

cc: Mr Spence  
Mr Blackwell  
Mr Kirk  
Mr McCusker

From: J F Walker  
CCRU

28 February 1990

To: Mr Q Thomas  
NIO (L)

**BROADCASTING BILL - IRISH LANGUAGE BROADCASTING**

1. I undertook to prepare defensive briefing on Irish language broadcasting, which could be used by Home Office Ministers in any future Parliamentary debate on the Broadcasting Bill.
2. Enclosed is a draft background note, which is intended to set the Irish language in a wider context than just broadcasting issues, together with a draft defensive briefing line.
3. I should be grateful for comments on these papers from yourself and copy recipients before finalising the material to go to the Home Office.

J F WALKER

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## Broadcasting Bill - Background note on Irish language

1. Government Policy

1.1 Government policy in Northern Ireland is to recognise and respect the cultural identities and traditions of both sides of the community.

1.2 In the 1989 review of the working of the Inter-Governmental Conference of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the British Government undertook to:-

"support efforts to enhance awareness and appreciation of the Irish language in the context of encouraging greater mutual understanding across the community, including respecting the cultural heritage of both traditions."

1.3 Against this background, the Government recognises and respects the special importance of the Irish language to many people in Northern Ireland. It therefore responds, where practical, to demand for the use of the Irish language.

2. Use of Irish language in NI

2.1 The Continuous Household Survey carried out in 1987 indicated that 11% (c. 100,000) of the population of Northern Ireland aged between 16 and 69 had

some knowledge of Irish. Within this total only 5% of the 100,000 claimed to have fluency, 80% never used Irish at home and while 15% used it occasionally, only 1% did so on a daily basis.

2.2 The next UK-wide census survey, planned for 1991, will, with respect to Northern Ireland, contain a question on the Irish language. The results from the census will, therefore, update the existing data on use of the Irish language and help in the planning of future developments.

### 3. Legislative position in Northern Ireland

3.1 Northern Ireland Departments have the legislative authority necessary to support all present and anticipated initiatives aimed at encouraging the use and appreciation of the Irish language and culture throughout the community, including the development of media services.

3.2 There is not sufficient demand for Irish language broadcasting to sustain a discrete Irish language radio or TV broadcasting station at the present time. There is therefore no need for additional legislative provision for Northern Ireland in the current Broadcasting Bill.

### 4. Present Broadcasting Provision

4.1 At present the only Irish language broadcasting in Northern Ireland is on BBC Radio. There is a 20 minute programme, at peak listening time, from Monday to Wednesday and on Friday of each week entitled "Rud Eile" which tends to concentrate on topical issues generally and on Irish culture in particular. On

Thursdays there is an hour long music request programme "Caschlar" and each Sunday there is a 45 minute general magazine programme "Meascra".

4.2 In addition, ten 20 minute programmes are produced each year as a resource to support the teaching of Irish in schools. This series is supported by extensive written material.

4.3 RTE services can be received in some parts of NI. Around 1.5% of RTE TV broadcasts are in Irish and RTE radio has one all Irish station which broadcasts 8-11 hours per day.

## 5. Future Broadcasting Plans

### 5.1 BBC Television

There are plans for a pilot series of childrens programmes on environmental issues. The ten 10 minute programmes will be aimed at children in Irish language schools and also those learning Irish in primary schools. The corporation also has plans to develop a major magazine programme and possibly some drama. The main developments will not occur until 1991 and will depend on the resources available.

### 5.2 BBC Radio

The intention is to consolidate the existing base and to develop educational broadcasting to meet demands of the new curriculum and the mandatory cross-curricular theme of cultural heritage.

5.3 Ulster Television

There is no indication yet about the plans of Ulster Television. It is known that they have commissioned some papers about possibilities but no work has yet been commissioned from any of the independent producers in Northern Ireland.

6. Community support for Irish language broadcasting

6.1 There is a growing lobby for much greater broadcasting in Irish language (see the attached extract from fortnight magazine). More and more groups are emerging and the education reforms are likely to create a surge of interest.

6.2 The broadcasting companies will come under increasing pressure to increase coverage of the Irish language and this will also lead to a lobby on Government to offer financial support to encourage the broadcasters to move much more quickly.

6.3 Existing provision in Wales and the recently announced Government support of £8m for Scottish gallic can be expected to be quoted extensively in support of the need to accelerate change and development in Northern Ireland.

6.4 Government intends to commission, in the near-future, an Irish language group, the Ultach Trust, to provide an overview of demand for Irish language, of existing and planned services, including the services which might reasonably be expected from broadcasting in the future.

7. Current Government initiatives on Irish language

Current Government support measures for Irish language initiatives which contribute to a wider Cultural Traditions Programme aimed at promoting greater mutual respect and understanding between the two sides of the community in NI, include:-

- (a) major developments in education, through the introduction of the two cross-curricular themes of education for mutual understanding and cultural heritage as a unique feature of the recently introduced education reforms in Northern Ireland;
- (b) funding of a research programme on Irish place names at Queens University, Belfast (£500,000 over 5 years);
- (c) £50,000 for Irish language projects, mainly in the adult education field;
- (d) £50,000 towards the immediate programme costs of the recently established Ultach Trust, an independent body which aims to encourage interest and appreciation of the Irish language throughout the community;
- (e) a commitment to provide up to £250,000 towards a £1m Trust Fund which the Ultach Trust plan to raise;
- (f) £20,000 to the Irish language school in Belfast to support curriculum material; and

(g) expenditure of around £        by the Arts Council for Northern Ireland to support Irish language activities in the fields of drama, literature and poetry.

8. Welsh/Scottish positions

8.1 The Welsh situation is not comparable with Northern Ireland. There is much greater use of Welsh on a day to day basis in public life, education, broadcasting etc. This is the result of response to demand for the use and development of the Welsh language over many years.

8.2 The additional £8m funding for Gallic broadcasting in Scotland, which is marginal on its merits, was agreed for "political" reasons, ie it was a response to complement efforts of existing Scottish Office subsidies in education and the arts.

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**Briefing Notes**

**Broadcasting Bill - Defensive line on Irish language**

1. Government policy in Northern Ireland is to recognise and respect the cultural identities and traditions of both sides of the community.
2. Within this policy, Government is committed to:-
  - encouraging interest and appreciation of the Irish language and culture throughout the community;
  - supporting, where practical, demand for the use of the Irish language; and
  - examining obstacles to its development.
3. These activities form part of a wider Cultural Traditions Programme, launched last year by Government, to promote greater mutual respect and understanding between the two sides of the community in NI.
4. Government in NI has sufficient powers to support all present and anticipated initiatives aimed at encouraging the use and appreciation of the Irish



language and culture throughout the community, including the development of media services.

5. Government does not believe there is sufficient demand to sustain a discrete Irish language radio or TV broadcasting station at the present time.

6. The 1987 Continuous Household Survey reported that 11% (c.100,000) of the 16-69 population of NI had some knowledge of Irish. Only 5% of the 100,000 claimed to have fluency, 80% never used Irish at home and only 1% used it on a daily basis.

7. Existing broadcasting provision involves:-

- a 20 minute topical and cultural radio slot, at peak time, from Monday-Wednesday and on Friday, of each week;
- a one hour radio music request programme each Thursday; and
- a 45 minute general magazine radio programme each Sunday.

8. Both radio and TV broadcasting channels in NI plan to extend their Irish language services.

9. Government in NI is supporting a wide range of initiatives aimed at promoting the use and understanding of the Irish language. These include:-

- provisions in the recently introduced education reforms to increase access to the Irish language and culture through the cross-curricular themes of education for mutual understanding and cultural heritage;
- funding for a major research programme on Irish place names;
- substantial support for the recently established Ultach Trust;
- funding from the Arts Council for Northern Ireland for drama and literature activities.

10. Government is aware of the growing lobby for development of the Irish language, including the development of broadcasting services. It will shortly be commissioning work to provide an overview of current demand, of existing and planned services, including the services which might reasonably be expected from broadcasting in the future.

11. The situations in Wales and Scotland are not comparable to NI.