



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Follow up to Agreement - Irish Language MattersFile
251A**Broadcasting:**

1. I met with Padhraic Ó Ciardha of TnaG on 21 April to discuss the implications of the references to Irish language broadcasting and TnaG in the Agreement and to consider ways in which these matters could be carried forward in the immediate future. Following our conversation Ó Ciardha will shortly be submitting his views in writing.
2. TnaG are enormously pleased with the conclusions regarding broadcasting and are very keen to see these matters vigorously pursued with a view to putting detailed provisions, and where appropriate legislation, in place.
3. The following would be preliminary conclusions regarding a strategy for developing and building on the two points in the Agreement in this area:

(A) More widespread availability of TnaG in Northern Ireland.

Considerable progress has already been made in this regard with the improved signal from Clermont Carn likely to be in full operation in the near future. There will still, however, be areas (in and behind mountains) where it will not be possible to receive TnaG. Ó Ciardha would see direct technical discussions between RTE (technical expert is Brendan Crinnion) and NI (probably BBC) as the best way of identifying the appropriate ways to tackle the remaining difficult areas. He provided me with a map showing the non reception areas post Clermont Carn.

Ó Ciardha also sees a need to look at the position regarding cable TV (Cabletel) in N.I. and at the implications and opportunities of digital TV.

Comment: We would need to discuss these matters with the NIO with a view to establishing/identifying structures which would facilitate the bringing forward of specific proposals in this area.

(B) Encourage and provide financial support for TV and Film Production: This

is an area of considerable potential for TnaG. They would envisage the establishment of a Broadcasting fund along the lines of that available in Scotland for Gaelic. The level of funding could be in the region of £3 million p/a - TnaG receive £12 million p/a from Irish Government (£7.5 m direct and £5 m through RTE). Ó Ciardha felt that the funding should be for

production and in this context he noted that capital funding had already been secured by NASC/Forbairt Feirste.

He also sees strong possibilities for co-operation with the Scottish Broadcasting Fund possibly through the Columba initiative.

Ó Ciardha suggests that a committee comprising TnaG, BBC, NI Film Council and the two Governments be established in the immediate future to develop firm proposals in this area (he accepts that it would be difficult to secure provision for a broadcasting fund in the present NI financial year). He emphasised the importance of productions meeting the needs of broadcasters in this area and added that this would not necessarily coincide with the preferences of Irish language groups who might have a too idealised view regarding the most appropriate type of productions .

Comment: The proposal to establish a Committee along the lines suggested would appear desirable and we should seek to discuss this with the NIO at an early date. I would also see a role for Forbairt Feirste or a representative of Pobal (umbrella group for Irish language community) in the proposed Committee.

General Irish language:

4. Minister of State Eamon Ó Cuiv, accompanied by the undersigned and by Wally Kirwan (D. Taoiseach) met with representatives of the Irish language community on 21 April. The Irish language delegation was led by Conradh na Gaeilge President, Gearóid Ó Cairealláin and included the following Janet Muller (Pobal), Pilib MacCathmhaoil (Forbairt Feirste), Eoghan Ó Néill (Lá), Máiréad Uí hAdhmaill (Gaeloiliúint), Concubhair Ó Liatháin (An Scéalai - TV film production Company) and Tomás Ó Donnaile (Meánscoil Dhoire).
5. The meeting was largely concerned with the implications of the Agreement for the position of the Irish language in NI. The representatives from NI were, without exception, enthusiastic regarding the Agreement and all congratulated the Government and the nationalist parties for the progress made. While seeing some difficulties ahead by way of securing the implementation of practical and specific policy measures they see the Agreement as providing a solid base on which to build a comprehensive policy with regard to the language. As well as the general commitment to "take resolute action to promote the language" the particular

references to Irish medium education and broadcasting are seen as particularly helpful. Minister Ó Cuív encouraged the delegation to bring forward specific and realistic proposals, based on what has been achieved in the text, and indicated that the Irish Government in its contacts with the NIO over the coming months would seek to secure as much progress towards the putting in place of specific policies and where possible legislation in the period prior to the handing over of powers to a devolved Assembly in NI. Ms Muller of Pobal indicated that they were involved in a process of putting together just such a shopping list and will be in a position to put specific suggestions to us in the near future. Gaeloiliúint provided a paper outlining clear and practical action which is required in the Gaelscoileanna area (recognition and funding for Gaeloiliúint, revision of criteria for recognition of Gaelscoileanna, funding for náiscoileanna etc)

Minister Ó Cuív indicated during the meeting that he would be sympathetically looking at the question of providing a once off grant to Meánscoil Dhoire.

6. **Comment:** There is at present considerable goodwill among the Irish language community in NI for the Agreement and this will no doubt influence to some extent the wider Nationalist and Republican community. It is perhaps the first time that what has been achieved in this area has exceeded expectations on the ground. In this context it is important that the established instinctive negative and grudging position of the NI Administration (DENI has already refused the linkage, for recognition purposes, between meanscoil Dhoire and Meanscoil Feirste) does not undermine this goodwill before the new approach has a chance to take root.

It would be important to hold early bilateral discussions with the NIO to ensure that specific proposals are brought forward in a range of areas and that the content of the legislation envisaged (Irish medium schools orders/Act) is outlined. The proposals which we expect to receive from Pobal, together with those already received from Gaeloiliúint and TnaG will be of assistance in these discussions.

Máirtín Ó Fainín
Anglo-Irish Division
22 April 1998

cc Secretary Gallagher, Councillors AI, Ray Bassett, ~~W. Kirwan~~ (D. Taoiseach), K. Dowling (Secretariat Belfast) and Eanna Mac Giolla Ruaidh (D.Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht)