

UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

Launch of Research Project

Working Title of Study:

***'The Sustainability of Minority Group Community Service Providers:
The Irish in Luton'***

PRESS RELEASE

As an ethnic minority group with a lengthy history of settlement in Luton, the Irish community continue to exist in significant numbers; forming a large Irish-born elderly generation, and even larger second and third generations of Irish descendants. The Luton Irish Forum community service provider (for further detail see Notes) has, since 1997, continued to grow, however its management are aware that the significant weighting of elderly, first generation persons engaging with its services versus the relatively small number of middle and younger age groups presents an important issue of 'cultural sustainability'.

How can the organisation continue to survive in the longer-term?

Monday 5th October 2009 marks the launch of a research project with the objectives of understanding the degree to which the large second and third generations of people of Irish descent in Luton engage with their Irish heritage, and what can be done by the Luton Irish Forum to attract a broader membership in the future.

Head researcher, Mr Jonathan McElhatton (for further detail see Notes), a student at the University of Southampton, seeks to recommend ways in which community service providers, such as the Luton Irish Forum, can continue to exist past the generation they originally sought to assist.

The launch begins with the distribution of a single-page, 32-question structured questionnaire, covering simple classificatory questions, questions that seek to understand the extent to which respondees identify with their Irish cultural heritage, and a section that looks at respondees' degree of attachment to community service provision in Luton. This questionnaire is directed only to those second and third generation people of Irish descent (for further detail see Notes), and who live in, or near to, Luton. A questionnaire can be picked-up from, and returned to, a number of locations (for further detail see Notes), and is also available online at www.lutonirishforum.org.

Lucy Kellett, Trustee and Public Relations Officer of the Luton Irish Forum said "We are happy to support this valuable research project. We think that it is necessary to engage with people who are of Irish descent to continue promoting Irish culture and welfare. The study will be beneficial not just to the Luton Irish Forum, but also to several other Irish organisations around the country". External support for this research project includes the Federation of Irish Societies, local religious ministers, and many other Irish community service providers from across the country (for further detail see Notes).

To request more information regarding this research project, or the services of Luton Irish Forum, please contact head researcher Jonathan McElhatton (jmcelhatton@btinternet.com) or Noelette Hanley / Lucy Kellett at the Luton Irish Forum (01582 720447, info@lutonirishforum.org)

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Notes

The Luton Irish Forum relieves persons in need, poverty or distress through the provision of advice and information, to advance the education of the public, and to provide other facilities for the benefit of the public in the interests of social welfare. With a current membership of over eight-hundred and fifty, as well as five fully employed staff and sixty-five volunteers, the organisation continues to grow.

Jonathan McElhatton has just begun his third and final year within the School of Geography reading for a Bachelor of Science (BSc) undergraduate degree. Forming the major assessment for the third year is the compulsory dissertation research project, designed to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their geographical skills by investigating a topic or problem of special interest to them. Jonathan's special interests in migration and race-relations, along with his Irish heritage and a long family history in Luton, led him to select this town as the case study for the project. After discussion with the Luton Irish Forum and Wardown Park Museum, Jonathan decided to focus his project around the Irish community in Luton, and more specifically around the involvement of the second and third generations.

The term 'of Irish descent' relates to anyone whose parents or grandparents are/were members of the large Irish-born population who travelled from Ireland to Britain during the post-Second World War decades (1940s/50s/60s/70s).

Distribution routes, where questionnaires will be available for pick-up and return, cover the following local institutions / organisations:

- Luton Irish Forum, Kathleen Connolly House, Hitchin Road, Luton
- Luton Irish Forum (online), www.lutonirishforum.org
- Our Lady Help of Christians RC Church, Castle Street, Luton
- St. Margaret of Scotland RC Church, Bolingbroke Road, Luton
- St. Joseph's RC Church, Gardenia Avenue, Luton
- Church of the Holy Family, Freshwater Close, Luton
- Holy Ghost RC Church, Westbourne Road, Luton
- St. Martin de Porres RC Church, Legrave High Street, Luton
- St. Mary's RC Church, West Street, Dunstable
- St. Elizabeth's RC Church, Park Road, Toddington
- St. Vincent's RC Church, Hammersmith Gardens, Houghton Regis
- Gerry Taylor Butchers, Calverton Road, Luton

Support for this research project comes from a number of directions. A motion for further research into the engagement of second and third generation people of Irish descent in community service provision was put forward by the Luton Irish Forum at the Federation of Irish Societies annual general meeting in Birmingham on Saturday 26th September 2009, and was overwhelmingly supported by representatives. Local religious ministers agree that Irish organisations struggle for younger members continually, and warmly recommend the research project. Support has also come

from numerous other Irish community service providers, who remain interested in the final recommendations for the future of their own organisations.

The research group would like to thank sincerely the Luton Irish Forum staff and members for their continued help and support, the Federation of Irish Societies, and the many local institutions / organisations / friends / family that have supported and facilitated the research project.



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