

MR McCusker

Sean

Pat

FROM: CLIVE BARBOUR
28 OCTOBER 1992

CB/20873/92/AL

UNDER
SEC 1130/10
28 OCT 1992
CENT SEC

- cc Mr Alston
- Mr Watkins
- Mr McCusker
- Mr Maxwell
- Mr Durbin
- Mr Kyle

Ms McAlister

30/10/92
Ms McAlister

M. dirum both annex to this.

HW
29.10

IRISH LANGUAGE ISSUES

I refer to Mr McCusker's note of 24 September in response to log cases concerning Irish language issues. As a result, the Irish have provided us with 2 papers which are attached. The first is a paper setting out their views on the Priestly Report and I would be grateful for you to pass this on to DENI before the closing date for the consultation period on 30 October.

2. I am also attaching a paper entitled Irish Language Review which the Irish would like us to consider in the context of the Review which is currently underway. You will be aware that I forwarded a note from David Barry to you which requested sight of the draft findings of the Review or, failing that, an outline of its main thrusts. I can only assume that this request has now been overtaken by the paper which is attached.

Clive Barbour

CLIVE BARBOUR
28 OCTOBER 1992

Consultation
Streeting
Centre

ASST/J
SEC 360/11
28 JAN 1993
C.C.F. J.

IRISH LANGUAGE REVIEW

1. We understand that the review of policy in respect of the Irish language, which has been underway since last year, has been completed and the findings presented to Ministers. We have been informed that it is a comprehensive review which takes into account the position of Irish in cultural, educational, social, legal and political terms and that proposals for policy developments arising out of the review are under consideration and that it is intended to make some positive announcement in respect of Irish by the end of the year. Further to the views conveyed by us at the meeting on the Irish language of 12 March, we would wish this restatement of our position on the Irish language to be taken into consideration.
2. We recall that at the Conference meeting of 20 November 1991, the former Secretary of State spoke of an input from the Irish side to the review at official level, followed by a discussion of the completed review at a future meeting of the Conference. We would, therefore, expect an early opportunity to follow up this paper with a full discussion at official level of the review.
3. The Irish language falls within Article 5(a) of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in regard to respect for cultural heritage and identities. Implicit in this is a recognition and acceptance that the Irish language is an important part of the nationalist identity. Furthermore, there has in recent times been a welcome growth in interest in the language on a cross-community basis and a realisation that Irish is important in terms of the cultural heritage of both traditions in Northern Ireland.

Our policy is that measures to widen the appeal of the language should be encouraged and that barriers which serve to discourage its use and inhibit its potential growth should be removed. In addition, there should be a positive programme of action to promote the language as a cultural resource for all the people of Northern Ireland.

4. We recognise the encouraging developments which have taken place in recent years in relation to policy on the language including the positive role played by the Central Community Relations Unit; the setting up of the Ultach Trust and consequent increased funding of Irish language groups and organisations; support for the Irish placenames project and the inclusion of a question on Irish in the 1991 census.

5. Notwithstanding this, however, some of our long-standing concerns remain unaddressed:

✓ 5.1 As regards the Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Act 1949, Section 19(4) which prohibits Irish language streetsigns, we have consistently urged the repeal of this provision on the basis that it is seen as symbolising official hostility to the language and, by extension, to the cultural identity of the Nationalist community. We would hope that the opportunity afforded by the review would be availed of to finally resolve this question.

5.2. While we welcome developments with regard to the recognition of Irish personal names in the conduct of official business and replies by Government Departments to correspondence addressed to them in Irish, we remain of the opinion that correspondents should be entitled to receive a reply in Irish. In addition, all relevant Northern Ireland authorities (e.g. the courts, Post

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Office (and the various licensing authorities) should be authorised to acknowledge both the Irish and English versions of names/placenames in their dealings with the public. The principle of acknowledging both traditions should also be observed in the case of Government road signs. Furthermore, in the context of removing obstacles to the use of Irish, we would suggest that the review should examine more complex measures such as the use of the language in the courts.

no!

5.3. We have in the past raised the question of funding for Irish-medium schools. A major factor inhibiting the development of Irish-medium schools is the absence of a structure of state support. While we welcome the indication given at the meeting of 12 March that a relaxation of the minimum student numbers required for both primary and secondary schools to obtain grant-maintained status is contemplated, we consider that the introduction of a comprehensive structure to oversee and support the development of the Irish-medium school sector in Northern Ireland would be desirable.

advise M.

5.4 The case for recognising the Irish language in Northern Ireland is based on wider considerations than the scale of the numbers of Irish speakers. It is part of the identity of the nationalist community and the two Governments have agreed in the Review of the Working of The Conference to "undertake to support efforts to enhance awareness and appreciation of this particular strand of the cultural heritage." It is the view of the Irish Government that the Irish language should be given parity of esteem with English and that the practical expression of that esteem should be as wide as possible. We continue to favour the introduction of legislation in relation to the Irish language similar to the Welsh Language Act 1967.

We do find by means of inhibition/discrimination. After that it's a matter of responding to demand.

this pressure will be intensified by the new Welsh language Bill.

6. As regards Irish language issues which have been the subject of recent exchanges, we would wish to make the following points:
- 6.1 We have been informed that the question of ratification by the UK of the European Convention on Minority Languages is still under review and is linked with the Irish language policy review. It is our view that adoption of the Convention would send a positive signal of the willingness of the British Government to respond positively to the concerns which have been raised with regard to the position of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. Ratification of the Convention would be a demonstration of an even-handed approach to the language and could provide a framework within which the current activities in support of the language could continue to operate and further progressive policies be developed. The placing of the language issue in a European context would make Government sponsored activity in its favour less contentious and would also have a beneficial impact in terms of reducing the scope for the misuse of language issues by politically motivated elements.
- 6.2 We have also pressed for a positive response in relation to the question of funding for the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. We note that the matter is under consideration in the Central Community Relations Unit and would hope that a positive response will be forthcoming.
- 6.3. As regards the question of the Irish language and the Review of Structures and Arrangements for Funding the Arts in Northern Ireland, we have recently conveyed our views in a separate paper. In short, we would hope that a more proactive stance would be taken on this question and we would favour the setting up of a separate designated

advice on (i) S/W practice (2) prospects for
this area.

system of financial support to the Irish language arts such as exists in Scotland and Wales. We propose that applications should cease to be judged centrally and in competition with other applications in terms of artistic merit rather than in terms of the larger objective of accommodating the nationalist identity in this area.

7. In summary we would suggest that the review provides an opportunity to address some of the long-standing issues in relation to the Irish language; that the opportunity provided by the review be availed of to build on the positive actions of recent years in favour of the language by instituting a coherent, proactive structured policy on Irish, ideally in the form of legislation; and that serious consideration should be given to signing the European Convention on Minority Languages.

THE ROLE OF IRISH IN ARTS POLICY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. The Irish language is an important part of the Nationalist identity in Northern Ireland and, indeed, as an aspect of cultural heritage distinctive to Northern Ireland, the language is a cultural resource for all members of the community. Both Governments have recognised the importance of the Irish language and have undertaken to support efforts to enhance awareness and appreciation of this particular strand of the cultural heritage.

2. We have, in earlier papers on this subject, proposed that support for and promotion of Irish language arts would be best expressed through the creation of a system whereby applications for funding should be considered primarily in terms of the larger objective of accommodating the nationalist identity in this area rather than centrally and in competition with English language applications in terms of artistic merit. It is our understanding that this system has been successfully adopted by both the Welsh and Scottish Arts Councils in relation to Welsh and Scots Gaelic.

3. We are disappointed that the report commissioned by the Minister for Arts on Structures and Arrangements for Funding the Arts in Northern Ireland did not reflect the representations which had been made to Mr. Clive Priestly on this point. We note that the terms of reference for the review of arts funding arrangements in Northern Ireland undertaken by Mr. Priestly included consideration of : "the promotion by the Arts Council of a coherent arts strategy, taking note of the views of the Council's clients" and "the respective aims and objectives of the Government and the Arts Council in relation to the promotion of the arts in Northern Ireland and the reflection of these aims and objectives in the Council's decision-making process." Within these terms of reference it would have been possible for Mr. Priestly to

include positive recommendations regarding the Irish language in his review of the overall operation of the Arts Council.

4. There are references to the Irish language in the report. Paragraph 117.1 speaks of the need for the new Arts Funding Board, as part of its strategy, to address those activities, including the Irish language, which are distinctive to Northern Ireland. In paragraph 135 it is recommended that those who seek to preserve and promote the Irish language should be included in a new Arts Consortium made up of those bodies and agencies active in the arts and arts funding. We agree that " it would be entirely consistent with these recommendations for the Arts Funding Board to invest in Irish language arts and to have a policy for Irish just as the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils have for Scots Gaelic and Welsh respectively". However, it is our view that the absence of a positive recommendation on this point is to be regretted and that the report will not have the desired effect on the current policy regarding the Irish language arts without such a recommendation.

5. For the reasons already indicated, and in line with established practice in Scotland and Wales, it is our view that Irish language arts should be considered separately from other applications under a funding arrangement specifically intended for their development. This would be best achieved through the setting up within the proposed Arts Funding Board of an Irish language arts division with its own budget and operating under the direction of an arts officer exclusively concerned with the development of Irish language arts. We would suggest that any policy decisions made as a result of the report should include the issuing of a positive directive to the Arts Funding Board to this effect.