

RECEIVED
25 JAN 2001 #4 34/1
PERMANENT SEC.

cc: Dr Rooney
Ms Cochrane

From: Patricia K McAlister
Linguistic Diversity Branch

23 January 2001

To: Secretary

BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD: TRANSLATION OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

David Cargo, Chief Executive, wrote to you (9 November 2000) asking for information on Departmental policy and practice with regard to translations. I have spoken to his office to apologise for the delay and to explain that things were moving on this front and that we would reply when we had a clearer picture.

I have offered a meeting to brief him more fully if he felt this would be helpful. He would like to have something to put to his Board meeting on 25 January 2001. I have attached a draft reply.

PATRICIA K McALISTER
Head of Linguistic Diversity Branch
Tel: (028) 90258955
Mobile: 07710 745019
Fax: (028) 90258860
email: Error! Bookmark not defined.

ISO
Mr David Cargo
Chief Executive
Belfast Education and Library Board
40 Academy Street
BELFAST
BT1 2NQ

25 January 2001

Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 9 November 2000. I apologise for the delay in getting back to you.

You asked for information on Departmental policy and practice in relation to translating official documents. Essentially, this is developing around the implementation of the *Good Friday Agreement* and the *Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages*. The Agreement commits the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland Governments to promote tolerance, respect and understanding for linguistic diversity, which in Northern Ireland includes Irish, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the ethnic minorities. In particular, in relation to the Irish language, it commits the British Government where appropriate and where people so desire it to:

- take resolute action to promote the language;
- facilitate and encourage the use of the language in speech and writing in public and private life where there is appropriate demand;
- seek to remove, where possible, restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language;
- make provision for liaising with the Irish language community, representing their views to public authorities and investigating complaints;

The UK Government on 2 March 2000 signed the *Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages* recognising Irish and Ulster-Scots for the purposes of Part II which involves general principles of support and non discrimination. When the Charter is ratified Irish will be specified as a language to which Part III will apply. This will involve applying a minimum of 35 provisions from a menu of 65 options for promoting the language across six areas of public life. Article 10, which deals with public administration, is particularly relevant to the issues you have raised. Ratification is expected to take place shortly and the Charter will come into force three months after that date.

We are still at an early stage in developing translation policy and services. In relation to Irish, we have some expertise in-house, handling mainly Irish to English work. Departments generally rely on one official commissioned translator, personal contacts and an emergency, non-quality controlled list of people and organisations who offer commercial translation services.

In relation to Ulster Scots, DCAL has agreed with the Ulster Scots Language Society, Ulster Scots Heritage Council and Ulster Scots Agency (part of the North/South Language Body) that all translation will be handled via the Agency. There has been minimal translation into ethnic minority languages but we would look to the Central Office of Information in London for assistance. In the case of Chinese we have identified that we could work with the local Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Irish and British sign languages can be provided locally.

There are as yet no hard and fast rules on which documents should be translated and we judge each case on its merits, taking into account efficiency and effectiveness as well as the subject matter – is it likely to be of particular relevance to a particular linguistic community?

As a general guide we would aim to produce key documents such as corporate strategy, annual report, Charter etc, in Irish and Ulster Scots with Chinese offered on request. We have provided trilingual versions of our draft Equality Scheme. We would also consider offering Executive Summaries of other documents in all three languages. We would not expect to produce non-English or bilingual versions of detailed technical documents or technical annexes to public documents which may be expected to have very little public interest and we have no plans at present to produce statutory forms. The Department uses trilingual letterheaded notepaper and Linguistic Diversity Branch also uses trilingual fax cover sheets.

Most of the non-English language correspondence we have received has been in Irish or bilingual Irish/English. We have also received a small number of bilingual Ulster-Scots/English items. We have replied in English, with exception of correspondence in Irish to Linguistic Diversity Branch which responds in Irish. Linguistic Diversity Branch also carries out spoken business in Irish where the caller wishes.

To facilitate meetings with Irish language organisations we have hired simultaneous interpreting facilities on a couple of occasions and Linguistic Diversity Branch has provided sequential interpreting on another. We would be happy to provide similar facilities to other language groups who requested them. We plan to install interpreting equipment in our headquarters at Interpoint shortly which we will be happy to make available to colleagues as far as possible.

The Department has given firm commitments in our Corporate Strategy and in the Programme for Government to develop language policy for Irish, Ulster Scots and ethnic minority languages and to make

key information available in languages other than English. We are at an early stage in this process and I am confident that the overall picture will become clearer over the coming months.

I hope this is helpful. I would be interested to hear how the Board policy and practice develops.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

AIDEEN McGINLEY

**Hcc: All Permanent Secretaries
Mr McKervill**