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NOTE OF MEETING HELD ON 12 NOVEMBER 1986 IN STORMONT CASTLE TO  
DISCUSS "IRISHNESS"

Present: Mr R B Spence  
Mr W E C Ford (DOE, NI)  
Mr A J Green (DENI)  
Miss Z I Davies (DHSS)  
Mr B I Trainor (DOE, NI)  
Mr J G Sullivan (Cent Sec)

1. Opening the meeting Mr Spence said that the Secretary of State had accepted the concept that we should encourage the recognition of "Irishness" in the cultural, historical and artistic fields but stop short of according the Irish language official status or promoting bilingualism. Against this background we needed to consider whether there were any activities which highlight our common heritage and which it would be appropriate for government to offer positive support.
2. There was general agreement that a considerable amount was already being done by a wide range of local bodies including the schools, the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, the Arts Council and the Department of Irish Studies at QUB. There was little scope for any dramatic new initiatives but it might be possible to persuade the Arts Council to do more. The museums already do useful work in this area but the establishment of more local museums and an Area Museums Council would be a useful step forward, if government was prepared to find the necessary resources. Mr Trainor suggested that government might support a degree course in Irish Studies at QUB and it was agreed that this idea should be explored further although Mr Green had some reservations. Mr Trainor also said that the PRO could usefully set up an education service and employ a professional in the public search room if additional staffing was approved. We should also consider encouraging the development of local studies at townland level.

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3. It was agreed that the approach advocated by the Irish would be divisive and should be challenged. We should try to convince them that it would be more constructive to focus on areas which are of common interest to both traditions rather than those which are of interest to nationalists only. We should also explain that we are already doing a good deal to encourage interest in the history and culture of Ulster and that we are looking at what more might be done. It might be helpful to draw up a list of the various activities sponsored by the NI Departments and bodies, along with details of the resources involved. This would illustrate our positive approach which was ahead of what ROI was doing.
  
4. The possibility of setting up a small, high-powered group of learned people to advise on possible further action, was also discussed. This group might be asked to examine what had been done to date to encourage interest in our shared heritage and to make recommendations for further action which might become the framework for government's policy. It was agreed that this suggestion was worth considering although some reservations were expressed.

*J. Sullivan*

J G SULLIVAN

Central Secretariat

17 November 1986

/JH

cc : Miss Elliott (CPL)

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