

## Chief Executive's Report to the 15th Meeting of the Board

### *1. Meeting with Ramelton Representatives 2 November 2001*

1.1 The Agency organised this meeting in an attempt to assuage the antagonism towards it felt by the Ramelton representatives over the selection of Raphoe as the Donegal office location. Lord Laird assured Messrs Campbell and Doherty that the location decision was the unanimous decision of the Board and not the judgement of any Board member. He said that the Agency was still keen to do something for Ramelton given the significant Ulster-Scots heritage represented by the Ramelton community and that a partnership between it, the University and the Agency was possible. The involvement of the Dublin government was crucial. Mr Doherty said he was not personally surprised at the location decision but felt that there were mutual gains to be had from activity in the Ramelton area.

1.2 Dr Kelly said that given Ramelton's position as a key player in the industrial heritage of the area, the Makemie church and the Lagganeers, it should be possible to use these as a focal point for research and study. It was possible that these could be centred in the Manse. The University would be willing to help in whatever way it could but there would have to be some structured study plan draw up to determine the way forward.

1.3 Mr Campbell agreed that there were problems with the structure of the Manse but that these could be resolved. The Dublin government had promised money for the refurbishment of the building. He said that it would be necessary to carry his congregation with him in relation to the future use of the building. There would be a local meeting on 13 November and it was agreed that this would be on the Agenda. Prof. Wilson and Dr Kelly agreed to look at the Manse and to take the matter forward with Messrs. Doherty and Campbell.

### *2. Meeting with President Mary McAleese 11 November 2001*

2.1 President McAleese invited the Chief Executives and Board members of all the cross-border bodies to a reception in Áras an Uachtaráin on 11 November. John McIntyre, Linde Lunney and I represented the Agency. I took the opportunity to raise with the President the dilemma the Agency faces in seeking proper recognition of the validity and value of the Ulster-Scots culture in the Republic. I told her I believed that much could be done there to remedy this, especially through the medium of education. I said the Agency would greatly welcome the opportunity to meet with key decision-makers in education in the Republic to seek their advice and guidance as to the most effective and appropriate way of implementing the Agency's education strategy in relation to the Republic. I said that I thought that the imprimatur of the President's office behind such a meeting would be most beneficial.

2.2 She listened carefully to what I had to say and said she would do whatever she could to help.

2.3 I later had a much more personable and longer discussion with her husband Dr Martin McAleese on much the same theme. He is a personal friend of the head of the Department of Education in the Republic and said that he if I dropped him a line he would ensure that arrangements for such a meeting would be put in train.

2.4 I sent the necessary letter to Dr McAleese and he phoned me the next day to acknowledge its receipt and to say that I could expect a call from the Department in the near future.

### *3. Meeting with Mr Steven Poever - Department of Education 15 November 2001*

3.1 Messrs Holmes, Erskine, McIntyre and I met with Mr Poever (Under Secretary) on Friday 15 November 2001 to seek the Departments advice and guidance on how best the Agency could take forwards its plans for the implementation of its education strategy. During what was a very constructive meeting, Mr Poever undertook to write to its advisory body on the curriculum CCEA to pave the way for a discussion between the Agency and the CCEA on the introduction of Ulster-Scots topics onto the curriculum. He also agreed to write in a similar vein to Curriculum Advice and Support Service (CASS). He balked at my suggestion for a working group between his Department, the Agency and the Department of Education and Science in the Republic, citing major political problems at any hint of extension of cross border transactions outside the remit of the British-Irish Agreement. The next step forward is arranging meetings with CCEA and the CASS of the Local Education Authorities.

### *4. Meeting with Officials of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum 19 November 2001*

4.1 On 19 November Mike Houlihan (CE, Museum & Galleries Northern Ireland (MAGNI)), Marshall McKee (MD), & Clifford Harness (Archive Collections) called to see me in the Agency about the linguistic development tender. They spoke at length about the Agency's "partnership" agreement with the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum (as set out in the Corporate Plan) and contended that the Agency's tendering arrangements had placed them in a difficult situation. While they had responded to the advertisement, MAGNI had never acted as a contractor before and were disconcerted by the turn of events.

4.2 I explained the rationale behind the decision to go to tender on the linguistic development work. I also mentioned that this approach has the support of the parent body (DCAL) of both the Agency and MAGNI, taking into account current procurement requirements, value for money and transparency arrangements. I suggested a round table meeting with DCAL to iron out any potential problems but Mr Houlihan preferred to reserve his position on the matter.

### *5. Meeting with Leo and Cassandra McNeir of the European Linguistic Development Initiative 20 November 2001*

5.1 Mr McNeir has expressed an interest in bidding for the language contract and was in Northern Ireland to meet a number of people with interest in Ulster-Scots. Mr & Mrs McNeir met me in the Agency on 20 November to explain their expertise in the preparation of specialised dictionaries for various bodies throughout Europe and the USA. It is likely that they will try to form some sort of local consortium to bid for the contract. I explained the public procurement procedures and the likely selection procedure that will be followed.

### *6. Meeting with Mr Neil Oliver 22 November*

6.1 Mr Oliver is a Corporate Consultant lawyer as well as a writer and broadcaster with a particular interest in Ulster Scots and "positive thinking" issues. He is interested in writing a book on famous Ulster-Scots personalities who have been successful because of their "positive thinking" virtues. He was hoping to have the book completed by next June and was looking for assistance from the Agency towards publication and marketing costs.

6.2 Mr Holmes and I met him in the Agency on Thursday 22 November. I explained the Agency's thinking in relation to the provision of multi-tiered material ranging from primary school to higher and further education as well as adult reading material, and to our discussions with the University of Ulster on joint publishing of Ulster-Scots material. He expressed an interest in being included in the formalisation of any arrangements that might emerge from those discussions and I promised to keep him informed.

### *7. Meeting with the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council 22 November 2001*

7.1 Messrs. Crozier (Chairman) and McCausland (Chief Executive) called to George Holmes and me on Thursday 22 November. We discussed the 6 November Letter of Offer on which Nelson McCausland sought a number of clarifications in relating to requirements for reporting procedures and the submission of accounts. Mr McCausland was content with my explanations. He also raised the question of the carry over of an under-spend of approx £10 000 on computer equipment. I said that provided the Agency's approval was sought and some indication was given of the time period in which the expenditure would take place, we would be prepared to agree the carry-over on receipt of a written request from the Council.

7.2 We also discussed the "call for proposals" documentation. I said that this was very timely and touched on a number of other studies which were being undertaken by bodies such as the Arts Council and the Institute of Ulster Scots Studies. I suggested the Agency and the Council co-sponsorship with the Agency paying for it, subject to the Agency

reviewing the detail of the documentation. We would revert to the Council in a couple of weeks about the way forward. Mr McCausland agreed with this.

7.3 He raised the relationship between the Conference on Saturday 24 November and the consultation procedure on the Corporate Plan. I explained that there was no direct relationship but that the feedback from the Conference would be an important part of the review procedure which my Board had agreed would be carried out on the Corporate Plan. Any subsequent consultation procedure would be a matter for my Board to determine.

7.4 Mr McCausland also raised the possibility of the Council having representation on the Advisory Board of the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies. I said that while this did not lie in the gift of the Agency, I promised I would raise the matter with the Institute whenever Prof Wilson returns from China in early December. I suggested that the Council should write separately to the Institute and seek representation.

7.5 He also mentioned the Council's continuing interest in the Consultative Forum and I promised to write confirming the Agency's agreement to the establishment of the Forum.

#### **8. "Gan Forrit Collogue" Dinner & Conference 23/24 November 2001**

8.1 These were both successful but Board members who participated may wish to give their own impressions of both events. The feedback papers have been provided to Board members

#### **9. Meeting with Professor John Kirk, (QUB) 26 November 2001**

9.1 Professor Kirk called to the Agency on Monday 26 November to discuss with George Holmes and myself the recent advertisement for language development. Prof Kirk alluded to underhand dealings within the Board and the Agency about decisions already having been made affecting the destination of the tender. I pointed out that the Agency would deal with all tendering arrangements with probity and transparency and that it was inappropriate to cast doubts on its integrity in relation to these matters. I answered some of his questions in relation to the documentation sent out by the GPA but refused to discuss the content of the tender document.

#### **10. Meeting between the Arts Council & the Ulster-Scots Agency Thursday 29 November 2001**

##### **Agenda**

1. Closer co-ordination on grants for the Ulster-Scots arts
2. Joint Programmes for Arts eg Sponsorship
3. Views on music, visual and performing arts in Schools
4. Advice on arts in the media
5. Publication of new work

Present:

*For the Arts Council*

Brian Walker (Chairman)  
Roisin McDonagh (Chief Executive)  
John Browne (Literary Awards Officer)  
Martin Dowling (Traditional Arts)

*For the Ulster-Scots Agency*

Stan Mallon (Chief Executive- Acting)  
George Holmes (Deputy Chief Executive)

10.1. I started the meeting by outlining the concept of closer co-operation between the Agency and the Arts Council over a wide range of Ulster-Scots arts activities that we both supported. Mr Holmes set the scene in relation to the Ulster-Scots dance and music and the degree to which both Agencies were involved in supporting individuals and groups. I raised the issue of formalising the arrangements between both grant givers to ensure some synergy and strategic directive. Mr Walker said that a lot of these issues would be covered by the proposed strategic review in the arts of the Ulster-Scots and Irish which is currently under tender.

10.2. I asked if the Council had in mind a strategic view in relation to *outputs* for Ulster-Scots arts. Mr Walker replied that there was none for Irish or Ulster-Scots. Roisin McDonagh said she hoped the proposed review would scope the entire landscape and give the Arts Council some handle on the scale of Ulster-Scots activity and needs. That should inform both bodies. The study should give a framework to look at these things from the perspective of both our organisations.

10.3. I mentioned that we were moving to respond to demands for the establishment of groups for Ulster-Scots writers, artists and performing arts, especially towards concert performances involving bands. Mr Walker said that the Council was not particularly "hands on" and there were a number of arts activities that did not seek or require support. But there were also a number of Council grant programmes that these artists could apply to for help.

10.4. I raised the possibility of an Ulster-Scot being employed by the Arts Council to take forward the whole area of arts in association with the Agency. Roisin McDonagh said that the current staffing structure did not lend to this and that the Council did not see merit in it. I reiterated that the Ulster-Scots community would see a lot of merit in such a posting but deferred to the assessment of the Arts Council executive in relation to its own perception of needs. I emphasised that the Agency would be pursuing its own agenda in relation to resources being made available to develop the whole area of Ulster-Scots and this would include arts development.

10.5. We discussed the issue of publication of literature and where the key responsibility lay. Mr Brown said that artists frequently come to them seeking publishing assistance.

The tests they use include the public benefit and the need for a publisher. If writers were to form an umbrella group with a publisher, the grant assistance route would be a lot easier. I mentioned the rather nebulous current arrangements which I understood existed between the Arts Council and Blackstaff Press, the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies and the Blackstaff Press and the involvement of DCAL in funding publications in Ulster-Scots and Irish. I said that these arrangements needed to become clearer so that we can map the way forward. We are tabling them so that they can be seen as live issues and perhaps addressed later as part of the new strategy for Ulster-Scots arts.

10.6. Mr Dowling replied that over the coming months each art officer in the Arts Council will be required to develop policies for their art and none of these issues can be ignored. The Ulster-Scots issues will be taken on board and developed in close co-operation with the Agency, hopefully by the end of March. Roisin McDonagh suggested that the Council and the Agency should have a joint meeting, maybe a seminar, to look at grant programmes and do some thinking around the development of policies. I agreed with that suggestion.

10.7. I mentioned the possibility of joint sponsorship of a major Ulster-Scots cultural show. Rosin McDonagh said that there was money available which could be used to support this. I mentioned the formation of a consortium in association with the University of Ulster to take forward certain performing arts. Mr Dowling explained the mechanism for support for this in terms of an independent organisation commissioning the show as "new work" and funding it under Lottery Funding. The Arts Council would come in at an early phase to look at the proposals.

10.8. I raised the importance of cultural activity in schools. Mr Dowling explained the mechanism for attracting funds, the main criteria being that the work should not be "self commissioned" but done by a group independent of the artist. The reality of this work is that it is likely to be piecemeal. In selecting artists for schools, the Arts Council considers the skill of the artist as a very important criterion. But it is up to the commissioning agents to drum up the interest from the schools, the Arts Council has no role to play here.

10.9. I raised the Arts Council's relations with the arts media especially the BBC and asked for advice on the best way of getting into the media network. Regrettably the Arts Council does not have good relationships with BBC arts producers and suggested we should plough our own furrow on this.

10.10. The Arts Council agreed, within my proposed Corporate Plan review, that we could mention that the Agency would work closely with the Arts Council in bringing the Agency's arts' plans forward.

Stan Mallon  
Chief Executive (Acting)  
30 November 2001