

**PROCESS, PERSPECTIVES AND
INTERPRETATIONS: AN ORAL ARCHIVE
OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

PROCESS, PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS: AN ORAL ARCHIVE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS WHICH LED TO THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

This paper outlines the process by which an archive of audio-taped interviews with participants in the multi-party negotiations which led to the Good Friday Agreement was collected. It outlines some of the difficulties which the project met, and also the successes—the way that many participants were willing to give considerable information for the historical record. It argues that such projects can provide for the wider academic public the type of insight which is normally only given to academics in private briefing sessions. It points to several particularly rich areas where the archive can be used for theses or monographs.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jennifer Todd lectures in the Department of Politics, UCD. Her interest areas include the Northern Ireland conflict, contemporary ethnic and centre-periphery conflict, globalisation and political ideologies. Her most recent publication is: *Europe's old states in the new world order: the politics of transition in Britain, France and Spain* (contributing co-editor, UCD Press, 2003). From 1998-2000 she led a project to document the process of negotiations which led to the Good Friday Agreement. Audio-tapes of interviews with participants in the negotiations are lodged in the Archives Department, UCD as the John Whyte Archive (presently under embargo), and form part of IBIS's research collection.

PROCESS, PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS: AN ORAL ARCHIVE OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Jennifer Todd

THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT OF 1998: THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT¹

From the time of the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, the opportunity for an inclusive settlement of the Northern Ireland conflict opened up. The driving force was the peace process. There was a sense of urgency and of achievement after the 1994 IRA ceasefire, a need to keep up the “momentum” of the process, a sense that a new beginning was possible which could—in the words of the Downing Street Declaration of 1993—“remove the causes of conflict ... overcome the legacy of history and ... heal the divisions which have resulted”.² Only the unionists remained suspicious of what they sensed as the nationalist understanding which had also accompanied the peace process.

The shape of a possible settlement became clear by the mid-1990s. All the nationalist parties, including Sinn Féin, now accepted that Irish unity would not come in one step and that a settlement involving an Irish dimension short of Irish unity was acceptable at least in the interim. The unionist parties realised that they could negotiate away part of the role of the Irish government in Northern Ireland only by accepting some form of power sharing devolution, but that a level of British-Irish cooperation would inevitably remain; this, however, might be acceptable to them if the territorial claim to Northern Ireland were removed from the Irish constitution (Hennessy, 2001: 54). The British government was increasingly involving the Irish government in a co-operative intergovernmental mode of managing conflict, which accepted the binational dimension in Northern Ireland, albeit within overall British sovereignty. While the details were much contested, by the governments as well as the parties in Northern Ireland, the broad frame was visible.

This did not form the basis of inclusive negotiations, however, for another three years. A series of wrangles over Sinn Féin’s participation in negotiations stalled progress and led to a breach of the IRA’s ceasefire until May 1997 when a new Labour government with a massive majority made clear its intention to admit Sinn Féin to talks in the event of an IRA ceasefire. A ceasefire was begun on 20 July 1997, and Sinn Féin entered the talks in September; two unionist parties (the DUP

¹ I thank the main interviewers, Mark Christal, Allen Leonard, Muiris MacCarthaigh and Claire Mitchell, and the part-time administrator, Adrian Millar. The archive was funded by the John Whyte Trust Fund and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

² Patterson (2001) argues—somewhat critically—that the Major government as well as the Blair government prioritised keeping the IRA ceasefire over reassuring (moderate) unionists.

and UKUP) left the talks but the UUP remained, under protest at Sinn Féin's entry to negotiations prior to decommissioning. Initially, the prospects of an agreed settlement seemed slim. Neither the UUP nor Sinn Féin appeared to be confident that an agreement between them would be reached, but each had strategic reasons for continuing in the talks, not least by their own participation to show up their opponent's recalcitrance.

The talks continued, with the provision that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed". The course of negotiations has been described elsewhere (Hennessy, 2001; Mallie and McKittrick, 1994; de Bréadún, 2001; Mitchell, 1999). As the talks moved into the final stages, the differences remained stark and breakdown was widely predicted.³ The final 36 hours of the talks process involved intensive all-day and all-night negotiations, under pressure from British, Irish and American leaders, with the parties amending a draft document prepared by British and Irish officials. Negotiations took place on a bilateral basis, with deals being brokered between governments and individual parties, and then presented as *faits accomplis*. Even the major parties felt themselves pressured to compromise, while the minor parties felt themselves sidelined. A number of core issues were resolved; others (reform of policing and criminal justice) were given to commissions, and others were fudged. The final stumbling block centred on the provisions for paramilitary decommissioning. UUP objections on the morning of April 10 nearly prevented agreement. They were eased only by a written memorandum from Tony Blair, stating that he understood decommissioning would begin immediately. Still a minority of UUP members, including senior negotiator, Jeffrey Donaldson, dissented and left the negotiations. Agreement was finally announced on the afternoon on Good Friday, 10 April 1998.

It is certain that the Agreement would not have come about without strong British and Irish governmental commitment and the third party mediation of Mitchell, de Chastelain and Holkeri. Once a draft agreement was in place the British Prime Minister and the Irish Taoiseach (with President Clinton on the telephone) used all their negotiating skills and resources to get an agreement. The two governments were sufficiently acquainted with each others' differences and conflicting perspectives to be able to draft provisions that sidestepped, fudged or simply juxtaposed the contradictory positions. The parties—at least the larger ones—each got enough of their core demands to be willing to swallow what was less palatable. However this was highly dependent on governmental and third party brokerage; George Mitchell is reported to have commented that it was the first agreement in which he had been involved where there was no sign that the opposing parties trusted each other.

In the final days, bargaining was about the detailed provisions of the Agreement; its overall status remained ambiguous. Unionists—or at least the bulk of the UUP—were ready for a compromise "deal" which secured their constitutional position, and this is what they thought they had attained. However a minority of the UUP could not accept the final document: one main negotiator and a number of more junior fig-

³ Until the last, even senior officials believed the odds were against a settlement.

ures left and mobilised against the Agreement. Nationalists, on the other hand, saw it as an institutional framework in which changes—many of them radical—could be managed peacefully and on the basis of which further institutional and constitutional change could occur. The differences of interpretation even between pro-Agreement parties would lead to continuing conflict in the implementation process. The Agreement passed in referendum the following May 1998, with over 70% of the vote, but with only a bare majority of unionists in support. The difficulty of getting negotiations started at all, their knife-edge quality, the final reaching of a settlement against the odds, but the bitter division of unionism, and then the continuing crises of implementation make the making of the Agreement of continuing interest.

THE ARCHIVES PROJECT

In September 1998, in the wake of the excitement and enthusiasm generated by the Agreement, and the desire to understand its significance, I began to look at the prospects of creating an archive of interviews with politicians engaged in the process. The purpose of the project was twofold: first to allow the politicians to tell us what happened while it was still fresh in their memories; secondly, to find out more about the significance of the Agreement from the point of view of those who made it. The latter purpose was especially important since at the time, and still, there is no agreement on the wider significance of the Agreement (see Ruane and Todd, 2001).

The first interview was on 17 December 1998. The project of interviewing was initially conducted on a shoestring budget, but after the first successful interviews we were granted £5000 from the John Whyte Trust Fund, and some six months later a slightly higher amount from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The main interviewers were four graduate students who had taken a BA course on the Politics of Northern Ireland and were taking a MA course on the Good Friday Agreement; one was also preparing for a PhD on Northern Ireland related questions. They were volunteers and they undertook training in interview methods. They were very clear on their own responsibility to maintain confidentiality and they have done so impeccably.

Interviewers were not paid but were given what we thought at the time were reasonably generous expenses. Most of the interviews were carried out in Belfast, with some in politicians' constituencies, some in Dublin and a few in England. Especially in the early stages, once the interviewer had completed an interview, I listened to the tape and discussed it with him or her. For example one initially kept saying "Yes, yes", so as to interrupt the interviewee, and moved on too quickly to the next question. One got sidetracked at the beginning of an interview by talking about the philosophy of consociationism rather than about the topic at hand. I also conducted some interviews myself, and at the end a colleague conducted two interviews abroad.

Interviewees were initially chosen from a list of all the participants in the multi-party negotiations. The list was compiled from existing sources and added to as it be-

came clear who the important “backroom” advisors of parties were. We added to this list politicians and civil servants involved in the wider process, including some who had been involved in the lead-up to the talks and one who was involved in the initial period of implementation after the Agreement. DUP politicians, who had walked out of the talks when Sinn Féin entered them in September 1997, were also included. So were representatives of groups on the margins of the political process (for example the Committee for the Administration of Justice) but whom, we believed, had played an important informal role in setting the equality and rights agenda of the talks (McCrudden, 1999). See sample letter in appendix 1.

There were strict confidentiality guidelines which were read out at the beginning of the interview (see appendix 2). An embargo on anyone listening to the interviews for four years (until the end of first Assembly) was guaranteed, and it has since been lengthened by one year. Two interviewees wanted an embargo for 15 years and one for 10. Several asked to be contacted before the embargo was lifted. All these requests were granted. In fact the archive is still under embargo, and so I am constrained as to what I can say about the content of the interviews that I listened to.

At first, I tried to “match” interviewers with interviewees. One interviewer who was also an Alliance Party member did most of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) interviews. The one Protestant in the group of interviewers did the interviews with the DUP. But, in fact, “matching” often meant that the interviewers chose who, among our list of potential participants, they would really like to interview and set out to phone them and arrange an interview. It was not until well into the project, with the second phase of funding, that we could afford a part-time administrator who did much of the telephoning and arranged interviews schedules.

The quality of the interviews was dependent on the personal rapport between interviewee and interviewer. One young man, initially disappointed when Sinn Féin refused to be interviewed, got some excellent results: the men he interviewed clearly recognized and responded to his seriousness and when he asked for further explanation or clarification, they gave it. Another, lighter in style, did not get so much from some interviewees but then did a truly excellent interview with one major negotiator, who agreed to be interviewed again in a (long) follow up session. Another became an exemplary interviewer, her own voice understated, letting the interviewees speak but interjecting incisive, quiet questions; one interview with a senior British civil servant showed at once her grasp of detail and her ability to steer the interview to get the most out of a relatively short appointment. Yet another, who had both knowledge of and interest in some of the finer details of negotiations, at his best conducted high-powered dialogues with politicians about their strategic choices in the negotiations. After the process had begun and the interviewers were trained, we had no resources to train more interviewers; one would not have wanted better interviewers than we had, but we could have used more. I stepped in myself at times to conduct some interviews, and at the very end a colleague conducted two interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured, episodic, narrative, focusing on the parts of negotiations with which the interviewee had been concerned. The questions followed the structure of the Agreement itself and our independent knowledge (e.g. from informal briefings by politicians and political advisors, and from media reports) about the process of negotiations; questions were adapted as we learned more from the interviews themselves (see appendix 3). The questions were in modules: entry to negotiations; constitutional issues; strand one of the talks (internal Northern Ireland institutions); strand two (North-South institutions); strand three (British-Irish institutions); equality and human rights; prisoners, decommissioning, demilitarisation; what was won or lost from the point of view of the party concerned; the view of the Agreement held by the interviewee in April 1998, six months later, one year later, two years later. Some modules were left out for some interviewees. The interviewers did not insist on asking the next question if it had already been answered and were ready with follow-ups. We also interviewed some DUP politicians, who were asked not about the process of negotiations but about their decision not to enter them, and their view of them from the “outside”.

Altogether we conducted 70 taped interviews. There were some marked absences; Sinn Féin did not agree to participate, presumably because the meaning and import of the Good Friday Agreement is still a very live issue for republicans, and their interpretation of the Agreement remains a very live issue for unionists and for the media. Some party leaders agreed to participate only with me, and we were unable to find a suitable time. For such a project to work optimally one needs a greater level of institutionalization than we had.

Copies of each tape were made, and the tapes were lodged in the Archives department at UCD. They are still under embargo. We have not yet transcribed the interviews because of lack of funding. Funding has been promised if Sinn Féin were to participate, and it appears possible that some Sinn Féin politicians will eventually agree to be interviewed for the project.

PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL CULTURE

How far was participation in the project affected by the wider political culture? In Ireland in general, both North and South, politicians and civil servants are in general happy to give briefing interviews to academics, solely for their use. These interviews are typically untaped, and it is generally in untaped interviews that politicians and civil servants give the most useful (unattributable) information. Sometimes such briefing interviews are taped solely for private use, by agreement with the interviewee. The significant aspect of this project was that the interviews were to be taped and opened to researchers in general. The danger was that the participants would treat them like media interviews, simply give the party-political or official line, and not give new information or useful perspectives in them.

This danger was increased because several years previously a graduate student at UCD Department of Politics (my department, although I had had no contact with this student) had broadcast on the mass media—in the midst of a presidential elec-

tion campaign—a confidential taped interview with a major Irish politician who was standing for election. This caused a scandal; the politician, who has since died, was politically embarrassed and lost the election. This had not, to my knowledge, happened before or since in Irish politics, but it was a severe potential problem for our project.

On both grounds, it was necessary to have a very strong guarantee of confidentiality (see appendix 2) and one that could be adapted as the interviewee saw fit. I was particularly concerned to ensure that the interviewers were committed to maintaining full confidentiality and I let them participate only when I was personally convinced that they were so committed; they were also aware how seriously I would take any breach of confidentiality. The confidentiality guarantee, together with the clear fact—to anyone who met or talked to us—that I and the interviewers were fully committed to confidentiality, appeared to overcome the potential problems. However confidentiality remains an important concern, and it is because of this that I am unwilling, while the embargo remains in force, to make public even the names of the participants. It is because of this that the guarantee of confidentiality restricts access to the tapes to bona-fide academic researchers.

As it turned out, politicians, and particularly Northern Ireland politicians who had been involved in the process, and who had kept silent about the negotiations as they were ongoing, were happy to talk about the process for the historical record. Many felt that this had been history in the making, and that the minutiae, their own experiences even when they were not central, should be recorded. The same was true of quite a few British and Irish civil servants. Neither British nor Irish politicians were so easy to interview.

It is possible that concerns of confidentiality affected some interviewees, for example one Irish politician who gave a blunt refusal and who would have been well aware of the UCD graduate student who so clearly breached confidentiality in the past. It appears to have affected the views of one senior Northern Irish politician who was willing to be interviewed only by me, on the grounds that he would be confident that a permanent employee of the university would not break confidentiality, but was less sure of graduate students.

We got a few other blunt rejections from individual politicians, without explanation. I think that if we had been more institutionalized, we might have had greater numbers of acceptances; a few politicians may have felt it beneath their dignity to talk to graduate students, or to participate in a project which did not have a strong institutional profile or prestigious backers. However it is certainly the case that many high-profile politicians and civil servants did agree to participate, and that where some did not it was a function more of difficulties of finding suitable times, rather than of principled rejection. For most, the bona fides of the project, a level of trust in the institution (UCD) and in myself, and the competence of the interviewers were more important than high prestige.

Some politicians had already been much interviewed and were simply too busy to participate. It might have been possible to have approached them again later, tell-

ing them how many had already participated and hoping that some who had participated would vouch for the usefulness of the exercise. We did not do this because of lack of administrative back-up. Members of those parties where disagreements about the value and meaning of the Agreement had become public were in general eager to participate in the project. Sinn Féin, which had kept tight discipline and relative secrecy on their strategic considerations, was not willing to participate.

The Official Secrets Act (1963), and its applicability to civil servants, was a serious problem for our interviews with Irish civil servants. A number refused to participate before they had a judgement from their own departments that they would not be found in breach of the act. This judgement was not forthcoming. Because it was initially difficult to gain access to British and Northern Ireland civil servants, I approached a figure who on paper appeared to be a key figure in the Northern Ireland administration. This was a serious mistake and eventually it led to a decision that civil servants should not participate in the project. If I had rather slowly worked by word of mouth and contacts, which had begun to work before the “ban” was announced, we would have got considerably more interviews with British civil servants; at least one more senior civil servant would have participated had it not been for the ban.

WHAT DID POLITICIANS AND CIVIL SERVANTS TELL?

The interviewees were not doing this for publicity but for history, for the record. Relatively few politicians gave the sort of “spin” which one sees with journalistic reports. Some participants entered very fully into the process, giving what they could—really trying to communicate as much as they could. Others gave less of intellectual or historical value: some politicians who had excellent media profiles sometimes responded exactly as they did to the media; perhaps they had one mode of response which was the media response. Some very major politicians gave interviews with minimal content. The politicians who gave most were middle rank politicians, plus one or two leading negotiators. Advisors were often excellent respondents, perhaps because they were academics and knew the sort of information that would be useful. One advisor talked for three and a half hours to an interviewer (who had been travelling for some time previously), offering her one cup of tea in the marathon session. Occasionally there were “scoops”—revelations of back scene negotiations—which one would need to cross-check. I have not yet come across statements that I know independently to be false. As the interviewers became more experienced and actually knew more, they asked more searching questions, particularly if something was said that did not fit in with what they had already been told.

Politicians from the political parties, particularly the major players, the UUP and the SDLP, were very clear and forthright in the interviews on their aims and bottom lines in the negotiations. Even within the same party, however, there were differences of emphasis and I think this comes across very clearly in the interviews. The Alliance party interviews were interesting in a different sense: the participants were

keen to describe the process of negotiations as they had experienced it. But the Agreement was also, in an important sense, an electoral disaster for the APNI whose vote in the subsequent Assembly elections was only 6.5%. The negotiations provoked bitter in-party conflict. The interviewees were frank about this, and there is a very useful set of interviews which show the different perspectives on party aims, organization, philosophy and strategy. The minor parties were also very frank, some making clear how marginalized they had felt in the negotiations, and also making clear those points in the final redrafting where their own contribution had been important.

Civil servants were among the best interviewees, although they were in general very concerned about confidentiality and official secrets, and some insisted on a very long embargo of the interview. They were admirably clear and excellent on the details of the process of negotiation as they were involved in it, for example in drafting documents, or in discussing the respective tasks of different individuals and groups—they responded enthusiastically to the question: “what would I have seen you doing if I had been there?”

We interviewed two of the three international chairs and one major British politician. The international chair whom I interviewed gave a very clear sense to me of the physical and organizational structure of the process—not the content of negotiations. My colleague interviewed a major British figure in London, who arrived with written answers to the questions which had been sent some days earlier, and refused to depart from the written script. The interview lasted less than 20 minutes and he felt it had not been very useful.

The funder whom I first approached asked the question, what would politicians tell us that they hadn't already told to senior Northern Ireland academics? I have a better answer now than I had then. We did not get as much confidential detail as, e.g., a senior unionist academic advisor would get from unionist politicians. We did get more from other parties than he might have got. The interviews—certainly the best of them—are the same sort of quality and content as a politician would give an academic interviewer in a private briefing session. It was not usually more than this, but this is a public not a private resource. Moreover we can eventually make it available without the interpretation that any commentator—and particularly political commentators in Northern Ireland—put on any such interview. We also got the directness of experience in the best of these interviews that is typical of a real personal interview. In the best of the interviews there is a sense of directness and of personal contact even on the tape. In this sense I think it is an important public resource.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE ARCHIVE FOR RESEARCHERS?

The archive gives excellent evidence on the process of negotiations, what was negotiated where and when and by whom, who drafted what and who amended

what.⁴ What came out very clearly was the importance of officials, and particularly the prominence of Irish officials (one unionist felt they were much more prominent than British officials, apart from the highest level British officials) and the hand-to-mouthness of some effective negotiators (one unionist felt they did not appear very professional). There was also a sense of what the process was like—a lot of hanging about, boredom, who said what to whom in a hotel lobby in London, the betting among even senior officials about the likely outcome, then the intense negotiation the final days. Much of this is already known, but it comes across very clearly again in the interviews that I have listened to.

The archive also gives excellent evidence on the different perspectives of the parties on the process—what issues were conceived as crunch issues and when were they so conceived? How did individuals conceive of their role? How did people come to terms, or not, with provisions of the Agreement with which they disagreed? What did they think of some of the other players? It also gives the human perspective; for example one unionist discussed the great difficulties he had in finally deciding to accept the Agreement, and the issues are very vivid, directly communicated, in the interview. This leads back to the point that the archive is valuable in the same sort of way as interviews are, in giving a depth, a richness of meaning, allowing “thick descriptions”, seeing what events meant to the participants. There is sometimes great clarity about why interpretation *a* is held and is held to be important by individual X. The voice, the resonances, the words chosen show what the participants thought and wanted much better than secondary reporting. In this sense the archive makes available to wide range of researchers what is usually only available to one or two.

It can be used to fill out details of the story of the negotiations. That story is already partially known, and the archive in large part repeats what is known. When I listen to some of the tapes, I sit through a full ten minutes and there is nothing that I do not already know. Then something may be said that is new, either as fact or as interpretation. There are certainly some new facts in these interviews which are not in the public realm—what Trimble or Empey said to X three days before the Agreement; unofficial negotiations on the sidelines and who was involved. Some of these new facts are cross-checkable (and confirmed) in more than one interview.

The interview material also provides very useful evidence to test or confirm hypotheses about what parties, or sections within parties, were concerned about. For example, I had come to certain hypotheses about the parties’ motivations for entering talks and about their negotiating positions; these were partially confirmed, partially qualified and clarified by the interviews. For example, unionist negotiators and advisors were often very clear on what they personally had seen as the key issues in the negotiations. However there were considerable differences among those we interviewed on the number and nature of the key issues, and the significance they put on each issue.

⁴ It does not give the total answers, some specific issues will have to be followed up, but it allows the formulation of such detailed questions.

Perhaps most striking and valuable as a research base is the evidence about a number of specific aspects of the negotiations, where we have six or more individuals talking about exactly the same issues/aspect of negotiations from very different perspectives, sometimes converging, sometimes conflicting. I have already mentioned the interviews with all the main Alliance party actors, which showed very clearly the internal differences of perspective within the party. There are also sets of interviews with UUP and with SDLP politicians which show the different perspectives within each of those parties. The SDLP interviews do not show different policy stances but rather different emphases on the same policy stance, and different degrees of satisfaction with what was achieved in the Agreement. Finally there is a set of interviews with participants in the negotiations about constitutional issues—three unionists and two or three Irish government negotiators. Here too we get interesting convergences and divergences of perspective.

What is the potential product of this project? At a minimum, some of the wider intellectual categorizations and interpretations of the Agreement might well come under criticism by study based on this material. This was, for example, a top-down process in which governments took the lead and civil servants did the drafting; it was not forged by dialogue between the parties. It was the best that could be done at the time, and participants felt they had been shoehorned into some of the provisions. Rather than it being an example of a settlement process where agreement was reached between the participants, it was a process where the participants agreed to accept a complex document which contained considerable gaps and ambiguities, while retaining very different perspectives on the direction and significance of the agreement. It is therefore very clear why these differences led to continuing conflict over the implementation of the agreement.

The archive, I think, also provides basic material for a number of monographs or theses on the differing perspectives in the political parties and on constitutional issues. I hope that graduate students and other researchers will make use of it in this respect.

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APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE LETTER

[This was sent to potential interviewees]

Department of Politics
University College Dublin
Belfield
Dublin 4

Dear Mr XXX,

I am very pleased to write to you.

Here in University College Dublin we are putting together an archive of audio-taped interviews with participants in the recent multi-party talks process (September 1997-April 1998). This archive will serve as a very valuable research data base in years to come. Your participation in the project is crucial and we would be particularly happy if you, as a senior Unionist, would agree to participate in the initial stages of the project.

The sorts of issues that we would like to discuss include the initial Unionist assessment of the prospect of success of the talks, the UUP's sense of what was to be gained and what to be lost in them and what were likely to be the crucial issues in contention, and whether, when and to what extent the party (or individuals within it) changed those initial assessments. There is much to be learned about negotiations and conflict management from the talks process, and here we would especially value your views on the process of the talks, what aspects and contributions were most helpful (or unhelpful) in coming to agreement on contentious issues, and when you sensed the possibilities of such agreement. We would very much value your assessment of the sorts of issues that had to be weighed up by Unionists in the crucial final stages of the talks. In addition, we would very much value your present assessment of the value of the process and the prospects of the Agreement.

This is not an investigative, fact-finding exercise for public consumption. It is a project intended to document the perceptions and perspectives of the parties to the talks for the historical record. Particularly in the initial stages of the project we may be unaware of centrally important issues and we would be very grateful to you for pointing them out to us. I know that politicians in Northern Ireland have a very busy schedule. Half an hour of your time would be very useful for our project. If it were possible for you to leave available a little more time, I think it would very much increase the historical value of the interview.

Given the confidential nature of the talks and the still contentious character of many of the issues raised, we have very clear guidelines on the use of the tapes. The tapes are the property of the Department of Politics, not of the interviewer (who will have pledged to use them only within the guidelines set by the department). The tapes will be kept in the Archives Department of UCD under embargo for four years, until the end of the life of this Assembly. Until that time, no-one will use the information given in the interviews. After four years, only bona-fide researchers will be permitted to use the archive, on the condition that they make no direct quotations until ten years after the interview took place. If you believe that more stringent restrictions should be placed on access to your interview, please contact me.

The interviewer who will be contacting you shortly is a very well qualified young woman, XXX. XXX is from the North. She has a brilliant undergraduate degree in Politics and History and she is particularly interested and well informed on the politics of Northern Ireland. She is presently doing an MLitt on the interrelation of politics and religion under my supervision. I can vouch—without reservation or hesitation—for her competence, integrity, honesty and respect for confidentiality. I would ask you to allow XXX to interview you at some stage in the near future. XXX will travel to meet you at your convenience. If you have any worries either before or after the interview, please contact me and I will do my utmost to resolve any problems.

Once again, I am very pleased to write to you and I very much hope you will be able to give a positive response to this request. Please contact me at any stage (tel XXX, fax XXX, tel and fax, XXX, email jennifer.todd@ucd.ie)

XXX will contact you within the next few weeks.

With thanks for your kind consideration of this request

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jennifer Todd
Senior Lecturer in Politics
Director of Archives Project

APPENDIX 2: CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

[This was read out at the start of each interview]

The tapes of the interviews with participants in the Northern Ireland talks process are the property of the Department of Politics UCD and are to be used only in accordance with the guidelines set down by the department. In particular:

- no information gained in the taped interviews about the talks process is to be used, published, or otherwise made public for four years (or longer, if agreed with the individual interviewee)
- then to be used only by bona-fide researchers
- no direct quotations or attributions of source from the taped interviews are to be used within ten years of the interview.

APPENDIX 3: OUTLINE QUESTIONS

3.1 Progressive Unionist Party

[This was one of the early interview schedules, and more detailed than the schedules that interviewers took with them to later interviews.]

1. What was the PUP's view of the talks process from summer 1997 when it became clear that Sinn Féin would be in the talks?
 - Did the PUP have difficulty entering talks including SF? Did you talk directly with them? Did you think the UUP would enter talks including SF?
 - Did you think at that time that the parties would eventually reach an agreement?
 - How closely did you work with other parties, for example the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP)? How far were your views the same, how far different?
 - Were you happy with the guiding principles of the talks (nothing agreed until everything was agreed; sufficient consensus; three strands)?
 - How did you view the expulsion of the UDP? The expulsion of SF?
2. From the PUP's perspective, what were the key, the crunch, issues in the talks?
 - What interests did you want protected above all?
 - What issues were you willing to "pull out the stops" for? What issues did you spend most time planning, working on, arguing about at the talks?
 - i. On strand 1?
 - ii. On strand 2?
 - iii. On strand 3?
 - iv. On constitutional issues?
 - v. On the equality agenda?

Follow up:

- What about the security agenda? Prisoners? North-South institutions?
 - Who were your allies in the talks on each of these issues?
 - How far were these issues central to the talks?
 - How far did other issues, not central from the PUP's perspective, take centre stage in the negotiations?
 - Did you have any bilateral contact with SF on any of these issues, where you might have had convergent views?
3. From the PUP's perspective, where did it see breakthroughs in the talks?
 - What were the crucial periods?
 - When did it seem that strand 1 might be agreed?
 - When did it seem that strand 2 might be agreed?
 - When did it seem that strand 3 might be agreed?

- When did it seem that constitutional issues might be agreed?
 - When did it seem that security issues might be agreed?
 - When did it seem that equality agenda might be agreed?
 - What or who was crucial in reaching agreement?
 - When did you sense that SF might come into the agreement on each of these issues? When did you sense that UUP might come into the agreement on each of these issues?
 - How was the equality agenda negotiated? How involved were you in the negotiations? When was it clear that this was going to be so important in the final agreement? What were your priorities here? Were you pleased with how the equality agenda became central to the agreement?
 - On the security agenda, what were your central aims? What about prisoners? What were your views on the police and the proposed commission on policing?
4. In the final stages of negotiations, leading up to the final 72 hours, what were your primary concerns? In particular:
- What was your view of George Mitchell's first draft which the UUP rejected?
 - What about the discussions on the voting system for the Assembly elections? Would a different system have suited you better? What were the interests involved here—i.e. why did others reject, for example, a top-up system as in the Forum elections?
 - What were the issues that you were most concerned about?
 - What were your arguments at this stage?
 - Were you consulted or did the governments focus on the larger parties?

More generally:

- What was your experience of the final 72 hours leading up to Agreement ?
 - What were the major stumbling blocks towards agreement, as you remember them?
 - Did you feel you had to swallow a bitter pill on any of the issues?
5. How successful was the PUP in getting its core issues and interests onto the agenda? In getting agreement on these issues?
- What was the balance sheet of gains and losses, for your party, at the end? Ask about each strand, strand 1, strand 2, strand 3, constitutional issues, equality issues, security issues.
 - Did the PUP have a negotiating strategy?
 - If so was it successful, how successful?
 - If not, do you now think it should have had?
 - In retrospect, how do you assess the PUP's performance in the negotiations?
 - From the PUP's perspective, what was won and lost in the Agreement?

6. How did you view the Agreement initially? (e.g. a new beginning? A resolution of conflict? A fudge?). How do you view it now?
 - Do you think it will last?
 - Do you think SF will get onto the executive?
 - Do you think that they should?
7. Specific issues, which may come in earlier:
 - How far, in your view, was decommissioning dealt with satisfactorily in the Agreement?
 - What is your view about the present discussions and debates about decommissioning?

3.2 Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

[The following instructions were given to the interviewer]

Use the same broad framework of questions as for the other parties. But for NIWC be sure to focus on the equality agenda—it appears they were very active and effective on this, and also that the way it was negotiated was of interest. So make sure to ask these additional qqs below (as well as the other qqs)

Include with other questions -

i. The equality agenda:

- How was it discussed: in the main part of talks or hived off in separate consultations?
- Who was centrally involved in the discussions?
- What was UUP view—were they involved in the discussions—did they take much notice of it?
- What was NIWC role with regard to the equality agenda?
- What sort of advice did you take on the equality agenda (e.g. documents by SACHR, CAJ activity: how important were they)?
- How successful do you think the Agreement was in asserting (and later implementing) a strong equality agenda?

ii. The NIWC role

- What was the NIWC role in the talks process: how did you see that role, what it should be and what it was?
- Did its specific character—a party without a constitutional position, and without specific policies on many issues—actually help it mediate positions and act as “honest broker” in talks?
- On two occasions the NIWC came out strongly against the expulsion of parties from the talks: UDP and SF. Can you explain why? What was the intent, the thinking behind this? What was the effect of this action on the part of NIWC later in the talks?

iii. The final 72 hours

[focus in on questions here, because this appears to have been a very crucial time]

Ask about the “Mitchell document” and the UUP (and Alliance’s) rejection of this:

- What did you think about this?
- What was your experience of this final 72 hours?
- How far did NIWC make a major input at this time? What was that input?
- Did the equality agenda get strengthened in this final period?
- If so, what was the process by which it got strengthened? Who did the drafting or the amending?

3.3 Irish civil servants

[This was a later set of interviews; the questions were more schematic, simply to remind the interviewer of issues to cover]

A) Initial assessment of situation and prospects: Summer—September 1997

After the IRA ceasefire when it became clear SF would enter the talks in September:

- Did you think there was a realistic prospects of talks?
- Did you think the DUP would stay in the talks?
- Did you think the UUP would stay in the talks?
- Was the Irish government involved in pre-negotiations to get the UUP to stay?
- Did you think there was a realistic prospect of agreement, i.e., given what you knew about changes in SF strategy and thinking, did you think they were capable of accepting an agreement that unionists would also be able to accept?
- Was the shape of a possible agreement already in the minds of the government?
- Was that shape the Frameworks Document of 1995? Was it an adaptation or revision of Frameworks?

B) Irish government negotiating stance:

- What did the Irish government, in your view, see as its role in the talks?
- What were the Irish government's initial understandings and expectations about Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution?
- What did it see as its role with respect to the demands of the Northern nationalist parties, the SDLP and SF?

C) Organisation:

Can you explain:

- the organisation of the talks
- the role of plenaries
- when the three strands were discussed and where
- in what venues and among whom, when and where decommissioning, equality and policing were discussed

D) When were there breakthroughs to agreement? Go through each of the strands and issues in turn

E) Taking you through the talks process stage by stage:

Sept-Dec 1997

What level of engagement:

- between the parties
- between governments

- between the governments and the parties

If I had been there, what would I have seen you doing at this stage?

D)—The Christmas period leading up to the Heads of Agreement Document

- What was the intent of the Heads of Agreement document?
- Was it intended as movement towards unionism? If so, why?
- Was it intended to lessen the emphasis on island of Ireland? To increase the Northern Irish and British Isles focus, thus changing the focus of the Frameworks Document?
- What sort of response did you get? Why?

E) The Christmas to late March period

- Crises, expulsions: how serious were these in terms of potential breakdown of the talks?
- Was there more engagement at this stage?
- What agreements—if any—were becoming clear?
- What was your role at this stage?
- Were there intergovernmental disagreement? About what?

F) The Mitchell deadline

- Why, in your view, was the Mitchell deadline set? Was it necessary?
- Who drafted the “Mitchell document”?
- How far were the two governments in agreement at this stage?
- What were the issues in disagreement between the governments?
- Were these resolved in the Mitchell document?
- Were you surprised at the UUP and Alliance response to the Mitchell document?

G) Last 72 hours.

- What was your experience of this phase? What was your role in it?
- How in fact did negotiations proceed at this phase?
- Go through strand by strand: when was each set of issues agreed?
- When did it seem to you that Sinn Féin were going to come into the Agreement? That the UUP were going to come into the Agreement?
- Did it seem likely to you that some negotiators would walk out?
- What was your—the Irish government—role on the last day, when the UUP went through crisis?
- Did the Irish and British governments divide responsibility for negotiations, e.g. some reports suggest that the Irish government negotiated with Sinn Féin and the British with the UUP? Is this correct?

H) When did you think you had a deal?

- Did you anticipate problems selling it to Unionist constituency; to the republican constituency?
- What was your assessment of it at the time: a permanent settlement, a framework, a beginning, an interim settlement? What is your assessment of it in retrospect?