

Minister

MEETING WITH GAELOILIUINT

THURSDAY 21ST AUGUST 1997 - Rathgael House

Pre-brief 1.30pm

Meeting 1.45 - 2.30 pm

You agreed to meet the delegation from Gaeloiliuint to discuss Irish Medium Education.

I attach briefing as follows:

Tab A	Agenda
Tab B	Delegation
Tab C	Background Note on Gaeloiliuint
Tab D	Background Note on Irish Medium Education
Tab E	The need for legal status and recognition etc.- Line to Take
Tab F	The need for legislation to provide for Irish Medium Education - Line to take
Tab G	Participation of Gaeloiliuint in Cross-Border Education Institution etc. - Line to take

Alan McVeigh, Leslie Ashe and Jim Russell will be in attendance.


Kevin Smith

AGENDA

Introductions and 5 minute resume on the background to Irish-medium education here.

The need for legal status, recognition and state funding for Gaeloiliuint, the Council for Irish medium education.

The need for Irish medium education to be specifically mentioned in legislation through a new order (sic) in the Education Act.

The participation of Gaeloiliuint in a Cross-border Education Institution with Gaelscoileanna which operates in the Republic.

DELEGATION

- Liam O Flannagain - Chairman of the Council
- Fearghas O hIr - Deputy Chairman of the Council
- Gabrielle Nig Uidhir - Director of the Council
- Sean MacGiolla Fhiondain - Treasurer of the Council
- Peadar MacMuiris - Education Officer
- Cathal O Donnghaile - Development Officer

1. Legal status, recognition and state funding for Gaeloiliuint?

LINE TO TAKE

- Explain that Government sees no need to provide a statutory basis for Gaeloiliuint; it is analogous to other voluntary bodies with interests in particular form of education (TRC, NICIE, GBA, etc): Government recognises all of these as having legitimate interests.

- **(if pressed on funding of NICIE)**

Explain that NICIE is an exception: the grants paid to NICIE are consistent with the Department's statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. However, NICIE has no statutory basis: it is a voluntary body.

- **(if pressed on legal status and funding of CCMS)**

Point out that CCMS represents a substantial educational interest in the Catholic maintained sector: Government could not justify a similar arrangement for GO which represents such a small constituency.

- Point out that EU resources have been made available to fund a development officer for GO.

- Explain that there are other IM pressure groups such as Ultach Trust, Altram and Conrad na Gaeilge which also have interests in education.

2. The need for legislation to provide for Irish-medium education?

LINE TO TAKE

- Explain that Article 44 of the 1986 Education and Libraries Order requires the Department to educate children in accordance with parental wishes provided this is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure: the demand for Irish-medium education can be accommodated within this legal provision.

- (if pressed on integrated education)

Point out that Government has a policy of encouraging and facilitating the development of integrated education because it believes this will have community relations benefits. This policy does not extend to any other form of education.

- Explain that existing arrangements for providing support for Irish-medium education are adequate:
 - viability criteria for the establishment of new schools are consistent with those applied in other sectors;
 - funding arrangements via boards are consistent with other sectors;
 - the Belfast Board is establishing a unit to provide IM curriculum materials on behalf of the Boards;

- the NI curriculum is tailored to meet the particular needs of IM schools;
- assessment arrangements are tailored to meet the needs of IM schools;
- GCSE and transfer tests are available in Irish; and
- teacher training is available for those seeking employment in IM schools.

**The participation of Gaeloiliuint in a Cross-border Education Institution
with Gaelscoileanna which operates in the Republic.**

LINE TO TAKE

- The Minister should simply note what is said. This is a matter for Gaeloiliuint there are likely to be no implications for Government.

IRISH-MEDIUM (IM) EDUCATION: BACKGROUND NOTE

Policy on new schools

1. A growing number of parents in Northern Ireland are choosing to have their children educated through the medium of the Irish language. DENI considers demand for Irish-medium education within the framework of its general requirement set out in Article 44 of the Education and Libraries Order 1986, that it "shall have regard to the general principle that, so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils shall be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents". Irish-medium schools may achieve grant-aided status, under the same procedures as other schools, by applying for voluntary maintained status.

Viability Criteria

2. In considering the case for maintained status for IM primary schools the Department applies a viability criterion of a minimum long-term enrolment of 150-175 pupils, which, in practice, means that the school has to demonstrate its a potential to attract and maintain an annual intake of 25 pupils. For a secondary school, a minimum long-term enrolment of 500 is required, with an expected annual intake of 100 pupils. These are the same viability criteria as are applied to integrated schools. There is continuing pressure from Irish language interests and their supporters in the political sphere to relax these requirements.

Comparisons with Republic of Ireland

3. Criteria for the recognition of Gaelsoileanna in the Irish Republic are different. At present a letter issues to the promoters advising of the following requirements:

- That there is a need for the proposed school having regard to existing provision, if any, through the medium of Irish in the general area.
- That the school will have an enrolment of not less than 20 pupils on opening (pupils who have not been enrolled previously in a national school) and that there are reasonable prospects for the development of the school.

- That there is satisfactory temporary accommodation available for the school and that this will be available for the duration of the period that it will have temporary recognition, taking account of the expected growth of the school. It is a matter for the promoters of the school to provide the temporary accommodation.

The cost of the rented accommodation should be stated. If the rent is reasonable the Department will be prepared to refund 75%, provided receipts are forwarded to Planning Section.

- That a Board of Management is established to run the school in accordance with the Rules for National Schools.

In some senses these are more favourable than in Northern Ireland while in others they are not: for example, in Northern Ireland grant rates for both capital and recurrent are 100%, this is not the case in the Republic.

Existing Provision

4. Six primary schools and one secondary school currently receive 100% grant-aid for recurrent expenditure and a further primary school has been approved for grant-aid in 1997 subject to confirmation of the requisite P1 enrolment. In addition there are four independent primary schools and one independent secondary school. In practice this means that over 95% of the 1,100 pupils being educated through the medium of Irish are in schools in receipt of 100% recurrent grant-aid. See table attached.

IM Satellites and Streams

5. In addition to free-standing schools, an Irish-medium unit at Christian Brothers' Primary School in Armagh was approved in 1995. At present 21 pupils are enrolled in the unit. In the past satellite units have been established as part of, but remote from, Irish-medium schools. Two of these, Bunscoil Cholmcille (Londonderry) and Bunscoil na Fuiseoige (Belfast), have developed to the point where they have now been established as free-standing grant-aided schools. The Department intends to bring forward proposals designed to assist units and streams as means of supporting Irish-medium education without the need to establish small free-standing schools.

Finance

6. Unlike integrated schools which can receive recurrent grant-aid from the date of opening, Irish-medium schools must demonstrate their viability over a number of years (usually 2 or 3) before grants are paid. Recurrent grants to Irish-medium schools in the last 3 years are (£m):-

1994/95	1995/96	1996/97
1.0	1.1	1.75

Figures for the next 3 years are not available, but will be determined by the numbers of pupils attending schools.

EU Funding

7. A number of successful applications have been made by Irish-medium schools and interest

groups for support from the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. These are:-

		£ (£000s)
Bunscoil Luraigh	- capital works	74
Bunscoil an Iuir	- capital works	186
Bunscoil an Droichead	- capital works	224
Gaeloiliuint*	- development officer	41
Conradh na Gaeilge	- promotional video	8
Cairde Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	- capital works	119
Naiscoil Ard Macha	- capital works	70

*The Department turned down an application by Gaeloiliuint for funding for strategic planning for the IM sector.

Northern Ireland Curriculum

8. The existing statutory requirements are:

a) Irish medium **primary schools** must teach their pupils the same subjects as English medium schools, with the following exceptions.

- Irish is a compulsory subject throughout key stages 1 and 2.

- English is also a compulsory subject at key stages 1 and 2. In order, however, to let pupils establish themselves in Irish, the only English required to be taught at key stage 1 is an introductory programme of study designed to be used in year 4.

b) In the Irish medium **secondary school**, Irish is a compulsory subject throughout key stages 3 and 4. CCEA has prepared a programme of study for Irish in the school, which is currently under consideration within the Department.

Curriculum Materials

9. Funding has been allocated for this purpose since 1989. The materials have been produced by one of the primary schools but the school does not have the resources to carry on doing so in the long term. Accordingly, the education and library boards have agreed to take over the function as part of their curriculum support responsibilities. The Belfast Board, acting on behalf of the other boards will also provide a central source of Irish medium expertise to support schools on a province-wide basis. Arrangements are currently being made to establish the unit.

Examinations

(a) GCSE

11. CCEA is the only GCSE awarding body offering examinations through the medium of Irish. They were first offered in summer 1996 examinations, in response to demand from the Irish medium secondary school, in the following subjects:

- English
- English Literature
- Mathematics (syllabus A)
- Single award and double award science (non-modular)
- Spanish
- CDT (design and realisation)
- History
- Geography

- Art and Design

The same subjects, with the addition of French, will be offered in the 1997 examinations. Policy in the provision of materials in Irish by CCEA, consistent with the Government's policy on translating public sector documents into Irish, is that materials for the pupils' own use is provided in Irish, but guidance and other materials for the teachers are not translated.

A difficulty in offering Irish medium examinations is the availability of personnel who are able to act as examiners, moderators who are both bilingual and experts in the subjects concerned and who are not already teachers in the Irish medium secondary school.

CCEA appointed a bilingual professional officer with effect from 1 November 1996 to work on the development of Irish medium examinations and assessment materials, including transfer procedure test papers

(b) A Levels

12. To date no pupils have followed A level courses in Meanscoil Feirste: any pupils wishing to follow such courses have enrolled at the Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education (BIFHE) and taken the courses through English. However, the school has not yet approached either DENI or CCEA about the availability of Irish medium A level examinations, and a formal policy decision on whether A levels should be provided in Irish medium will be necessary in due course: there could be implications, for example, for tertiary education, as well as for the provision of vocational qualifications (see below) and, of course, cost implications.

(c) GNVQs

13. Currently there is no demand from the Irish medium secondary school for GNVQ courses in the medium of Irish, but if the school develops into making post-16 provision it is possible that such demand could arise. None of the 3 GNVQ awarding bodies (BTEC, City and Guilds, RSA) offer GNVQs in the medium of Irish.

Transfer procedure

14. Transfer procedure test papers have been made available in the medium of Irish since the 1980s. For these pupils, the tests cover Irish, English and mathematics, whereas the English medium tests cover English and mathematics only. The level of English used in the Irish medium tests is also capped at level 4 of the 8-level scale of attainment, rather than level 5 as in the tests for other schools.

Teacher Training for Irish-medium Schools

15. St Mary's College of Education offers a 4-year BEd (Primary) course for those wishing to teach in the Irish-medium sector. Pending the output of teachers from this new course, the Department has approved 5 additional one-year PGCE intake places each year.

Ulster Irish College

16. One issue the Minister should be aware of is the "Ulster Irish College". Meanscoil Dhoire, the independent Irish-medium secondary school in Londonderry, had an enrolment on 1 July 1996 of only 38 pupils - well short of the viability targets for grant-aided status. GO has suggested that a natural solution to the problem of recognition and funding would be to accept Meanscoil Dhoire as a subsidiary campus of Meanscoil Feirste. GO contends that the 2 units have always been analogous to a single school and could be linked under the management and authority of a single principal with a change of name for the 2 schools to the Ulster Irish College. The Department asked the schools to provide more details in October 1996. This information has not been supplied to date.

GAELOILIUINT: BACKGROUND NOTE

1. Gaeloiliuint (GO) is a voluntary body which was set up in September 1991 by people involved in Irish-medium education. Membership is comprised mainly of educationalists employed in Irish-medium nurseries, primary schools and secondary schools. GO claim that all Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland are affiliated to the organisation. Members also include a range of other independent groups and professional individuals.

2. GO was established to develop a more structured approach to the expansion of Irish-medium education at all three levels. It aims to provide a supportive network for teachers and parents. Teachers gain from the opportunities to share experiences and resources as well as from the forum for discussion and debate. Regular seminars and workshops are organised. The organisation claims to have gained the respect and confidence of the many groups providing Irish-medium education.

TABLE

IRISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN IRELAND 1997

NAME	LOCATION	ENROL @ OCT '96	DATE OF ESTABLISHME NT	STATUS	DATE OF GRANT- AIDED STATUS
PRIMARY SCHOOLS					
<i>Bunscoil Phobal Feirste</i>	<i>Belfast</i>	<i>385</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>Grant-Aided</i>	<i>01/09/84</i>
<i>*Bunscoil Na fuiseoige: (satellite of above school)</i>	<i>Belfast</i>				
<i>Gaelscoil Na Bhfal</i>	<i>Belfast</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>Grant-Aided</i>	<i>01/08/92</i>
<i>Bunscoil Cholmcille</i>	<i>Londonderry</i>	<i>222</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>Grant-Aided</i>	<i>01/09/93</i>
<i>Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh</i>	<i>Belfast</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>Grant-Aided</i>	<i>01/08/96</i>
<i>Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain</i>	<i>Belfast</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>Grant-Aided</i>	<i>01/04/97</i>
<i>**Bunscoil an Iuir</i>	<i>Newry</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>Independent</i>	
<i>Bunscoil Luraigh</i>	<i>Maghera</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>Independent</i>	
<i>Bunscoil Ui Neill</i>	<i>Coalisland</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>Independent</i>	
<i>Bunscoil An Droichead</i>	<i>Belfast</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>Independent</i>	
<i>Bunscoil Dhal Riada</i>	<i>Dunloy</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>Independent</i>	
SECONDARY SCHOOLS					
<i>Meanscoil Feirste</i>	<i>Belfast</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>Grant-Aided</i>	<i>01/08/96</i>
<i>Meanscoil Doire</i>	<i>Londonderry</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>Independent</i>	

* Approval for grant aided status has been given with effect from 1.9.97

** Approval for grant aided status has been given with effect from 1.8.97 subject to confirmation of P1 enrol for Sept 97.