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Prison Department
Dundonald House

MR SPENCE BLIS

USE OF IRISH LANGUAGE IN OFFICIAL BUSINESS

You invited comments on the draft Central Secretariat circular enclosed with your minute of 28 September.

2. On personal names, the Prison Department recognises that any person is legally entitled to use any name he or she wishes. However, as we have said on previous occasions, it is essential that prison records are maintained on the same basis as those of the courts and the police. It has been our invariable practice during a prisoner's sentence to use the name by which he was described on the original committal warrant, and we would want this to be the name by which the prison^{er} was known so long as he remained in custody following the first committal. We would not rule out including in our records a reference to another name "also known as", but that is as far as would feel able to go.

3. We are content with the reference in the draft circular to place and street names. However, we see considerable practical difficulties in the proposals about correspondence. We would expect a deliberate attempt to flood us with correspondence in Irish, and if we accepted letters in Irish, why not also prisoners' petitions? We have a firm rule that prisoners able to write in English should send their outgoing letters in that language, and we would not wish to change this. We believe that there are more than 300 prisoners in Maze alone who would wish to write their letters in Irish; either we should have to have expert translators available

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on the spot, or prisoners' correspondence would have to be delayed considerably. If Governors and their staff are to be able to comment on the points which inmates make in their petitions we would probably have to require petitions to be written in English, at least those which required a reasonably quick reply. But even if the acceptance of Irish was limited to incoming correspondence, we would not expect to be able to cope with the volume without additional translation resources. Could they be provided, even if one concluded that they were justified and affordable?

4. I hope that it will be possible for you to look at the matter again in the light of these practicalities.



J. M. STEELE

12 October 1987

cc	PS/PUS (B&L)	BLIS
	Mr Stephens	BLIS
	Mr Burns	BLIS
	Mr M Elliott	BLIS
	Mr Chesterton	BLIS
	Mr Innes	BLIS
	Mr McConnell	BLIS
	Mr Bell	BLIS
	Mr S Hewitt	BLIS
	Mr Blackwell	BLIS

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