

E. R.

*RBS 11/12*

CONFIDENTIAL

*MSullivan*  
*to see a return*

cc: PS/SofS (B&L) - M  
PS/Dr Mawhinney (B&L) - M  
PS/Mr Bloomfield  
Mr Parkes  
Dr Hayes  
Mr Spence  
Miss Elliott - M  
Mr McConnell

*MM 2/12*

Mr Green  
DENI

GAELIC LANGUAGE

you attended a lunch given today by the Secretary of State for Professors Buchanan and Stockman, Dr Hayes and Mr Peover when the matter of the Irish language was discussed.

2. The consensus expressed by the visitors was that they sought a greater degree of respect for the Irish language and those who spoke it or were in other ways connected with it. They were distinctly opposed to bilingualism, including current SDLP policy under which every pupil in Northern Ireland would learn Irish for one hour in each school day. Instead they sought a widening of opportunities for those who wished to study and speak the language and in this connection they welcomed plans of BBC Radio Ulster to beam a 30 minute programme in Irish five nights a week. On the other hand they confirmed that policy aimed at promoting Irish in the Republic over the last 60 years had been a failure: the level of interest in schools in particular remained very low.

3. They advised therefore that the Government should foster recognition and respect for the language and accommodate those who wish to pursue it. This might be by means of an official map, extended coverage on BBC, and appointments to both the Arts Council and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum with a special remit for the Irish language. In conclusion, the Secretary of State expressed his view that use of Irish in an Ordnance Survey map might carry

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risks, but he took from the meeting the message that the Irish language should as far as possible be accommodated and respected without political overtones. It was the cultural aspect which should dominate. Dr Mawhinney also noted with interest the suggestion that an appointment with specific responsibilities for Irish be made at the Folk Museum.

HS.

D J WATKINS  
Private Secretary

1. December 1986

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