



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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28 January, 1987.

Box

Mr. Dermot Gallagher,  
Assistant Secretary,  
Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Irish Language in Northern Ireland

Dear Assistant Secretary,

We had a discussion in the Secretariat on Tuesday, 26 January, on the Irish language in the Northern Ireland educational system. The meeting was attended by officials from the Northern Ireland Department of Education, including the Inspector of Irish (there is only one), Mr. Henry McRory.

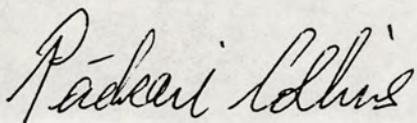
The study of Irish, especially since the outbreak of the "troubles", is confined virtually exclusively to the maintained schools (that is, the Catholic schools). Since primary schools are, apparently, not obliged to report the amount of time devoted to teaching Irish it is impossible to get figures on the numbers studying Irish at primary level. The number of secondary maintained schools (all Catholic) in Northern Ireland is 125. In these schools about 25,000 students take Irish at some stage up to and including 3rd year. Subsequently, because of the subject options which become available from 4th year onwards, the number taking Irish drops drastically to less than 1700 taking GCE "O" level and just over 300 taking "A" level. Nevertheless, Irish comes second only to French in terms of modern languages studied in secondary schools in Northern Ireland.

We took the Northern side through a series of recommendations referred to in the recently published Gael-Linn document "An Ghaeilge i gCoras Oideachais an Tuaiscirt: Moltai Forbartha". They agreed to study these and said that they would be willing to meet Gael-Linn to discuss the recommendations. I would be grateful, therefore, if Gael-Linn could be informed that their recommendations have been raised in the Secretariat and a copy given to the Northern Ireland Department of Education. They could get in touch with Peter Holmes, Assistant Secretary, Department of Education of Northern Ireland, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, BT19 2PR.

We underlined the importance of the Irish language to the nationalist community, the importance of seeing it as part of the cultural inheritance of nationalists and not simply as just another language. We stressed, in particular, the necessity to provide further encouragement for the study of Irish in schools and to provide professional teachers for adult education classes. The latter suggestion would, we said, encourage people in areas such as West Belfast to study the language in a professional environment rather than in classes run by Sinn Fein as is the case at present.

In discussion on general Irish language issues on the margins of the meeting with the Deputy Head of the Central Secretariat, Ronnie Spence, he said that he saw a possibility of progress on Street names if we were to push for it at the political level. We ought to consider doing this, I suggest, at the next ordinary meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference at which the Irish language is likely to be an agenda item.

Yours sincerely,



Padraic Collins