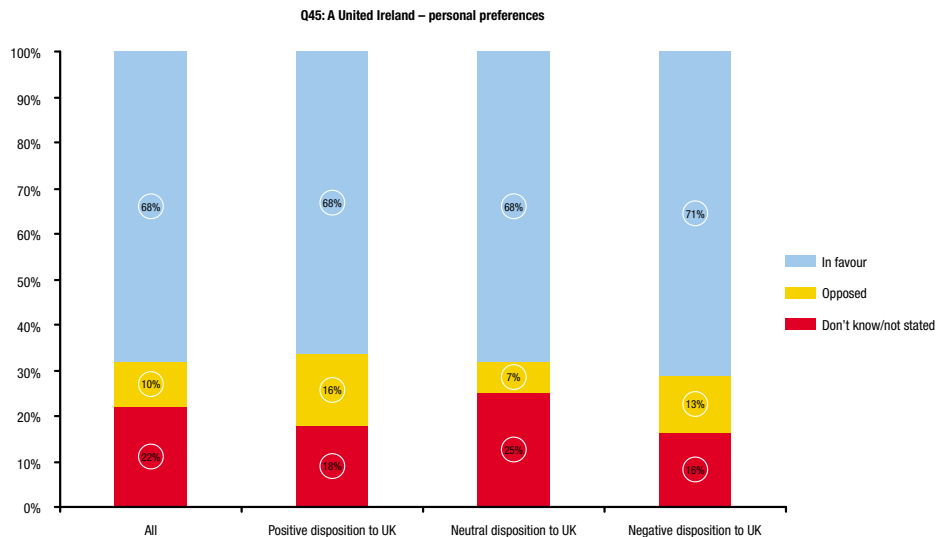
*"The two great traditions on this island have each yielded on the absolutism of their positions. Nationalists have had to swallow the bitter truth that there will be no united Ireland in the foreseeable future and that if it comes, it will only do so with the consent of Northern Ireland's majority. Unionists have had to accept, in the new cross-border structures, that Northern Ireland is not as British as Finchley, as Mrs Thatcher once put it."*

The Irish Times editorial, 11th April, 1998

The concept of a United Ireland remains an important one for a significant proportion of the successor generation. When asked to name regions of the UK, only 35% mentioned Northern Ireland spontaneously, which may indicate that many respondents don't include Northern Ireland in their mental map of the UK.

*"I don't think of it as in the UK - but maybe they do?"*

68% of the group is in favour of the idea of a United Ireland, and this figure is largely static across the sample, regardless of personal disposition to the UK, as figure 14 shows:



**Figure 14: 'How do you feel about the issue of a United Ireland? In general at this stage would you be in favour of or opposed to the idea of a United Ireland?'**

However, there is little sense in the qualitative evidence of an active impetus to translating the concept to reality, which indicates that the idea of a United Ireland may be more totemic than active:

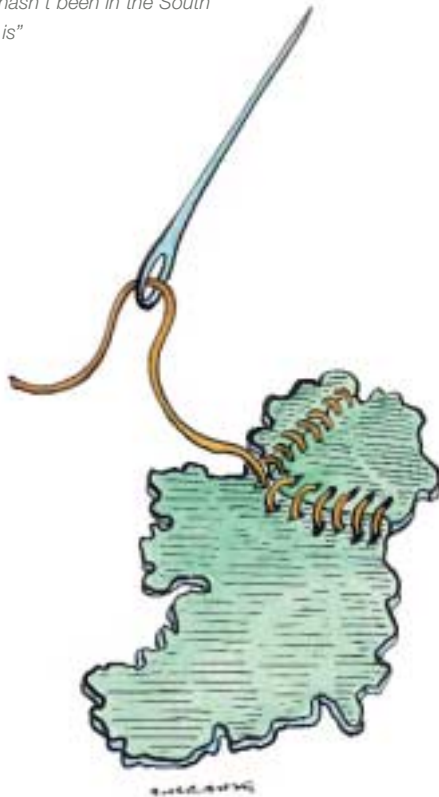
*"I still think of it as a part of Ireland, but I'm just so sick of it now to be honest"*

*"It's very English though. It's been under English rule for so long that I'd say they're more English than Irish"*

*"We are not at war, in the sense that the IRA is different now, there are not as many people would be as nationalistic maybe as they were"*

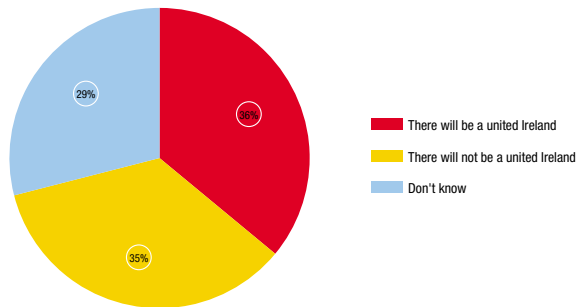
*"I do think there has to be a certain amount of forgive and forget on both sides"*

*"If you meet someone from Belfast who hasn't been in the South they don't know where Athlone or Cork is"*



The sense that this idea is increasingly symbolic in nature is supported by an even split in the sample between those who believe a United Ireland will be achieved, those who disagree and those who don't know.

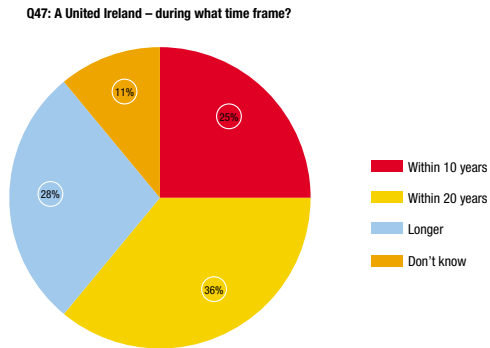
**Q46: A United Ireland – likely or not?**



**Figure 15: 'Whatever your personal wishes on the matter, do you think that there will be a United Ireland at some stage in the future or not?'**

The quantitative data shows limited levels of direct contact with Northern Ireland among the successor generation. Although 50% have visited at some point, this compares with 84% who have been to London and 44%, 43% and 41% respectively who have travelled to Scotland, Wales and the North West. Further, none of the sample has ever lived there (compared with 16% that has lived in London), and only 14% has family or friends living there (compared with 58% for London, 18% for Scotland and 12% for Wales).

Third, as with the prospect of the UK joining the single currency, the group is hazy about when the idea of a United Ireland might be realised. Only 9% of those who believe there will be a United Ireland say it will happen within 10 years, and 10% say it will not happen for more than 20 years.



**Figure 16: 'At what point in the future do you think it is likely that there will be a United Ireland?'**

This extreme reticence in putting a united Ireland on the agenda in the near future perhaps reflects some concerns raised in the qualitative sessions:

*"A United Ireland would break this country in two - think about it - even basic things like the roads, their roads are way better than ours"*

*"Northern Ireland is just different. Everything about it - the people, the infrastructure, even their clothes, their way of life, they are different people"*

*"I don't think a United Ireland will work. It would destroy us if they came to Ireland...I can't see it working"*

While the successor generation doesn't see Northern Ireland as British, it is clear that they are also reluctant to consider it to be part of Ireland, except conceptually. This idea is supported by the quantitative evidence set out in Figure 13, where just 17% of the successor generation believes there is 'a lot of room for improvement' in inter-government co-operation on issues related to Northern Ireland. This compares favourably with all the other issues, including co-operation between police forces (27%) and Sellafield (72%).

This mythologisation of the United Ireland concept seems to be another symptom of the decreasing importance of the UK politically and economically for the successor generation in Ireland. However, while the respondents see Northern Ireland as 'different' in many ways, Chapter 4 will explore in more detail how separate British and Irish culture actually seem.

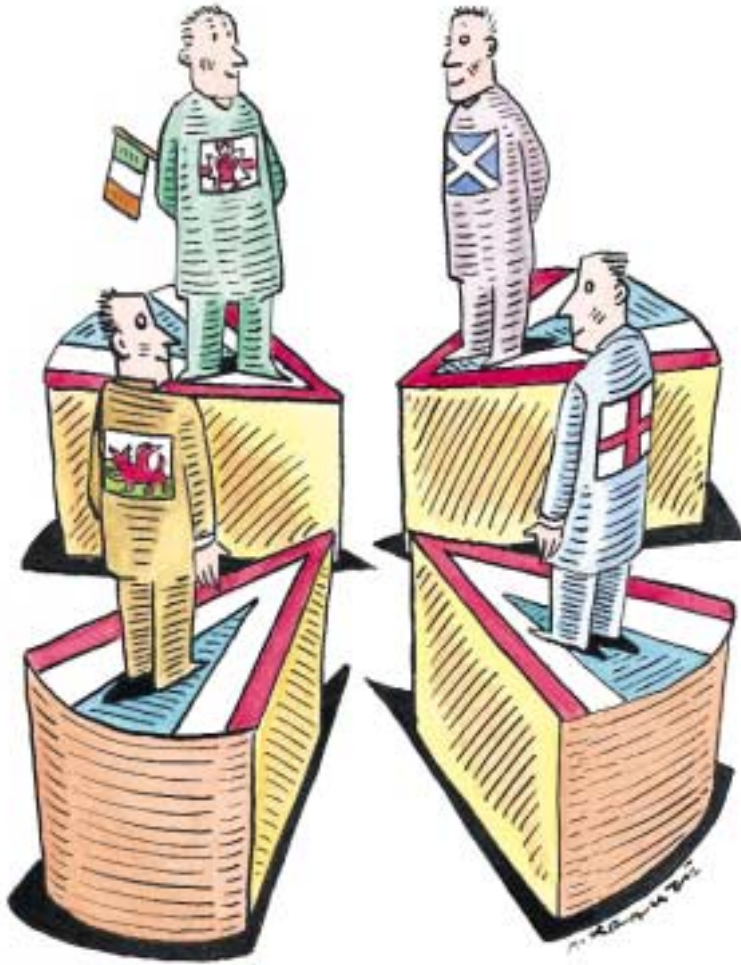




A. HARRISON

# Chapter 4

**Multiple Identities:** British and Irish Culture

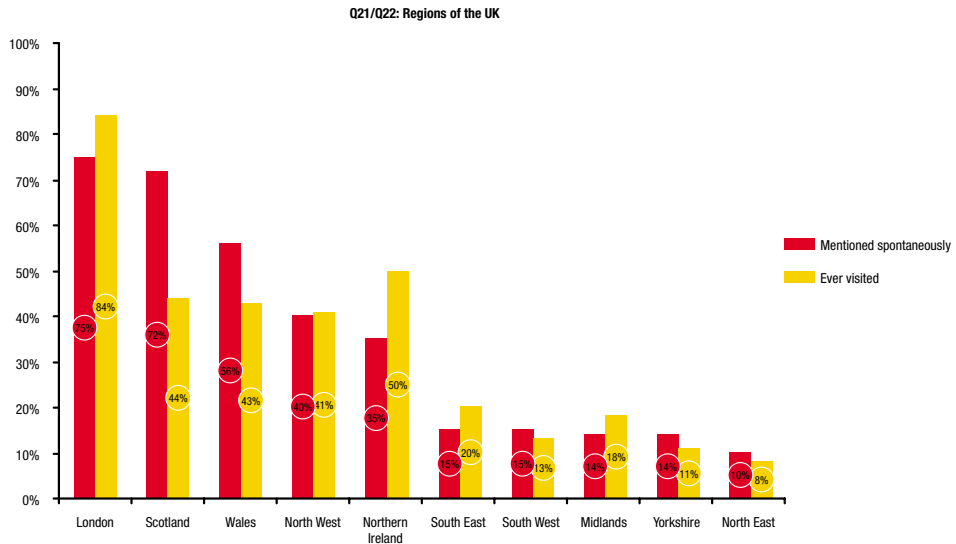


## Mapping the UK

*"The UK is not united, and it is not a kingdom"*

Male focus group participant, aged 30+

The successor generation's view of the UK and the way people live in the UK is an interesting mixture of received wisdom and personal experience. 97% of the quantitative sample has visited the UK, so direct experience is considerable, although this is concentrated on London, the North West and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



**Figure 17: 'I would like you to think about the different countries or regions that make up the UK. Which ones come to mind? PROBE: Any others? Which, if any, of these parts of the UK have you personally ever visited?'**

London is more familiar to the successor generation than any other part of the UK. 75% of the quantitative sample mentioned it spontaneously, 84% have visited, 58% have family or friends resident in London, and 16% have lived there themselves. This is perhaps a reflection of the concentration of Irish immigration over a number of generations; a recent report by the CRE estimates that 11.5% of the population of London was either born in Ireland, or born to Irish parents.

Attitudes towards London are mixed among the qualitative groups. While some think of it as a great city to visit, others feel it is an unfriendly place for Irish people, possibly influenced by stories of discrimination from the past:

*"The theatre in the West End is pretty impressive too"*

*"London city is beautiful"*

*"Even as far away as Australia they come over to see London"*

*"Get on the train from Stansted into London and you will see (a big class divide)"*

*"We wouldn't even bother with London now"*

Less familiar regions of the UK elicited responses that return to the image of the UK as a traditional society, divided by class. 60% of the quantitative sample disagrees with the statement, "The UK is now a classless society", despite the fact that 74% believe it is a modern society, and 63% believe the British system is a good example of democratic government.

Among the qualitative groups, a sense of North/South divide in the UK, and a society characterised by class was strong in their descriptions of different regions:

*"Actually I think most people in Liverpool are hated by the English"*

*"Surrey and all that kind of stuff, all the hunting and horsey set"*

*"A lot of unemployment in Newcastle and places like that in the North"*

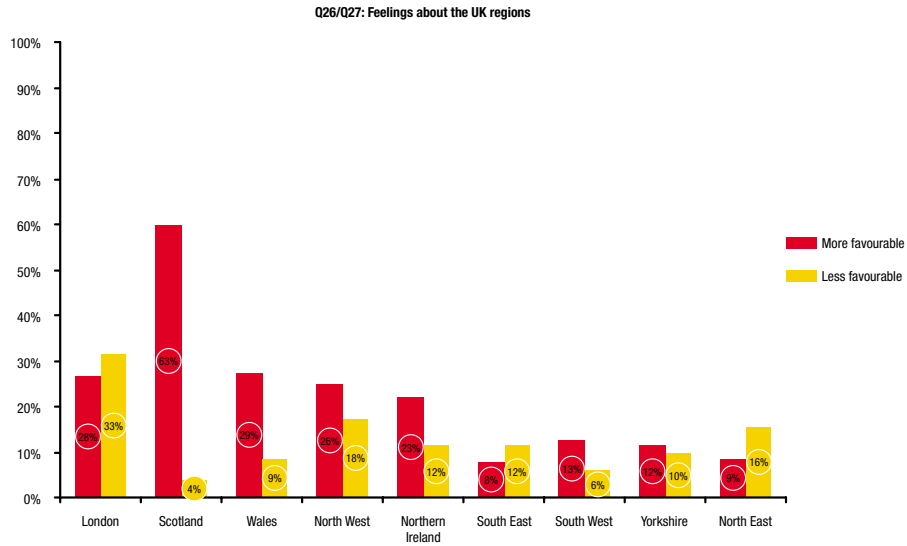
*"Where Cheltenham is, is very horsey"*

*"The northern part of the country is so industrious (sic). I think that they are all closed now, the Black Country"*

*"There is a bigger class divide than there is in Ireland"*

These images and feelings about the UK are summed up in Figure 18. Although just 28% of the sample feels more favourable to some regions of the UK than others, the opinions among this smaller group are striking. While Scotland, Wales, the North West and Northern Ireland elicit largely favourable impressions, London and the South East produce more negative feelings.

This contrast illustrates graphically the gap in the successor generation's perceptions between the traditional UK, associated with colonial power and arrogance, and the belief, explored in Chapters 1 and 3, that the UK has changed:



**Figure 18: ‘Which regions, from this list, would you say you feel more favourably than average about? And which ones do you feel least favourably about? PROBE: Any others?’**

Particularly striking is the empathy felt by the Irish successor generation for Scotland and Wales. The qualitative evidence supports the idea of deeper understanding and a sense of identification with both the Scots and the Welsh, who many in the qualitative groups saw as fellow-sufferers of English colonialism:

*“You would have to look at Wales as major scenery, valleys and mountains”*

*“I lived in Scotland for a while and they have a huge working class population”*

*“I think we are more like the Scots in terms of our personality. At least we like to think we’re like them. They’re still friendly and outgoing”*

*“I think of Wales the same way I think of Scotland”*

Widespread support for devolution among the group further develops the sense that the Irish, Scots and Welsh are in some way aligned against the English as a result of their history. Just 10% of the successor generation sample felt that recent legislation and the establishment of the Scottish parliament and Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies had resulted in no improvement for the local population:

*"Scotland have broken out and our own Northern Ireland have broken out, so they all want their own identity"*

*"I think you'd find very few Scots now who'd identify themselves with the UK. I mean you see them abroad, it's not Union Jacks they're wearing - it's the Scottish flag"*

*"I think the Irish always think the Scottish and the Welsh are against the English, it is like we all join hands"*

*"We are all against them"*

These attitudes towards devolution further point up the contradiction in Irish attitudes towards Northern Ireland discussed in Chapter 3. While there is a clear sense that the successor generation welcomes devolution for Scotland and Wales as a way of achieving greater independence from the English, devolved government in Northern Ireland does not square with the totemic goal of a United Ireland. Added to the lack of certainty about when or how this might be achieved, support for the Stormont administration demonstrates the underlying ambiguity among this group about the future of Northern Ireland.

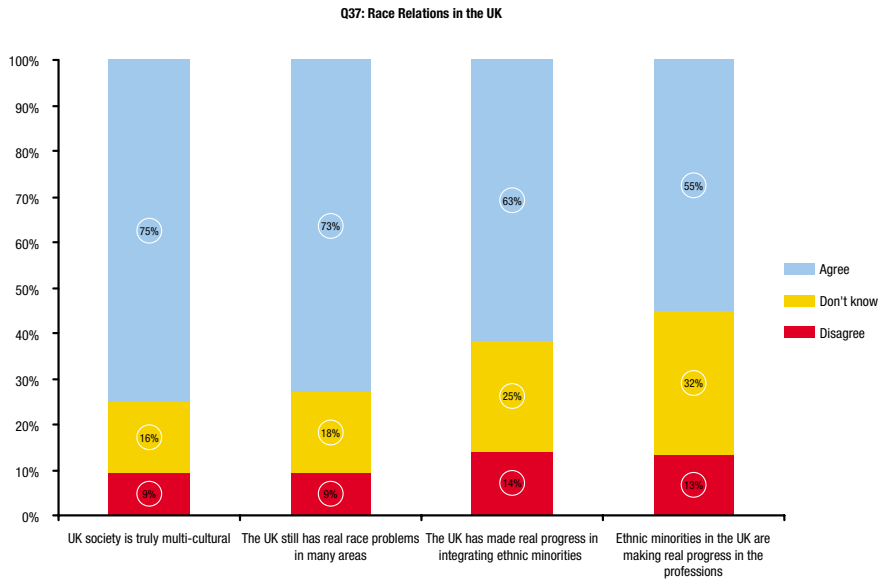
## Multicultural Society

*"It's one of the first things you notice when you go over to England. All the different types of people...compared to Ireland; it's one of the first things I notice and love about it"*

Male focus group participant, under 30

There is a clear appreciation among the sample that the UK is a country that has changed radically since the early 20th century in terms of its treatment of people from ethnic minorities. Three in four respondents agree that it is a truly multicultural society, and 63% believe the UK has made considerable progress in integrating ethnic minorities:





**Figure 19: 'I am now going to read out some statements that have been made about British society. I would like you to tell me to what extent you personally agree or disagree that they represent Britain.'**

*"I find England is becoming less and less English. How many pure Englishmen are left now?"*

*"You see the equality thing over there...schools...they seem not to be racist in any way"*

*"I used to work in London and...there was a big Caribbean population who were totally integrated into society there"*

*"The English look at foreign races coming into their society and they have virtually no real problems in terms of religion and things like that"*

*"Britain has probably been a lot more accommodating than a lot of other countries"*



However, impressions of a multicultural society are tempered by the strong belief that the UK experiences ongoing race relations problems. This view is likely to be driven strongly by easy access to British media in Ireland, in particular tabloid coverage of recent electoral successes for the British National Party and accounts of rioting in some cities:

*"From my experience in Britain it is very clear that people like Pakistanis, they seem to own corner shops. I kind of got the idea they stay there. I don't think they have integrated well"*

*"In East London there is a huge Bangladeshi population...there is no melting away of the differences there"*

*"There's race riots, running battles on the streets, so I don't know how well they handle it. Mind you, it'll happen here too"*

Memories and current stories of Irish experience in the UK may also have a role in perpetuating the idea of ongoing difficulties with integration and discrimination. In 1997, the Commission for Racial Equality discovered that 79% of Irish people working in the UK had been subjected to anti-Irish jokes and remarks, and that while 70% of those surveyed found these offensive, only 30% felt able to say so publicly.

There is also some evidence that the successor generation believes that race relations will become an increasingly pressing issue for them too, as demand for immigration and naturalisation in Ireland increases:

*"There are people of other cultures now settling in Ireland"*

*"In Dublin they are becoming more racist towards the Asians than the blacks"*

*"The Filipinos are lovely, they have left their families and they are in every week sending all their cheques home, but then you have got the Nigerians coming in every week with their social welfare cheques, they are very arrogant"*

*"I admit it though, I wouldn't go out of my way to integrate"*

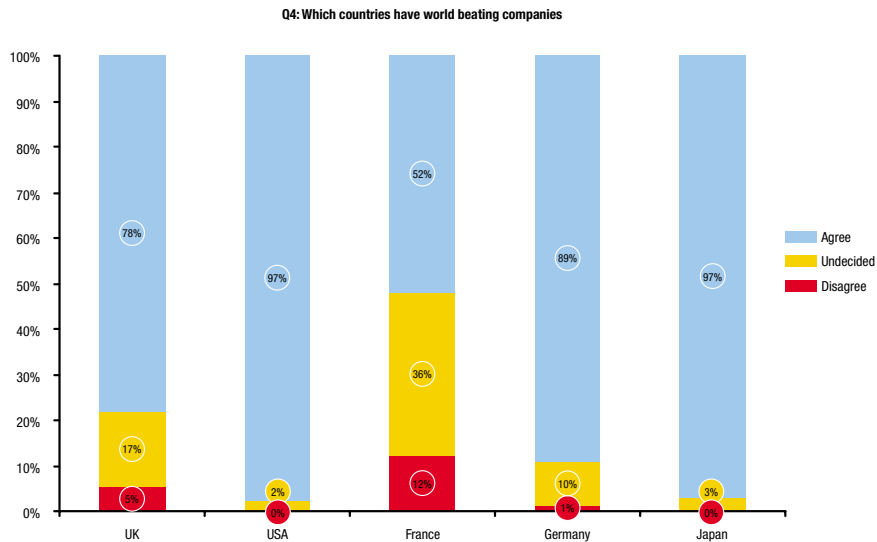
Again, access to the UK tabloid media and its largely anti-immigration bias may be a factor in a sense of trepidation that emerges about the prospect of a multicultural Ireland and the problems this may bring. There may also be concern that the Common Travel Area in existence between Ireland and the UK could provide a means of exporting some of the perceived problems across the Irish Sea.

### Thinkers not doers – UK Industry, Science & Innovation

*“Our starting point in terms of industrial development and economic and social wellbeing... probably stems from the 50s...I don't think England has changed much at all, but our outlook in terms of a whole load of issues has changed”*

Male focus group participant, 30+

For many of the successor generation in Ireland, the UK retains its ‘sick man of Europe’ image when they are asked about the quality of British industry and innovation, in stark contrast to their positive outlook on the Irish economy. Although 89% of the sample agrees with the statement that the UK is a major trading centre, it is placed behind the USA (99%), Japan (94%) and Germany (90%). When asked whether the UK has many world beating companies, this contrast becomes starker:



**Figure 20: ‘Now I am going to read out some statements about the same five countries. For each country and each statement, taking your answer from this card, please tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree.’**

The qualitative evidence too suggests that for many respondents, the UK's industrial base has been in decline for many years, and has simply not adapted effectively. These impressions are often clearly based on experiences of the 1970s and early 1980s:

*"England used to have four fellows fitting the dashboard of a car...when I was a young lad, the English certainly were not the way forward in terms of industrial development, we were way ahead of them"*

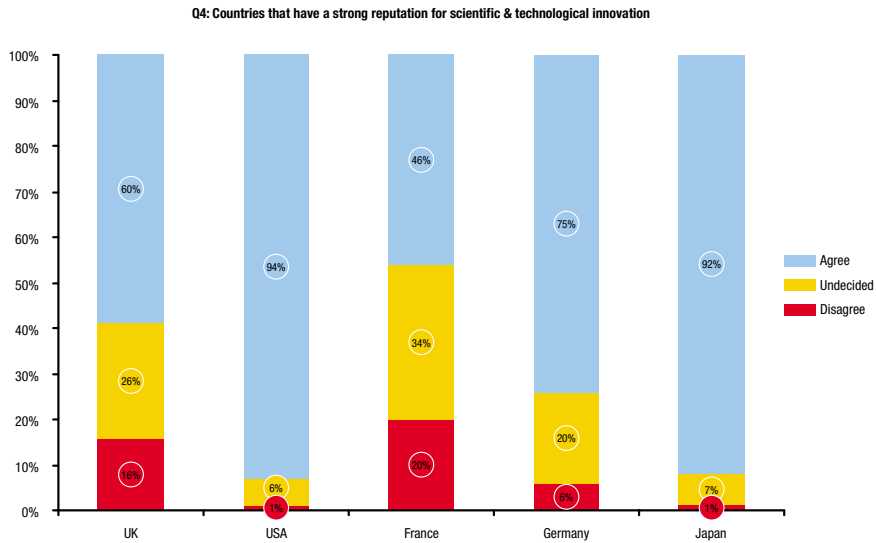
*"England really wasn't in it as regards a country to look up to"*

*"The three countries that were held up as an example...were Sweden, Japan and Germany. Germany because there were no strikes, Japan for what they were producing and Sweden for their high income tax and social welfare system"*

*"50 years ago everything that was made, was made in England, and nowadays they don't make motorbikes, TVs"*

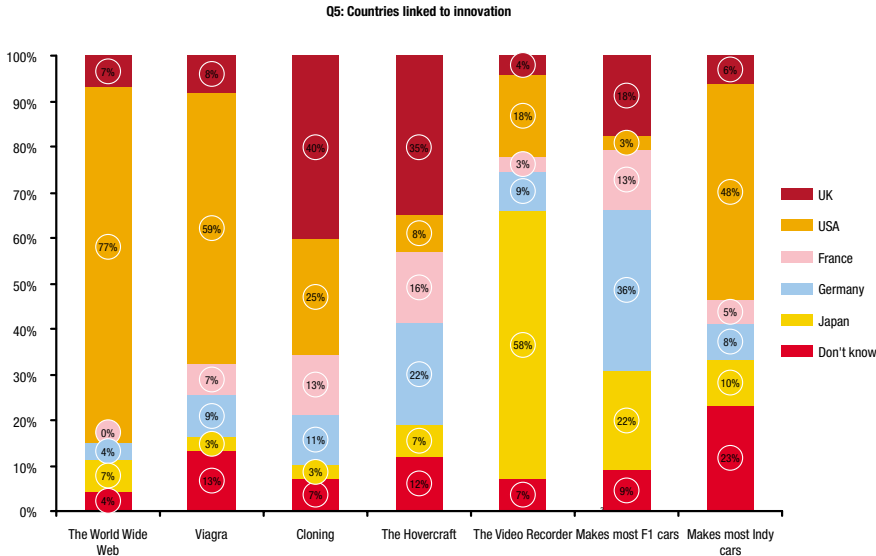
*"Their business, it's all very old. They ignored it for years and thought it would be grand, but they haven't kept up"*

Largely negative views of British industry also apply to the associated areas of science, innovation and engineering. As Figure 21 shows, the UK is again placed behind the USA, Japan and Germany, and 16% of the sample actively disagrees with the idea that the UK has a strong reputation for scientific and technological innovation.



**Figure 21: ‘Now I am going to read out some statements about the same five countries. For each country and each statement, taking your answer from this card, please tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree.’**

Further, there is little recognition among the successor generation of British involvement in a number of key recent inventions and developments. Although the UK is strongly associated with cloning, undoubtedly through Irish access to media stories about Dolly the Sheep (40% of the sample), and the hovercraft (35%), the USA is most closely associated with the development of the World Wide Web (77%), Viagra (59%) and the production of Indy cars (48%). Similarly, Germany is associated with the production of Formula One cars, perhaps because of its reputation for fine engineering (36%) and Japan with the invention of the video recorder, a clear association with its reputation for consumer electronics (58%). As Figure 22 shows, attempts to promote the UK’s track record in key recent inventions have largely been unsuccessful among the successor generation in Ireland:



**Figure 22: 'I am going to read out a number of inventions. I'd like you to tell me in which of these countries, if any, you think they were invented?'**

*"I think German products are over-engineered (sic) and they are hugely reliable and functional compared to British stuff"*

*"If you get the same price you would definitely look at German stuff"*

*"I would go for a German car over an English one any day"*

However, some qualitative comment makes the distinction between invention and production more effectively, and suggests that there is a more general awareness of the UK's reputation for invention:

*"I have always found the English to be up there as regards technology anyhow"*

*"They had the technology for a test tube baby, they are very good at innovation"*

*"A lot of modern drugs have been developed in Britain, things like beta blockers"*

This distinction is an important one, and may help explain the low percentage of the sample that was able to identify the UK as the birthplace of the development of the World Wide Web and other important recent innovations shown in Figure 22. There is little association among the sample of the UK with the application and commercialisation of ideas, which in turn, may well be linked back to negative views about the quality of British industry.

*"They come up with the idea or the concept...they are not good at executing it and ...getting the business part right"*

*"They are very good at pure research"*

*"I think the English are very good on innovation, but they are not good at putting it into business practice"*

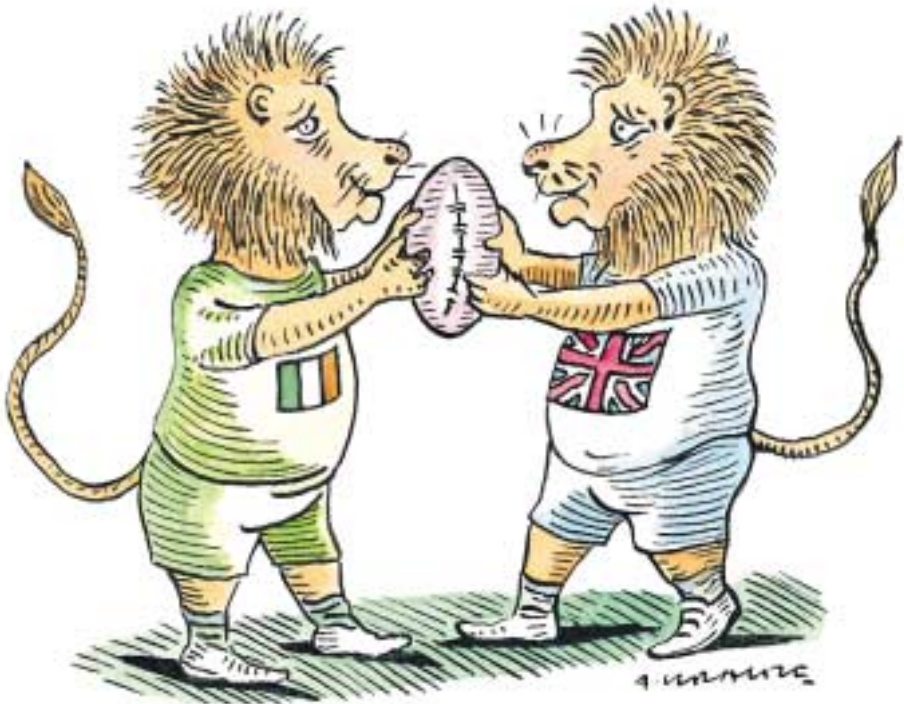
## A Love/Hate Relationship

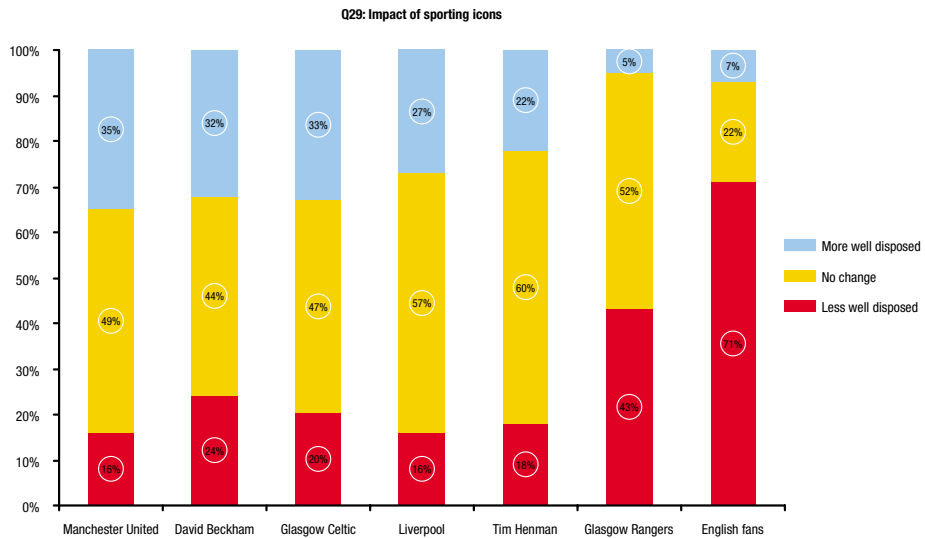
### Sport

*"Like in World Cups, you always want them to lose, but a bit of the fun goes out of it when they do"*

Male focus group participant, under 30

With two notable exceptions, the Irish successor generation is broadly well disposed to many of the key icons of British sport. In particular, Manchester United (with its Irish captain, Roy Keane), Glasgow Celtic and Liverpool football clubs are all popular. Strong links between Ireland, the North West and Scotland compared to other regions of the UK perhaps account for some of the strength of positive feeling:





**Figure 23: ‘I would now like you to think about different aspects of Britain. When you come across media items on each of these areas could you tell me do you tend to feel more well disposed or less well disposed towards Britain?’**

Other evidence suggests that UK sport is something that Irish people love to hate, a relationship that is perhaps reciprocated. A recent debate on BBC on England’s defeat of Ireland in the Six Nations Grand Slam offers some rich examples:

*“We should all get behind the home nations, and hope they all do well. And if Ireland can’t do it, I’ll be cheering for England - it’s about time a Northern Hemisphere team won”*

*“I have to admit that a very good Irish side were made to look very poor by an awesome English performance and I would like to congratulate the English on winning the Grand Slam. I think England and Ireland will have a great World Cup. I only hope this win doesn’t increase English arrogance too much”*



However, Figure 23 also raises a fresh perspective on Irish views of the population that offers an updated take on the idea of old fashioned, arrogant, colonial UK. 11% of the quantitative sample that said it was not well disposed towards the UK mentioned soccer thugs or hooligans as their primary reason. The UK media is heavily implicated in the propagation of this unflattering portrait:

*"We enjoy their sports"*

*"Their loyalty to football and cricket is huge, more so than here"*

*"When I was in America...I lived with two separate English rugby teams in the same compound and I have never hated rugby or English more. They are horrible"*

*"I went to Prague in March and we walked into a pub and you know the way the English are always known for lager heads and getting rowdy and having their singsongs and everyone else in the pub is raising their eyes up to heaven"*

*"When I was in Corfu they had signs on the gates and everything, no English"*

*"Their foreign relations are bad - they are hooligans"*

*"I think a lot of the reason we think they are arrogant, in football or rugby or whatever is coming from the media. They stick it in your face"*

*"The tabloids fuel it up too"*

## Media

*"There is an element of them that is very distasteful"*

Focus group participant, male aged 30+

Levels of familiarity with the UK media are generally extremely high among this group, with British TV and Sunday newspapers having high penetration among the sample. 84% watch UK TV stations, 67% watch at least an hour's British TV every week and 39% read a British Sunday newspaper (chiefly the Sunday Times) on a regular basis. However, views on the quality of UK media are not positive:

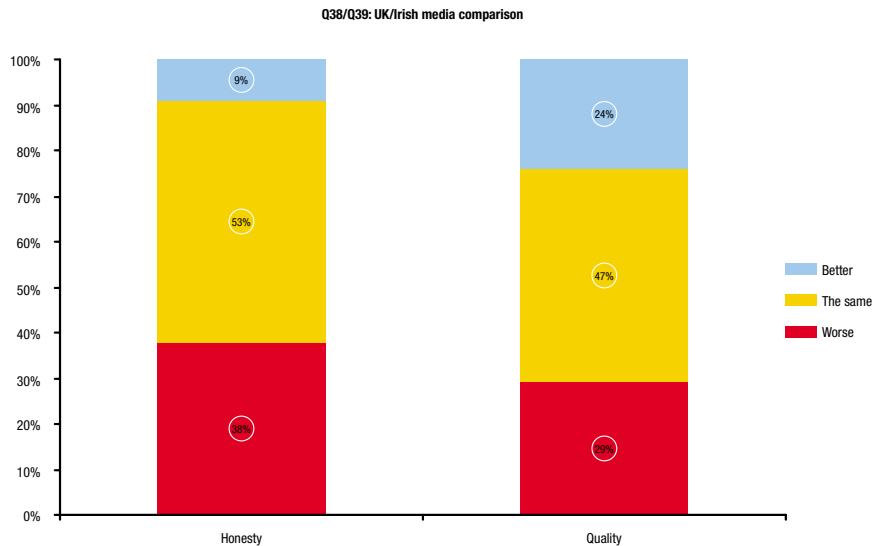


Figure 24: 'Thinking about the British media, how does it compare with the media in Ireland in terms of honesty/quality?'

The qualitative evidence supports the idea that while the Irish successor generation consumes UK media regularly, they are not universally convinced of its quality, and are sometimes rather ashamed to admit to watching programmes like Big Brother:

*"They are good at broadcasting"*

*"Their TV dramas are very good"*

*"We are watching more English television than we did before. I find that I am anyway, I have all the channels"*

*"E4 and all that"*

*"A lot of tackiness comes out of there from the pop culture"*

*"Big Brother, they behave...so badly in Big Brother, it is so funny"*

*"At the end of it you say, why did I (watch) this?"*

### High Culture, Low Culture

*"I think we love their sense of humour and love to watch their... movies and they love to watch our movies"*

Focus group participant, female, aged under 30

Other media in the UK are also extremely popular in Ireland, notably pop music, film, and fashion. However, there is a sense that while many of the group consider UK 'high' art forms to be of good quality, there is little or no consumption of these kinds of cultural expression:

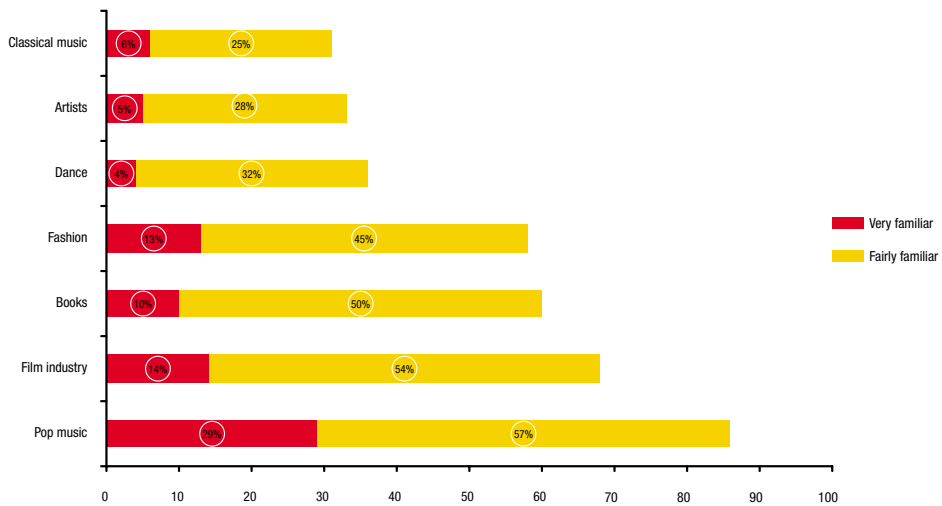


Figure 25: 'How familiar would you say you are with each of the following aspects of British life?'

*"The theatre is very much more highbrow there"*

*"Their theatre in the West End is pretty impressive too"*

*"The modern art, it doesn't affect me...it has gone past the point of being ridiculous"*

*"You don't hear much about British art. There is your man Hirst though...you only know him because he is controversial"*

*"I think as an artist you'd have a much easier time living in England than here"*

*"Their whole arts scene, the galleries, it's all funded better than it is here. And their...people are a lot more interested in different ways of making art than we are"*

While there is some respect for the quality of art forms from dance to sculpture in the UK among the successor generation, it is clear that it is with the media, fashion, sport and pop music that most are engaged. In these areas it seems Ireland and the UK retain close cultural links, although it is interesting that opinions on both sport and media suggest concerns about quality. In many senses this simply reflects the situation in the UK itself, where penetration of TV, sport and pop music far outstrips interest in fine arts, classical music or dance, and where similar issues about quality are hotly debated.

Irish engagement in UK culture is very deep, due to the shared history of the countries and specifically their linguistic ties, and also to continuing high levels of consumption of British media, sport and art forms among the successor generation. However, this interconnectedness is by no means straightforwardly positive. Easy access to the media - particularly phenomena like Big Brother - elicits a sense that UK culture is not of a universally high quality, while this group is much less likely to access art, theatre and other cultural forms.

Perhaps above all, Irish attitudes towards life in the UK - from the group's views of multicultural society to their ambivalent relationship with British sport - suggest a mixing of identities that chimes with ideas raised throughout *Through Irish Eyes*. While the successor generation in Ireland is confident in the future of its own affluent and thriving culture, its history continues to colour and shape its relationship with the UK significantly.

# Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative research results of *Through Irish Eyes* suggest three broad conclusions.



### Firstly

Attitudes towards the UK among the successor generation are often contradictory, usually where mythmaking about the British and real life experience collide. On the one hand, respondents retain an image of 'old England' populated by arrogant colonialists with an inflated sense of their own importance. On the other, the UK is a country of football hooligans, despised by the rest of the world – or alternatively a welcoming place that provides a home for many different cultures. Similarly, stark contrasts are made between a picture of decaying cities and industry and a reputation for ingenuity and invention.

The quantitative research shows a clear relationship between familiarity with a country and favourability towards it. However, in the case of the UK, this correlation is less simple. The evidence suggests this more complex attitude seems to have its roots in the considerable societal overlap that exists between Ireland and the UK – from shared media to the number of Irish people who continue to live and work across the Irish Sea. In addition, it is clear that history continues to have a significant part to play in Irish attitudes towards the UK – whether in the widespread commitment to the idea of a United Ireland, or in the caricatures of British people that emerge throughout the qualitative material.

### Secondly

It seems that Ireland's own development as a successful economy has enabled the successor generation to develop a sense that the UK is not as important to them as it was to previous generations in Ireland. This self-confidence also seems to be linked to decreasing interest in previously thorny political issues, including the immediate settlement of the future of Northern Ireland, as well as a feeling of improved relations between the British and Irish administrations.

However, there is also a sense that the UK is not always wise in its attitudes towards international relations. Many believe its relationship with the USA is based on a need to maintain its ability to 'punch above its weight', a clear reference to its colonial past and Ireland's own experience of that. Equally, the qualitative evidence suggests strongly that the successor generation believes the UK should work more constructively in Europe; specifically by joining the common currency and committing itself more wholeheartedly to the project.

### Thirdly

It is clear from Chapter 4 and elsewhere that while the UK is becoming more tangential to Ireland from an economic and political standpoint, the two countries continue to share cultural experiences on every level – from Big Brother to memories of Ireland's past as part of the UK itself. Views on this betray extremely mixed feelings; while the successor generation is an avid consumer of UK media, pop music, fashion and sport, it often finds itself in the position of 'loving to hate' British culture.

There is also a clear sense that British people increasingly like and admire Ireland and Irish culture more than is always the case the other way around. This is perhaps a reflection of the growing confidence of the successor generation in their own identity, and the future of their culture, economy and place on the world stage.

*"They seem to like us – the amount of retired English couples living over here is amazing"*

*"People think the Irish are fantastic"*

*"I think the Irish have done well over there. The whole 'no Irish need apply' is gone and even the media there always promote Irish guys. Look how many of them have done well – it's like we've become cool"*

*"I reckon they're envious, they think we're very hip"*