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COMMUNIQUÉ

The British-Irish Council established under the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday 1998 held its fifth Summit meeting today at the Museum of Welsh Life, St. Fagans, Cardiff, Wales. The meeting was chaired by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Rhodri Morgan AM.

The British and Irish Governments were represented by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Tony Blair MP and the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern TD respectively.

The Scottish Executive was represented by the Rt Hon Jim Wallace MSP, Deputy First Minister.

The Isle of Man was represented by the Hon Richard Corkill MHK, Chief Minister of the Government of the Isle of Man, Guernsey was represented by Deputy Laurie Morgan, President, States of Guernsey Advisory and Finance Committee and Jersey was represented by Senator Frank Walker, President of the States of Jersey Policy and Resources Committee.

A full list of delegation members is attached.

The British-Irish Council is a forum for its Members to exchange information, discuss, consult and endeavour to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the respective competencies.

The Council noted the recent elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and looked forward to

the restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland as soon as possible.

Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages

The main focus of today's meeting was Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages, on which the Welsh Assembly Government takes the lead within the BIC. The Council noted the rich linguistic inheritance possessed by all BIC Members. As well as English, five different languages indigenous to the BIC area were spoken at different points during the course of the meeting. The Council reiterated the commitment on the part of Members to support and promote their respective indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages. The meeting highlighted the wide variety of policies, projects and initiatives supporting these languages within the various BIC administrations. The considerable commonality of goals and existing areas of collaboration between BIC members in this policy area were noted.

While noting that much of the work in terms of supporting and promoting indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages is specific to the circumstances of each BIC member administration, the Council agreed on a number of areas where enhanced co-operation at governmental level would be beneficial.

Recognising the crucial importance of intergenerational language transmission to the future health and viability of indigenous languages, the Council agreed to jointly consider the outcomes of research in this area and to carry out an assessment of structures supporting indigenous language learning in adult education in each of the BIC administrations.

The Council noted also the potential of ICT developments to facilitate the use and raise the visibility of indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages. Members agreed to work together on identifying priorities for their respective indigenous languages in relation to ICT development.

The collection and analysis of data relating to indigenous language ability and use is an important element of work in this area within BIC member administrations. The Council agreed that members with an interest in this area would consider the potential benefits of co-operating on the development of language use surveys. Members also agreed to share information on their experiences of the relationship between planning policy and linguistic considerations.

In addition to the discussion on Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used languages, the Council

was updated on work being undertaken in other British-Irish Council areas by the relevant administrations.

Drugs

Ireland leads the work of the Council in relation to the Misuse of Drugs. BIC Ministers with responsibility in this area in their respective administrations met for the second time in Dublin in February 2003 to report progress and identify new areas of interest. A number of conferences and seminars on topics of common interest to BIC members have been hosted by different member administrations over the past year. Educational, Training and Employment Opportunities for Recovering Drug Users was the subject of a seminar held in Scotland in December 2002. Ireland hosted a seminar on Awareness Campaigns in June, and in September a conference on Emerging Trends in Drug Use and Treatment Modalities was held in Guernsey. A third BIC Ministerial meeting on the subject of Drug Misuse is scheduled for 2004.

Environment

The UK is the lead Administration on the Environment. BIC Environment Ministers have met twice this year, in London in January, and most recently in October on the Isle of Man. Work on climate change has continued with the publication in July of a report "Scenarios of Climate Change for islands within the BIC region", which provides a basis for preparing different regions and sectors of the economies of BIC members for the possible impacts of climate change. In addition, Environment Ministers agreed in October that work should be taken forward on biodiversity, including marine biodiversity, which is of interest to BIC members. Approaches to sustainable development are also under consideration by the Council in this sector.

Transport

Northern Ireland is the lead Administration on Transport. Work on the initial priority areas identified by the Council is continuing, including on transport links between BIC members. Within the area of Road Safety, the potential for taking forward work on driving and drugs misuse is under consideration by officials. An exploration of the potential for developing mutual recognition of driving offences between BIC member administrations has also been proposed for inclusion in the work programme.

Knowledge Economy

Jersey takes the lead on the work of the BIC in relation to the Knowledge Economy. A study has been undertaken of ICT use by people with disabilities. Preliminary results of this study were presented to a conference on "Raising the profile of local e-government" hosted by the BIC in co-operation with the UK Improvement and Development Agency in July and this data can be used by BIC members to inform decision making in key policy areas such as tackling the digital divide. Further results will be presented in December.

Health: the Application of Telemedicine

The Isle of Man leads the work of the Council on the application of Telemedicine and e-health. This work provides a useful forum for the exchange of information and ideas between officials and experts in Member Administrations on the identification and implementation of telemedicine/e-health solutions. In this context, various initiatives and methodologies in the field of telemedicine have been the subject of study visits and presentations hosted by BIC members.

Social Inclusion

Social Inclusion, and particularly financial inclusion, was the main topic for discussion at the last BIC summit in November 2002. The Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government take the lead on this issue in which the Council seeks to promote financial literacy and access to appropriate financial products. The role of social enterprises such as credit unions and money advice centres in tackling financial exclusion is being explored by the Council. A meeting of BIC Ministers with responsibility in the areas of social and financial inclusion is scheduled for spring 2004.

Tourism

Guernsey takes the lead on Tourism in the work of the BIC. Work has been undertaken on the collection and analysis of tourism statistics, with a forum held in London in January 2003 bringing together senior statisticians and policy makers in the areas from across the member administrations. Members are also involved in the development of a tourism satellite accounts project which seeks to improve the understanding of the financial contribution tourism makes to

local, regional and national economies. Members are also jointly exploring issues relating to staff training and recruitment, sustainable tourism (including a seminar hosted by Guernsey in September 2003), and cultural tourism, in collaboration with the BIC minority and lesser-used language sector.

Future Summit Meetings

The Council noted that Northern Ireland and Guernsey are scheduled to host summits in 2004.

British-Irish Council
28 November 2003
www.British-IrishCouncil.org

List of Delegates

Wales	
First Minister	The Rt. Hon Rhodri Morgan AM
Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport	Alun Pugh AM
Minister for Economic Development And Transport	Andrew Davies AM

Minister for Education and Life-Long Learning	Jane Davidson AM
British Government	
Prime Minister	The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Angela Smith MP
Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs	Rt Hon the Lord Falconer of Thoroton QC
Government of Ireland	
Taoiseach	Bertie Ahern TD
Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources	Dermot Ahern TD
Minister for Community, Rural And Gaeltacht Affairs	Éamon Ó Cuív TD
Scotland	

Deputy First Minister	The Rt Hon Jim Wallace QC MSP
Minister for Education and Young People	Peter Peacock MSP
Jersey	
President of the Policy and Resources Committee	Senator Frank Walker
Chief Executive, Policy and Resources Department	Bill Ogley
States of Guernsey	
President, Advisory and Finance Committee	Deputy Laurie Morgan
Chief Executive, Advisory and Finance Committee	Mike Brown
Government of the Isle of Man	
Chief Minister	Hon Richard Corkill MHK

Minister for Education	Hon Stephen Rodan MHK