

File Anglo Irish Secretariat

cc: PS/Mr McFall (DHSS&L)
Mr Bell
Mr McVeigh
Ms Smith
Mr Tierney

From: J A Canavan
CCRU

30 May 1999

To: PS/Mr McFall (DENI)

MINISTERIAL DINNER AT AI SECRETARIAT

I attach briefing on New TSN and Irish language issues for Mr McFall's use at his forthcoming dinner with the Anglo-Irish Secretariat.

[Signed: JAC]

J A CANAVAN

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NEW TSN - PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

BACKGROUND

The Irish Side has always taken an interest in the TSN initiative. They see it primarily in terms of the socio-economic position of the Catholic community and are keen to stress that aspect of the initiative which received the erosion, over time, of communal differentials. They were receptive to criticisms of old TSN, articulated during SACHR's review of employment equality in 1995/97. They welcomed the commitments on New TSN in the White Paper 'Partnership for Equality' of March 1998 and are keen that momentum is maintained.

On 19 April the Irish Side were briefed by CCRU officials on progress with New TSN. They may use the occasion of the dinner to confirm that this is being maintained.

LINES TO TAKE

Objectives of New TSN

To identify people and areas in greatest need and try to ensure that the Government programmes are more effective in helping them. This includes both Catholics and Protestants. It will direct efforts and resources towards individuals, groups and areas objectively defined as being in greatest need, irrespective of community background. However, as the Catholic community, on the whole, is more disadvantaged, New TSN should contribute, over time, to the erosion of differentials between the communities.

Main themes of New TSN

- Particular focus on unemployment and employability;
- targeting other types of social need, which may not be directly related to unemployment (eg inequalities in health, housing and education);
- special Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) initiative to seek new and creative ways of helping people who suffer from multiple disadvantage.

Progress with independent audits/action plans

The review by independent consultants of responsibilities of all Departments, with a view to identifying those areas most relevant to New TSN, are now completed. Departments are now

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preparing Action Plans, drawing on the consultant's recommendations. Draft Action Plans will be published for consultation later in the summer. [NB: the Irish may also enquire about progress with PSI. They have submitted a response to the Minister to send to Mr Trimble, who had raised questions about the PSI priorities which officials had identified, based on an extensive consultation.]

Irish is the first national language in the Republic and regarded as a badge of independent nationhood. The Irish side therefore identifies closely with Irish language activities in Northern Ireland and perhaps over-estimates the importance of the language for ordinary nationalists. Their objective has been to see Irish given greater recognition as part of the 'charter of administration' with sufficient funds being given to Irish language organisations and, particularly, Irish medical education.

The most important developments over the past year have been:

* commitments on Irish in the Good Friday Agreement;

* the announcement of Government's intention to sign the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, with Irish regarded as such a language for the general purposes of Part II from the outset and specialisation under Part III at an early date;

* the establishment of an all-Ireland Irish Language Agency under the umbrella of the Cross-Border Implementation Body which will come into operation at the time of devolution.

The Cross-Border Body will mark a completely new departure in the provision for the language in Northern Ireland. £m of additional NI expenditure is envisaged for the Irish language functions of the Body. It will have an office in Belfast and employ up to a dozen staff. Its activities will fulfil the requirement under the Good Friday Agreement to actively promote the language.

Attached are lists to take on detailed issues of Irish language provision, including increases for specialisation under the Charter (administrative briefing may be provided if these are changes considered on Mr McAlister's administration of 13 May) and reception of *Téilín na Ceoil* (TnCO), the Republic's Irish language TV channel.

IRISH LANGUAGE

BACKGROUND

The Irish interest in linguistic diversity is almost entirely confined to the Irish language. By virtue of the 18 December Agreement, they will now be involved with us in a cross-border Ulster-Scots Agency, but this is peripheral to their main concerns.

Irish is the first national language in the Republic and regarded as a badge of independent nationhood. The Irish Side therefore identifies closely with Irish language activists in Northern Ireland and perhaps over-estimates the importance of the language for ordinary Nationalists. Their objective has been to see Irish given greater recognition as part of the 'furniture of administration' with sufficient funds being given to Irish language organisations and, particularly, Irish medium education.

The most important developments over the past year have been:

- commitments on Irish in the Good Friday Agreement;
- the announcement of Government's intention to sign the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, with Irish regarded as such a language for the general purposes of Part II from the outset and specification under Part III at an early date;
- the establishment of an all-Ireland Irish Language Agency under the umbrella of the Cross-Border Implementation Body which will come into operation at the time of devolution.

The Cross-Border Body will mark a completely new departure in the provision for the language in Northern Ireland. £2m of additional NI expenditure is earmarked for the Irish language functions of the Body. It will have an office in Belfast and employ up to a dozen staff. Its activities will fulfil the requirement under the Good Friday Agreement to actively promote the language.

Attached are lines to take on detailed issues of Irish language provision, including timescale for specification under the Charter (supplementary briefing may be provided if there are changes consequent on Ms McAlister's submission of 13 May) and reception of Teilifis na Gaeilge (TnaG), the Republic's Irish language TV channel.

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IRISH LANGUAGE/LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

What is the status of the Irish Language?

In the 1991 Census 142,000 people said they had some knowledge of the language. It is an important element in Northern Ireland's cultural heritage. Under the Good Friday Agreement, the Government is committed, where appropriate and where people so desire it, to take resolute action to promote the Irish language, to facilitate and encourage its use, and to seek to remove, where possible, restrictions which discourage it. Subsequently the Government announced its intention to sign the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and said that Irish would be recognised as a minority language for the purposes of Part II of the Charter. A Linguistic Diversity Branch has been established to lead in the development of policy on Irish, Ulster-Scots and ethnic minority languages and to identify progress that must be made for Irish to be specified for Part III of the Charter.

When will the Government sign/ratify the Charter?

The Government expects shortly to be in a position to sign and ratify the Charter. Probably within the next two months.

Will Ulster-Scots be recognised for Part II of the Charter

The Government is currently considering Part II with regard to Ulster-Scots.

When will Irish be specified for Part III of the Charter?

The Government is currently considering the provisions of Part III with regard to Irish. The Government is committed to specifying Irish for Part III purposes at an early date.

[Note: This line will change if the Government makes an announcement on Ulster-Scots and Irish.]

What is the position on the Cross Border Language Implementation

An Agreement to establish North/South Bodies was signed by the two Governments on 8 March 1999, This will be a significant departure for the Irish language throughout the island. Additional resources will be allocated to the Irish language Agency to allow it to promote Irish in Northern Ireland on a scale not seen before. The all-island budget for the Irish Language Agency is estimated at 9.5m Stg per annum. The Ulster-Scots Agency will be allocated nearly £1 million pounds per annum to promote Ullans and Ulster-Scots Cultural Issues.

Why is expenditure on Irish not on a par with Wales and Scotland?

Current levels of expenditure on Celtic languages in Scotland/Wales are the result of response over the years to the particular characteristics of local languages. We do not accept that expenditure on one language should be used as a benchmark for another. In Wales and Scotland there are well defined areas where the ancient languages have traditionally been spoken and residents can be assumed to be users. In Northern Ireland, in contrast, Irish is more diffuse.

What prospect is there for wider availability of Teilifis na Gaeilge in Northern Ireland and what is delaying extending RTE reception to Northern Ireland

The signal for TnaG will be transmitted through the Clermont Carn transmitter, as is the RTE signal. There has been a delay in boosting this signal due to a number of technical difficulties. Most of these have now been resolved but the broadcasting authorities, have not, as yet, reached agreement on the outstanding problems. Once they do the signal from Clermont Carn will be boosted and this will allow RTE and Teilifis na Gaeilge to be broadcast to Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State has written to Chris Smith asking him to pursue this urgently with the British broadcasting authorities. Good idea if Irish Ministers kept up the pressure from their

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own end as well. Both Governments want to see early progress on this aspect of the Agreement, as well as others.

BACKGROUND NOTE

The Good Friday Agreement contains an undertaking that we will 'explore urgently, with the relevant British Authorities, and in co-operation with the Irish broadcasting authorities, the scope for achieving more widespread availability of Teilifis na Gaeilige in Northern Ireland'.

In recent years a lot of work has been undertaken to prepare the way for RTE to extend its coverage in Northern Ireland. At present it reaches about 30% and this will be boosted to about 70% by increasing the signal from Clermont Carn. This facility would also be open to Teilifis na Gaeilige (Tna).

The proposal to increase the output from Clermont Carn was approved by British and Irish Ministers earlier this year. There are a few outstanding technical difficulties and we are still waiting confirmation from the broadcasting authorities that these have been resolved.

Even with the boosted signal there will be gaps in the RTE/TnaG coverage in Northern Ireland. This may occur in the Belfast area and around Lough Neagh, areas which include communities that will have a particular interest in receiving Irish language broadcasts. The DCMS have been asked to begin examining the options on this.

What progress is being made to encourage and provide support for Irish language film and television production

Linguistic Diversity Branch has established an Inter-Departmental group which has held discussions with a range of organisations who have an interest in Irish language film and TV production. Linguistic Diversity Branch has also held discussions with the NI Film Commission, Lottery authorities, Pobal/Sinn Fein and the Ultach Trust.

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A report commissioned by the Ultach Trust from Mr Don Anderson (late of the Independent Television Commission) is being consulted.

A meeting with the ad hoc advisory group who produced the report was held on 14 May 1999 and progress was made on the way ahead.

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