

A Peace of Us – Episode 4: the Time Capsule

Host: Jordan Kenny

Guests: Daniel Holder, Claudia Savage, Matt Fox, Neave Campbell

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/openlearn-ireland/the-good-friday-agreement-podcast>

Jordan:

Hello and welcome to A Peace of Us, a four part series from the Open University in Ireland, in which voices beyond political institutions explore the impact of the Good Friday Agreement on arts, sports, the community, and their hopes for the future of Northern Ireland. I'm Jordan Kenny and we hope this episode will act as a time capsule. We get a snapshot of the current standing of the Good Friday Agreement from expert Daniel Holder. We discuss the impact of the Good Friday Agreement and the future with three young journalists, and we also hear your hopes and dreams for the next 25 years.

Jordan:

Right. So a full house for this episode. I've got three people staring at me in the studio here. Let's start on my left with Claudia. Introduce yourself. Tell me who you are and where you come from.

Claudia:

My name's Claudia Salvage. I am 23. I'm from <inaudible> in County Tyrone, and I'm a journalist with Press Association.

Jordan:

Nice one. In the middle -

Neave:

I'm Neave Campbell. I am 28. I'm from <inaudible> near Dungannon in County, Tyrone and I am a journalist for the Belfast Telegraph.

Jordan:

And last but definitely not least. Hello?

Matt:

Uh, I'm Matt. I'm 32. I'm the oldest one here, I think <laugh>. From Fermanagh, Eniskillen, and I am a journalist with BBC.

Jordan:

Nice one. So I've got four journalists in a room. What could go wrong? <laugh>. We're going to talk a bit about your hopes and dreams for the next 25 years and hear what opportunities you feel the Good Friday Agreement has afforded you. But first we're going to hear from Daniel Holder, a human rights expert who'll talk about the Good Friday Agreement through that lens.

Jordan:

Daniel, thanks very much for joining us.

Daniel:

Pleasure. Thank you.

Jordan:

So for anyone who maybe doesn't know who you are, introduce yourself for us.

Daniel:

So I am Daniel Holder. I work for the committee on the administration of Justice, CAJ, better known by its initials, which is the Principal Human Rights Group within Northern Ireland.

Jordan:

For anybody who doesn't maybe fully understand or know what the Good Friday Agreement is, could you briefly summarize it for us?

Daniel:

Well, look, I suppose the simplest way of describing as is that it is a peace agreement. Um, and it's an agreement that was both raised by the majority of political parties in Northern Ireland, but it's also an international agreement between the British and Irish governments, which actually is enshrined with the United Nations as a treaty. So it actually forms part of the legal obligations, the international legal obligations of, uh, of the UK and, and Irish governments. They're duty bound to implement the bits of it that correspond to them. That happening in practice, of course, is sometimes a different matter.

Jordan:

What's the current standing of the Good Friday Agreement?

Daniel:

I suppose that the model of the Good Friday Agreement was one of power sharing. And we as a human rights organization were optimistic in the sense that human rights was really mainstreamed throughout the Good Friday Agreement. It was the blueprint for how you could prevent the type of abuses of power that had occurred previously in Northern Ireland and had fueled and sowed the seeds for conflict. So the idea was the core provisions in the agreement were, there was a couple of things. One is - which was implemented - that you would incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights, the principle European - from the Council of Europe, nothing to do with the eu -

Daniel:

- Human rights instrument into domestic legislation here. Meaning you could directly enforce rights in court, but also that ministers, MLA's passing laws and things could not do anything that breach the European Convention. And if they did, you had a direct route to court - that was very successful. The current British government are still, again, toying over tearing that up. The Human Rights Act which would be a breach of the Good Friday Agreement, but also an incredibly irresponsible and dangerous thing to do.

Jordan:

So we've talked through there a bit about what the Good Friday Agreement actually is, but talk to me about parts of the Good Friday Agreement that haven't yet been delivered. What are those?

Daniel:

Primary thing that's missing is really the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. That was the big sort of safeguard over power sharing. But there are other things. I mean, there was a duty -

Jordan:

I was going to say - explain. People hear that phrase: Bill of Rights, all the time in the media and in papers and wherever else. What does Bill of Rights actually mean?

Daniel:

There's a reasonable familiarity, I think with the Human Rights Act that - you have legally binding rights rights to freedom of expression, rights to fair trial that if they are breached by government ministers or by legislation, you can go to court and stop the breach. That's how powerful the instrument is. Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland was completely on that model, except it was to include a range of other rights that wouldn't be within the European Convention. Things the right to housing, which obviously

is relevant to preventing past practices of gerrymandering and other things that were among the causes of conflict here.

Daniel:

In terms of the other things that haven't been delivered, there's a number of things out of the St. Andrews agreement that were brought in. One of them would be an anti-poverty strategy. Anti-poverty strategy on the basis of objective need was a legal duty placed on the Stormont government. Hasn't yet been delivered. We took a judicial review back in 2015, found the ministers acted unlawfully in not progressing an anti-poverty strategy. That's something that needs set up.

Daniel:

The Irish Language Act has been legislated for, but not commenced, but it's certainly well below the commitments at the moment that were then in the Good Friday Agreement. There's also strategies, for Irish and Ulster Scots, which were legal obligations. There are elements of policing reform, particularly in covert policing that were - that still haven't been delivered.

Jordan:

So how detrimental is that the parts of it haven't actually been fully delivered on?

Daniel:

I think it set the seeds for the continued dysfunctional collapse of the assembly that you don't have those rights-based safeguards. Now we saw in places North Belfast, the reemergence of questions around things gerrymandering, not building houses in a particular place on the sense that it would change electoral outcomes. And because the wrong side of the community would live in them, it would change the geography of the area. That's the kind of thing that the right to housing, if it was enshrined in a Bill of Rights, would've prevented. In a sense, you've got a situation whereby you don't have objective constraints on power in the way that was envisaged.

Daniel:

But you do have these very subjective political vetoes and they've allowed measures, even when - marriage equality is a good example - even when you have a majority within the cabinet, within what's called the executive and within the assembly for a particular positive action measure, it can still be blocked by a minority. And that's not what was originally envisaged. This was meant to be objectively based around human rights standards. You're meant to have a much more formal role for the sort of human rights and equality commissions and in that process within the assembly, it hasn't happened.

Daniel:

Um, and I think that does lay at the foot of way the institutions have have failed to function even when they have been established and they haven't delivered in the way they could have done.

Jordan:

So where can we learn more about that?

Daniel:

We've actually produced a matrix of everything that was committed to and everything that's been delivered and haven't, and let me tell you, it runs into several dozen pages.

Jordan:

Well, you can find that matrix on our OpenLearn hub if you search OpenLearn Good Friday Agreement online. Daniel, thank you for taking us through that detail

Jordan:

So guys, a bit more on the Good Friday Agreement then. From your perspective, Neave, opportunity wise, do you think there's things that you've experienced or gone through in your career that wouldn't have happened if not for the Good Friday Agreement?

Neave:

I Think so. Definitely. I've grown up, I went to a Catholic grammar school and then when I left and I went to university in Belfast, a lot of people - where I'm from would probably be considered a nationalist area. And whenever I went - but through school as well, we did cross-community things and we got to meet - pupils from our school would go to the Protestant Grammar School for different A Levels and they would come down to us. And then whenever I went to uni in Belfast, that opened my eyes up more because I got to meet people from Protestant backgrounds and just different backgrounds in general.

Neave:

And I think a lot of people, older people in my family and even just from my area would've never really had that before the Good Friday Agreement and particularly during the height of the Troubles, you just, it was - it still is tribal in Northern Ireland. I'm not saying that it isn't, but it was way much more so back then. So even to be able to be given those opportunities through university, through education, through sport and just through the peace process in general, I think that in itself is a big opportunity that we take for granted because we don't know anything different.

Jordan:

Talking about the media industry as a whole, looking to the future, Matt, what do you see as maybe the biggest challenges facing journalism in the media industry at the minute?

Matt:

That's a big question. I think we'd all probably agree that we're living in the age of disinformation at the minute. So there's so much fake news, and even during Covid that you just had to go on three Facebook comments, all you needed was a smartphone to be an expert in virology or whatever. There's a lot of that. I think the challenge will be putting out authoritative news, and not giving in to fake news, deep fakes- There's a lot of, I think a lot of people don't realize when they're going on their phone and seeing stuff on social media, they just think it's a hundred percent fact.

Matt:

But I suppose it'll be our jobs in the future to counter that.

Jordan:

How do you two as journalists - what way do you see your role in countering this information?

Neave:

I agree with Matt there. I'm even thinking - my mom and dad are in their fifties and sixties and they actually come to me sometimes. My mom's - oh, I saw this headline. Is this true?

Matt:

My mom does the same as well. It's wild...

Neave:

It's wild because, when you're growing up. They're the ones telling you what's right and what's wrong and they don't know because they're not - they didn't grow up with - and it's, I just think the law and journalism and just society in general can't really keep up with how fast technology is moving. And we grew up on it so we can obviously, and we work in it now so we can, you know, tell things a bit better, but I have to go to my mom and dad and be , no, that's not real. I'll tell you why that's not a reputable source, blah, blah, blah. Then I'm thinking, what about all the people who don't have journalists as family members. And then a lot of people are very - they don't trust journalists, as well.

Neave:

So they think that we're not to be trusted. And even if we do try to tell them, you know, this is why. So I do think it's hard, it's hard to counteract that, but Matt says, it is something that's important to

do going forward. And I think it is just the case where journalism in general needs to keep up, move as fast as technology is moving. But it's easier said than done.

Jordan:

And I know one way of trying to keep up with technology that a lot of journalists are using is TikTok, and I know you do that and also yourself, Claudia, you're all over TikTok with your news updates, right?

Claudia:

Yes. I love doing it, the reason I started doing them was because I have two younger sisters and we've been having the discussion for years in media about whether or not print is dead. And I think print is going to have a bit of a resurgence vinyl players and people will think it's cool to start reading newspapers again, but -

Neave:

Still vintage

Claudia:

But the fact is now we're moving past that, we're talking about whether or not broadcast is dead. People who are watching tv, they're watching Netflix, people don't even watch the news on TV anymore because people don't, there are people now they don't even have - people don't have free view. You know what I mean? People don't have broadband. They'll just have a fire stick and Netflix. So now we're getting a discussion about whether or not broadcast news is dead.

Jordan:

And as a journalist, does that worry you or concern you?

Claudia:

I don't think so. Cause I think you can always adapt to the new medium. I said, I've been trying to do the news on TikTok and because it's my personal page, I try to explain things in a way that's easier. But you can see that major news - all the major news corporations now are adapting their content for TikTok. There's whole job roles which are about taking horizontal video and making it look good in a portrait mode so that it can be used on those type of platforms.

Jordan:

Do you find in Northern Ireland especially, have you had people maybe react badly to you being a journalist?

Neave:

Yeah, well you definitely get trolls emailing you and whatnot. Sometimes I find - there's an unwritten rule, you don't reply to the trolls, but sometimes I find if you do it the odd time in a very constructive way, they nearly freak out and they're, oh, this person noticed me and replied to me I'm not invisible. You know I have a voice and I'm a person too. But yeah, I've had people before, like you said, not maybe distrust, but they're just - why does the media say this? Or why does the media say that?

Neave:

And I always say, do you think the media are all in a WhatsApp group chat and we're all conspiring to - we all get given this note, okay, today we're going to push this narrative.

Neave:

It's not real. The media is - there's right wing outlets, there's left-wing outlets, there's broadcasters, print, there's everything. Everyone has different perspectives and different papers, for example, we'll take different angles on different stories. I think it's important to get a rounded view of all of that. But I've had that before and I always just sort of make that joke and try to say to them, no - and I explain to them how we factcheck and find things and also I find if you're reporting on things politicians say, people take it as - that's your view.

Neave:

No, no, no, no. If you read it, I'm just literally reporting on what they said. I'm also not saying what they said is factual and then, you go and try to truth check what they're saying and things - I think people, I think social media too, because there's a lot of ways for people to be anonymous and I personally have a gripe with that - I think people should have to put their passport details and things that into stuff like Twitter and Facebook to authenticate their um, their profiles.

Jordan:

I know it can be hard to - you answered this in a general sense because there's so many different young people from different backgrounds and um, upbringings. But how do you think young people in Northern Ireland perceive the Good Friday Agreement at the minute, Claudia?

Claudia:

I say I think there's a lot more, I think there needs to be a lot more education on it. It's not taught in schools in any meaningful way. It's sort of - this is what happened so that the Troubles aren't happening anymore. And even that sense of, I feel when the Good Friday Agreement is taught, it's very - a lot of people my age would think of about it as the full stop on the Troubles, the end, that was it. And then everything was great and that was it. Which again, I think sort of negates the work that

people of my generation have to do to maintain that and to make sure that the promises were made in the Good Friday Agreement are fulfilled.

Claudia:

Um, so I think a, a lot of people sort of think of it as that full stop, the end, the Troubles are over now. Rather than think of it as something that's something that's a living and breathing document that we all have to keep engaging with to make sure that our institutions, more widely our political culture is something that correlates to what the Good Friday Agreement intended for Northern Ireland to be.

Jordan:

Matt, what is your thoughts in terms of how people in Northern Ireland at the minute look at the Good Friday Agreement?

Matt:

I did my GCSEs obviously a bit back further back than the rest of you <laugh>. But again, we weren't taught the Troubles at all. I think a bit of Easter Rising and that was it. So I didn't really ever know what the Good Friday Agreement was. I never grew up in a very political house or - that was all kind of remote to us. We never talked about it. So it wasn't until I was a bit older that I knew what it was. And I would say if people aren't being taught in schools, they'd be much the same now where it's just very much a thing in the past. And like Claudia was saying, I'm sure a lot of people think it was a document that was done - full stop.

Matt:

It brought us peace, it's great. But Neave was saying - we are discussing it at the minute and seeing it is a living and breathing thing like you were saying Claudia, it could be - there's people already calling for it to be amended. They want reform in government.

Jordan:

As journalists, do you feel a responsibility almost to be explaining the past and to be still talking about the past in reports and things like that and bringing up the Good Friday Agreement and explaining it to a younger generation? Or do you think we don't so much need to concentrate on that anymore?

Neave:

There's a really good quote - and I can't remember who said it, but I just know it's on the side of the <inaudible> bar in Belfast City Centre, <laugh>. And it says something along the lines of - a wise person, something like - a wise person keeps one eye on the past and a blind person keeps both eyes. So I always really like that quote because I think it's really important to remember because - we're all from here and it's your heritage at the end of the day. It's your history. And I think Northern Ireland is so

unique, I think no matter whether you identify as British or Irish, I think we are totally unique in that we are different from people in the Republic of Ireland and we are different from people in mainland, inland Britain, because only we get it.

Neave:

And I think we have a very dark sense of humor because of the Troubles and everything as well because that's how we've been able to cope. And I think we're different in that way too. So I think it is really important to teach it and it's really important that people know about it, but I think it's important that people don't focus too much on why it's had to come about and be better about it and focus on the goodness that came from it and, and keeping that going.

Jordan:

Is that something you'd agree with Claudia?

Claudia:

I think it's, it's especially at a time when divisions are starting to rise again that the Good Friday Agreement was something for everyone in Northern Ireland to be proud of. No matter what side of the divide you're from, no matter what party your politician or you were affiliated to, they all had some part in in helping to bring that to fruition. So it's not something that should be demonized by anyone because it's a uniting thing for people from this part of the world because it was everyone's project and even at the referendum, everyone had to vote for it.

Claudia:

Every single person in Northern Ireland at that time had something to do with bringing the Good Friday Agreement together. So it should be a rallying point, especially now in the anniversary.

Jordan:

What do you think about that, Matt?

Matt:

Yeah, a hundred percent. I think it's something it should be taught, it should be celebrated. Um, I think coming up now with the anniversary, people are going to maybe take a step back and realize how lucky we were to have it and celebrated for what it was and keep it going as well. Um, I know to use sort of internationally as an example of how peace can be achieved. We should be very proud of that. I think especially younger people should be , yes. Like you were saying, we are a unique part of the world.

Jordan:

I want to talk about the words Unionist and Nationalist. Do you think people are almost afraid to label themselves as one or the other these days?

Neave:

I think people, I think because of social media sometimes people are afraid to say whether they're one or the other because they're afraid of the abuse yet because unfortunately, and I just even think some of the articles I write on the R that people have under Facebook on it, um, you know, and it is Claudia was saying, people saying Derry and then someone says it's not Dar it's London Derry, blah blah blah. And you're saying, you can call it whatever you want. Um, you can say Scott and you can say it in Irish two. Uh, but what I think is important is that, and this is where social media, people on social media, the trolls and social media aren't getting this.

Neave:

for example this week, um, there's a young unionist activist Joel Keys and he, I think he attended the Slb party conference and he, he received some abuse from um, hard lane, hard lane unionists from his own background.

Neave:

And he said, you know how if you only ever he said this himself, I'm paraphrasing, but how are you only, how are you ever going to get anywhere if you only talk to people with the same views as you? And I just think that was class. I think that's so progressive and I do think younger people are, are bridging that divide. Um, and it's great that he can come out and say that I'm a proud unionist and this is what I believe. And he can debate that with nationalists in a, in a structured and educated way and no one has to shout each other and no one has Tory. Um, and talk about the benefits and the pros and cons of both. Um, so yeah, I think it's important that people are still comfortable to say what they are.

Neave:

You don't have to be completely down the middle. I think maybe so social media can, can bring out the worst in people that that say they are that, but it can also go the other way and make people are afraid at the say it because of the abuse they might get. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, but it's definitely important to because they're, we're, we're sort of half and half in this country at this stage two. Um, so it's important to, to let people know that's what you are, but know that you can't be accepted for that as well.

Jordan:

Mm-hmm. And Matt, what do you think?

Matt:

Yeah, uh, I think both terms still have relevance. I was actually shocked when I moved to Belfast. So when I grew up in Forman Abs quite sheltered, I didn't really know what a union or internationalist was and went through integrated education, I said, very early and then moved away. And then when I came back to Belfast I didn't realize how strong identity was here. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Um, I live on the Newport Road so every 12th you see it. People all my age, hundreds of people who are proud unionists out enjoying themselves. I'm proud to call themselves union us and I think I was just really sheltered growing up and even with the people now that I'm hanging about with would all be quite middle of the road liberal.

Matt:

Wouldn't, you'd think those labels are outdated but when you look around you in certain areas of Belfast, you're , no, they're definitely still very relevant and people are proud to use them and they should be allowed to use them. Mm-hmm.

Claudia:

It is interesting though that as much as those terms are still relevant, there is the the increase in popularity of alliance Yeah. I think shows that people are there is so a bit of a backlash I think towards that. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, I um, because something that we were talking about, um, earlier about saying about how people, what people of, of the ceasefire generation think of the Good Friday agreement, but people might, so people my age have never known the conflict, but what they have known is the failures of partner, they've known as Soman government that for a lot of their lives has not been functional.

Claudia:

And that's why I think there can be a bit of a kickback against the grid in Orange politics. Uh, and again, even, even looking forward for the next 25 years, Alliance really want, uh, to, to break down some of those barriers in terms of community designation for people that don't feel that way. So as much as those terms are still useful and still relevant and still important for a lot of people, they're questioning in word what those, what role those labels play moving forward. So I think that's going to be really interesting to be in the next couple of years as well.

Jordan:

In just a minute guys, we're going to hear from different people telling us what their hopes and dreams are for the next 25 years, but I wanted to hear yours first. Claudia, I'll start with you. What are your hopes and dreams for the next 25 years?

Claudia:

I hope we can establish a culture where everyone's identity is respected and even going beyond unionists and nationalists - just where a culture plays a part of this world where everyone's accepted and welcomed.

Jordan:

Neave, what about you?

Neave:

I hope that we'll have a lot more integrated education and mixed

Jordan:

And Matt to finish with you.

Matt:

Yes, I'd like to see continuation of the peace. Hopefully we're in a better position 25 years on, let's see, a bit more stability in government, just Northern Ireland being celebrated a bit more, with great tourism and film industries, there's so much potential for great economic growth here as well.

Jordan:

Nice one. And like I said, we're going to hear from lots of other people on their hopes and dreams. So give us a listen.

Speaker:

Hello, I am Nandi Jola and in 25 years I hope Northern Island will become an intercultural society.

Speaker:

I am Carl Ni Kellen. In 25 years I hope to be living in United Ireland. I also hope that public services remain free at the point of delivery.

Speaker:

I am Sarah Een and in 25 years I hope that we will have grown in confidence, realized how wonderful this place could be and reached our full potentials.

Speaker:

I am Grand Taggart and in 25 years I hope we are all living and gaining in a society with rights and true equality. At its core, we all win and benefit in a society based on rights.

Speaker:

I'm Ellen Fernan. In 25 years I would like to see a Green New Deal, a real solution to the climate crisis and more hope for the future.

Speaker:

My name is Patricia Lynn and in 25 years I want to see not only peace sustained in Northern Ireland, but a move from peace towards prosperity.

Speaker:

Hi, my name is Fiona Dorn and in 25 years I would like to see a truly equal open and community based Northern Ireland.

Speaker:

My name is Winnie Amma. I'm a singer, a songwriter, and a dj. And in the next 25 years I would love to see in society a real deep understanding of why diversity and equal opportunities are critical to healthy and vibrant and prosperous society.

Speaker:

I'm Rob Swell Hills Union MLA for North Aram. In 25 years time, I want to see a Northern Ireland that there's outward looking, it's forward looking, that has a health and, and an education service that we can be proud of and we can all be content to call this place home.

Speaker:

In the next 25 years, I hope to see a strengthened and more prosperous union working together to create better jobs and tackle the collective global challenges that lie ahead.

Speaker:

My name is Mia and in the next 25 years, I hope that all children, no matter where they come from, have the same chances of success.

Jordan:

That's it for this episode and there's lots more to explore on our OpenLearn hub, which features music, art, and a series of guest essays. Search OpenLearn Good Friday Agreement online to find it. Thanks for listening.