



Minister of State

Jeremy Corbyn Esq MP
House of Commons
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PS/ M d F S (HTB)

MR McCABE

MR CORNICK

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MISS DEMPSEY

30 August 1990

PQ 6793

Dear Mr Corbyn

You tabled the following Parliamentary Question for Ordinary Written Answer on 26 July 1990:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what are the reasons for the bans on the use of Irish: (a) in correspondence, (b) during visits and (c) on forms, in prisons; what is the average line taken to censor Irish language publications for prisoners use; and what is the practice on the provision of opportunities for Irish sports in prisons in Northern Ireland".

I am sorry that I was not able to provide a substantive reply to your question before the House rose for recess. However, the information sought is as follows:-

Northern Ireland Prison Rules require censorship of correspondence as a matter of security. All prisoners who are able to write in English are obliged to do so because of limited translation resources, although a short greeting in Irish at the beginning or end of each letter is allowed. Prison Rules also require visits to be within sight and hearing of prison staff for security reasons. Because of the unavailability of staff fluent in Irish, prisoners who speak English as their first language are required to use English during visits. Special arrangements can be made for those

not capable of speaking English. Prisoners are, however, permitted to converse amongst themselves at other times in Irish or any other language they might wish.

It is essential that prison records are maintained on the same basis as those of the courts and the police. It is, therefore, the practice during a prisoner's sentence to use the name by which he was described on the committal warrant. Prison records do, however, include a note of any other name form a prisoner may use. Prisoners may sign petitions using Irish name forms, but the name shown on the committal warrant is used for administrative purposes. While information about the length of time taken to censor Irish language publications is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost, of the 140 publications submitted for censorship during 1989 only one is outstanding.

Gaelic sport is not arranged on a formal basis because the limited facilities are shared by all prisoners. Prisoners may, however, play football in the Gaelic fashion or other suitable games during their normal exercise periods, without restriction. In addition prisoners are being provided with facilities to play yard games some of which have an Irish cultural association.

I will arrange for a copy of this letter to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Yours Sincerely

David Kyle

for RT HON JOHN COPE MP

*(approved by the Minister
and signed in his absence)*