

C O N F I D E N T I A L



19011

BY BLIS

cc PS/Sofs (B&L) - B  
PS/Ministers (B&L) - B  
PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
NI Perm Secs  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Burns - B  
Mr Chesterton - B  
Mr M Elliott - B  
Mr Innes - B  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Simpson  
Mr Spence - B  
Miss Pease - B  
Mr Cole (DFP Sols)  
Mr McConnell PAB - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Hewitt - B  
Mr Hamilton - B  
Mr Daniell - B  
Mr Masefield - B

1. PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B

2. A19

USE OF IRISH LANGUAGE IN OFFICIAL BUSINESS

The Secretary of State has seen Sir Kenneth's submission of 7 January and is content with the issue of the circular as drafted and in the manner proposed.

Signed

D J WATKINS  
Private Secretary

12 January 1988

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JW 7584

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HCS/1/37

cc. PS/Ministers (B&L)  
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PS/Secretary of State (B&amp;L)

USE OF IRISH LANGUAGE IN OFFICIAL BUSINESS

1. The purpose of this submission is to seek the Secretary of State's agreement to the issue of a circular giving guidance to NI Departments on the use of the Irish language in official business. The guidance will also apply to NIO with additional and separate guidance being issued to the Prisons Department and the NI Court Service. It is also intended to explain our approach to the appropriate UK Departments and to invite them to be guided by it in their work in NI.
2. The circular, a draft of which is attached, follows the decisions reached earlier by Ministers in relation to the wider issue of the position of the Irish language in NI. The main features are:-
  - 2.1 respecting the wishes of an individual to be known by a personal name in the Irish language;

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- 2.2 continuation of the use in official business of the English version only of place and street names; and
- 2.3 responding in English to correspondence in Irish.
3. The advice on dealing with these matters has been prepared in consultation with the Head of Legal Services and the draft circular provides carefully worded guidance to Departments on some of the difficulties which may arise.
4. Since this circular will be widely distributed within NI Departments, it is likely that its contents will become public knowledge. I have, therefore, considered whether it would be prudent to accompany its release with a press statement explaining its purpose or to arrange for a suitable PQ. However, this could give the matter too high a profile. Instead, defensive briefing will be prepared to enable the Press Office to explain that the document is an internal circular giving guidance to officials and that it restates and consolidates advice on the use of the Irish language in official business, including acceptance of the right of an individual to be known by the name of his choice and seeking to ensure that contacts with those who wish to use the Irish language are handled with due courtesy but without creating undue administrative difficulties.
5. The guidance will probably attract criticism from the Irish language supporters - who are likely to demand parity of esteem and in particular the right to use Irish language place-names and street names and the right to a reply in Irish to correspondence in that language - and from loyalists - who may choose to see the whole exercise as a further "concession" to Irish republicanism produced by pressure from the Irish Government. There must also be a danger that Sinn Fein may, in further exploiting the Irish language issue, seek to create difficulties for Departments in complying with this guidance. Departments are, therefore, being advised to consult Central Secretariat if problems arise.
6. The Secretary of State is invited to agree to the release of this circular to NI Departments. The Irish language will probably feature on the agenda for the

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next meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference. It would be helpful if we could point to the issue of this guidance as evidence of our recognition of the importance of the Irish language to members of the minority tradition, particularly as we are unlikely to be able to offer significant action on other Irish language issues.



K P BLOOMFIELD

7 January 1988

/JH

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DRAFT/RBS/5/88 - 7 JANUARY 1988

USE OF IRISH LANGUAGE IN OFFICIAL BUSINESS

Introduction

1. The purpose of this circular is to offer guidance on the use of the Irish language in official business. In essence the guidance confirms that correspondence with the members of the public who wish to use the Irish language should be treated with due courtesy.

Personal names

2. An individual is legally entitled to assume any name he or she wishes - in English or in any other language - and, if he or she is generally known by that name, it is valid for purposes of legal identification
3. Departments should accordingly respect the wishes of any individual who has indicated a desire to be known by a personal name in the Irish language. Unless it appears that he or she is not generally known by that name, a personal name in Irish should be accepted for all official purposes, including correspondence and official documents. It may be necessary also to record previously used versions of a name on official files and computer records etc in order to help identification. However, only the version requested by the individual concerned should be used in correspondence and documents issued to that individual. Because of the difference between some of the letter characters in English and Irish, the Irish version for official purposes should use English letter characters.

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Place and street names

4. . Departments should continue to use the English version of place and street names in official business and records since departures from this practice could cause many difficulties. Where doubts arise as to the correctness of a placename, Departments may wish to seek the assistance of the Ordnance Survey. District Councils are the statutory authority in relation to the determination of street names and the existing law requires street names to be displayed in English.
  
5. Where letters, application forms etc which use an address in Northern Ireland other than in English are received, Departments should reply using the English form and should only record in official records the English form.

Correspondence

6. Where a correspondent writes in Irish, Departments should use their best endeavours to obtain a translation in order to enable the inquiry to be handled. (CRISP records will help Departments to identify officers who are fluent in Irish). The correspondent should not be asked to write in English. It may on occasions be necessary to seek the correspondent's confirmation of the Department's understanding of any difficult or technical points in the letter. For example, it may be sensible in replying to use a phrase such as - "I understand from your letter that you are requesting .....". Departments should always reply in English.
  
7. Where a letter in Irish could have legal implications, Departments should exercise special care to ensure that any translation accurately reflects the

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original and that the meaning is clear. To establish certainty of understanding it may be appropriate to include a typed copy of the English translation with the Department's reply and to stress that such a reply is based on the Department's interpretation of the original letter as set out in the translation. In some circumstances it may be prudent to delay issuing a substantive reply until the correspondent has confirmed that the Department's translation accurately reflects the original.

8. Central Secretariat should be consulted if a Department receives a large number of letters in Irish and would face problems in responding within an acceptable timescale, or where a Department is of the view that an attempt is being made to use the Irish language in order to delay official business.
9. Central Secretariat will be glad to offer advice on any difficulties facing Departments as a consequence of this circular.
10. This circular also applies to the NIO, but separate, additional guidance will be issued in respect of the Prisons Department and the NI Court Service.

Central Secretariat

January 1988

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