



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/100/20

**Creator(s):** Department of the Taoiseach

**Accession Conditions:** Open

**Copyright:** National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

RECEIVED 16 NOV 1998

Secure Fax: 1379

13 November 1998

No of pages including this one:

To: HQ  
For: Secretary Gallagher

From: Belfast  
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Conversation with Tony McCusker

1. As I mentioned earlier, Tony McCusker called to the Secretariat last night.
2. The following points of interest arose about the current state of the work on the implementation bodies.

Trimble indicated at the end of yesterday's round-table meeting that he intended to ring the Taoiseach next Monday about our proposals (though no specific reference was made to the paper we provided this week).

McCusker, who is aware of the UUP's negative response to the paper, intends to suggest to David Lavery today that the UUP focus on the positive elements in it.

He himself understands fully that this paper is part of an ongoing negotiation, which will inevitably involve give-and-take on both sides, and that it represents an effort to address some of the concerns identified by the UUP at the recent meeting with our side. He fears, however, that the Unionists' propensity to dig themselves into trenches at every turn may make it difficult to achieve a constructive response. Perversely, they complain about the fact that to date only the Irish Government's seven proposals have been discussed, yet do not recognise that they themselves can take the initiative and put ideas of their own on the table. It would be helpful if, in our contacts with them, we could bring out this point more clearly. (Comment: The UUP seem already to be picking up on the point, however - in a report in today's Irish News, Esmond Birnie lists his party's priorities alongside ours and suggests that theirs make better business sense).

McCusker emphasised the anxieties on the part of Campbell and others about the

baleful influence of John Taylor, whom they expect to reject our paper. In overall terms, however, he believes that progress is being made and that the UUP could "tick off" many of our proposals, albeit with a series of modifications. He listed these as follows:

- (1) Strategic transport planning
- (2) Inland waterways and inland fisheries (as a composite body)
- (3) Irish language (but (a) he feels that Unionists will not wear a merger between the two Arts Councils - he wondered himself about focussing simply on the existing common membership; and (b) some provision for Ulster Scots, however modest, will have to be made - the approach should be to "smother it with kindness" rather than omit it altogether).
- (4) Tourism (but (a) Unionist cultural concerns will have to be addressed somehow; and (b) a residual NITB in Northern Ireland, dealing with regulatory functions, may be necessary).
- (5) EU Programmes (this may not be as comprehensive as we might like; however, "even Taylor" was accepting in Brussels last week that a body of this kind is inevitable).
- (6) Training (McCusker is inclined to see this, as we have described it, as a candidate for cooperation rather than an implementation body; our own view is different as we have a broader view of what the latter can involve).

The problem area, in his view, continues to be that of Trade Promotion, Business Development and Inward Investment. McCusker suggested that the most problematic of these elements is business development, which, if included, would remove much of the rationale for a Department of Economic Development (and is therefore being fiercely resisted by the latter).

McCusker suggested that we might consider agreeing to a Food Safety body, in order to give the UUP an "achievement" to which they can point as a counterweight for other items which might be less palatable to Unionists.

3. Updated assessments of our seven proposals have been forwarded by McCusker to the Secretary of State and Paul Murphy for clearance prior to being sent to Trimble and Mallon. A copy has been promised to us on a confidential basis for later today. The broad approach, we understand, is to set out options under each heading (in most cases two, the minimalist and the maximalist; in the case of the EU Programmes body, the DFP has reportedly sketched five models).
4. As regards future Departments, McCusker believes that ten will be agreed. Consensus is growing around the following:

Agriculture  
Health  
Economic Development  
Education (with training ?)  
Environment - two Departments  
Finance  
Arts, Tourism, Sport and Heritage

For the final two, there are two leading candidates: a Department of Social Development (which would combine the social security element of the DHSS with a "social inclusion" element) and a Department which would discharge functions such as legal services and law reform and would approximate to the "Leader of the House" portfolio at Westminster. These two Departments would clearly be less attractive than the others but, as the UUP and the SDLP would be taking one each, this should not be a major problem.

The assumption is that the equality function will be left to the "centre".

4. Finally, McCusker mused aloud about the structure of the future Secretariat for the North/South Ministerial Council. Emphasising the enormous challenge of brokering agreements between a wide range of interests on the Northern side and the Irish Government, he suggested that the Secretariat could only make an efficient contribution to this work if it had a single head (rather than a dual arrangement as in Maryfield). His concern seemed to be that a dual arrangement might be open to partisan exploitation by the parties on the Northern side and that it would be better to present a single front from the outset.

McCusker went on to suggest that the Secretariat might be headed for an initial three-year period by the senior Northern member. He also suggested that the latter might have Permanent Secretary rank.

We agreed with him that the task of achieving agreement between the many interests involved in the North/South Ministerial Council will indeed be a daunting one and that the decision-making process could be very cumbersome. We suggested, however, that the issue of whether the Secretariat has one or two heads will not have a fundamental bearing on the outcome. While we would wish the Secretariat to speak with one voice and would be working for that, both North and South would need to be represented on it on equal terms and any other approach would be problematic.

Comment These points were made by McCusker in a lighthearted and speculative way and, indeed, he ended up by accepting that his approach was unlikely to be a runner. Behind it, however, there is probably a personal interest in creating a rationale for an upgrading of the senior Northern post which might make the latter a more attractive proposition for himself.

on hets a  
 side flow  
 then  
 initial behind