

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

ASST. / *rcw 11/89*
SEC
12 SEP 1989
CENT SEC

BS/318/89

FROM: R B SPENCE
US CENT SEC
DATE: 12 SEPTEMBER 1989

cc. PS/Sir Kenneth Bloomfield - B
Mr Holmes
Mr Kirk
Mr R Wilson *hr 12/9*
Mr McCusker

DR HARBISON

IRISH LANGUAGE

*to note x. we should
keep an eye out for
this.
I have referred
to Denis McCusker
advise re. Arts Council
funding
hr 12/9
pl file
under
LA
Conway
mill.*

As you know, we have arranged on 21 September a meeting with some of the people involved in the proposals for the Ultach Trust to discuss further how best to provide support for Irish language activities.

X Michael Longley has spoken to me on a couple of occasions about how the Arts Council should respond to proposals from LA (currently located in Conway Mill, but reported to be leaving next week) to fund new Irish language publications. I have invited Michael and Cieran Carson to join us.

The attached short note seeks to set out the problem and how we might proceed. Perhaps we could add this to our agenda for discussion with DENI tomorrow on the cultural traditions programme.

[Signed RBS]

R B SPENCE
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT
EXT SH 269 SC 248

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JH/USCENSEC/1934

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SUPPORT FOR IRISH LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

This note discusses how support for Irish language activities might best be provided within the wider framework of policy to improve community relations, including increasing respect for cultural diversity.

It does not deal with the position of the Irish language in the education system or with Irish language activities of high artistic merit which might be supported by the Arts Council.

Our community relations efforts are aimed at encouraging the development of mutual respect and understanding between the two sides of the community and developing increased cross-community contact and co-operation. Part of these efforts is directed towards encouraging wider understanding about the validity of the different cultural traditions which exist in Northern Ireland. The cultural traditions programme, announced on 16 June, provides for support to be made available to groups, publishers and others who seek "to explore, on a cross-community basis, the richness of the different traditions in NI" and "contribute to the debate about cultural heritage and diversity".

The Irish language is a very important part of Northern Ireland's rich cultural heritage. However, the unfortunate reality is that it is perceived as belonging to one side of the community. The majority side of the community has, with very few exceptions, little or no interest in it and many in the majority community are alienated from the language because of its association with the violent side of Irish republicanism. While to the minority community, the official attitude to the language seems to be at best negative and at worst hostile, with little understanding of, or respect for, the importance of the language to the nationalist identity.

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Any new measures to support Irish language activities have, therefore, to be devised against this very difficult background. In particular, there are risks of such measures being seen as a "concession" to one side of the community or of taking steps which locate the language even more deeply within one side of the community.

The main emphasis of any new measures should, therefore, be to widen appreciation of the contribution which the Irish language makes to the cultural heritage of the whole community, rather than to support activities which are essentially for existing Irish language enthusiasts. This would not, however, exclude action to assist in the provision of written and oral material in Irish which would help to promote a wider knowledge of the language.

The NI Community Relations Council will eventually have responsibility for handling this matter. However, it will be some time before the Council is fully established and the **Minister has decided** that in the meantime the Central Community Relations Unit will be responsible for funding appropriate Irish language activities. To enable it to do so, it is proposed to create a small committee to provide advice.

Possible members of this committee include:-

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Mr Christopher Napier) | |
| Dr Ian Adamson) | supporters of the |
| Dr Roger Blaney) | Ultach Trust proposals |
| Mr Patrick Loughrey) | |
| Prof G Stockman) | |
| Mr C Carson | Arts Council |

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