

27 May 1975

The Rt Hon Merlyn Rees MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Stormont Castle
BELFAST
BT4 3ST

I have been asked by the party leaders in the Convention to convey to you their wish that funds should be provided to enable the various party groupings to avail of expert and professional advice and guidance in preparing and presenting their views to the Convention.

The facilities provided in the Convention Library have already been expanded to provide information-retrieval and simple research facilities for Members. This has been done within the resources of the Office of the Convention and, unless the demand exceeds present expectations, no additional expenditure is envisaged.

Parties have shown no inclination to avail of opportunities to indulge in study trips abroad. The leaders all regard the provision of this facility as being less important than the funding of experts. Therefore I do not anticipate any considerable expenditure under this heading.

As far as expert advisers are concerned there are, it seems to me, three separate ways in which they might be employed. Two of these proposals appear to fall within the provisions of the Act, the third probably requiring special approval by you on some extra-statutory basis.

It might help if I set these out in sequence:

- (1) The recruitment of expert advisers to the staff of the Convention to supplement the resources of the Office of the Chairman. Such experts might be asked to provide papers on specific topics, to comment on submissions by parties or outside groups, to give an 'opinion' if asked, or to assist in briefing the Chairman on important Committee business. They would be paid a fee for each item on scales determined by CSMD. A proposal has already been made to your Office (by letter of 2 May) and I would appreciate early approval.
- (2) The summoning of expert witnesses to appear before Committees of the Convention. We would here propose to follow the practice of Westminster Select Committees and pay reasonable fees and expenses based on scales agreed with CSMD as for (1).
- (3) The provision for each party of a sum of money to enable them to employ expert advisers of their own choice.

This would substantially reduce the demand for 'expert witnesses' under (2), would particularly assist the smaller parties and would meet the strongly expressed preference of the leaders. It would also enable them to involve the local universities in the work of the Convention and help to create a more informed and widespread interest in the proceedings.

We would envisage fairly tight control over this money-- only vouched-for expenditure in accordance with a predetermined CSMD scale of fees and reasonable expenses would be reimbursed. We would suggest, for example, that present employees of parties, Convention Members and their wives or defeated election candidates be excluded. The main party leaders were insistent that whatever facilities might be provided should be extended also to small parties and individual independent members (Messrs Bleakley and Smyth). The principal demand at the moment is for advisers in the fields of Economics and Constitutional Law. I do not believe that parties will create unreasonable demands and the amount of money involved is likely to be relatively modest.

I am inclined to suggest a sliding scale of grant which, while related to the size of parties, gives proportionately rather more assistance to smaller parties.

A tentative allocation might be:

Messrs Bleakley and Smyth	£1,000 each
UPNI/Alliance	£3,000 each
DUP/VUP	£4,000 each
SDLP/OUN	£5,000 each.

These are complicated matters to put on paper and I do so only to indicate the sort of proposals we think would meet the need. If you were of a mind to approve the general principle our officers could, I am sure, jointly produce a more refined scheme.

It would greatly facilitate the work of the Convention and would generate considerable goodwill if you could fairly quickly approve of some such scheme. It is, I suggest, important to allow the Convention to gather momentum and parties would be facilitated in the recruitment of advisers if they were able to do so before the University vacation.

If the Convention were to run beyond the initial statutory limit it would be necessary to look again at the arrangements. The main thing is to do something now.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Copies to:

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