

Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure
Linguistic Diversity Branch

Cc: Dr McGinley
Mr Carson
Ms McAlister
Mr Kirk

From: Seamus Tierney
Linguistic Diversity Branch
DCAL

28 January 2000

To: PS/Minister

COR 149/2000: APPLICATION FOR FUNDING FOR LÁ

Summary: Request from Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, Managing Editor of Lá Newspaper, to Minister for Government to double the grant to Lá.

Timescale: Immediate.

Recommendation: Draft reply attached.

Background

1. Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir has written to the Minister (15 December 1999) requesting that funding for the weekly Irish language newspaper Lá be doubled. A copy of Mr Ó Muilleoir's letter is attached. (Tab A).
2. The estimated circulation figures for Lá are 1,700. (The 1991 Census showed some 142,000 people with some knowledge of the Irish language). Estimated circulation figures for major English language papers are: Belfast Telegraph 131,000; Irish News 50,000; New Letter 34,000.

20-24 Donegall Street, Belfast, BT1 2JP
Tel: (028) 90544502/544513
Fax: (028) 90544513

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Funding

3. Community Relations Unit (formerly Central Community Relations Unit) in April 1990 began funding Preas an Phobail Ltd to produce Lá. CRU funding was provided on the basis that the newspaper would become self funding but it became apparent that Lá was unlikely to survive without continued Government support.
4. CRU has to date provided financial assistance of £212,926 towards the paper's print costs, along with additional funding of £2,500 per annum for the costs of producing annual audited accounts.

Development Plan

5. Early in 1999 CRU provided £2,500 towards the costs of preparing a development plan. Making Belfast Work also provided £2,500. On 1 April 1999, following recommendations in the development plan, Nuachtain (a group which publishes the Andersonstown News and North Belfast News) acquired the shares of Preas an Phobail Ltd. It claims to have subsequently invested heavily in the cost of improvement seen to be necessary to increase the readership of the newspaper. In April 1999 CCRU made a one-off payment of £4,500 towards the costs of new capital equipment. These payments have not been included in the figure of £212,926 quoted above.
6. Current funding (24K per annum) of Lá by CRU will cease 31/3/2000 and the responsibility for funding thereafter will rest with DCAL and the North/South Language Body.

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Comment

7. The measures to promote the use of regional or minority languages listed in Part III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages include the encouragement, facilitation or maintenance of at least one newspaper in the language concerned. Lá is the only Irish language newspaper in Northern Ireland and it is likely that the North/South Language Body would consider favourably an application for financial assistance. However a decision on funding, the amount of this, what it would cover and the conditions attaching to it would be matters for consideration and decision by the North/South Language Body.

Recommendation

8. That the Minister write to Mr Ó Muilleoir along the lines of the attached draft. In view of the fact that Mr Ó Muilleoir has written in Irish, the Minister may wish to consider replying in Irish. If so, we will be happy to arrange for a translation.



SEAMUS TIERNEY

☎ (028) 90544502

Fax: (028) 90544513

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Fax: (028) 90544513

DRAFT REPLY FOR MINISTER'S SIGNATURE

Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir
Managing Editor
Nuachtain
301 Glen Road
BELFAST
BT11 6BU

Dear Mr Ó Muilleoir

Thank you for your letter of 15 December 1999 in which you requested additional funding for the Lá newspaper.

I wish to congratulate you on the developments you have made and are planning for Lá and the newspaper coverage Lá has provided for the Irish speaking community here.

The Government, through the former Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) and other sources, has been happy to help over the years by providing financial support for Lá. The responsibility for funding projects to promote Irish will shortly be taken on by the North/South Language Body. I am therefore forwarding your letter to the Chairperson of the Irish Language Agency, Mrs Máighréad Ní Mhairtín. Lá will, of course, still be free to apply, on the same basis as any other organisation, for help under appropriate mainstream Departmental programmes.

I hope this reply is helpful. Best wishes for the future of Lá.

MICHAEL McGIMPSEY, MLA

Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure

**TRANSLATION OF A LETTER TO THE MINISTER, MICHAEL
McGIMPSEY, DATED 15 DECEMBER, FROM LÁ**

Dear Sir

I am writing to you as the Managing Director of the LÁ Newspaper to put before you as the Minister with responsibility for the cross-border Language body the case for increased funding. I hope that you will submit this application to the Language body as appropriate.

I recently applied, on behalf of the Newspaper for an increase in the grant which the Northern Government has made to LÁ for the past ten years. LÁ currently receives £24,000 to help with printing costs. Another £2,500 goes directly from Central Community Relations Unit to the accountant.

We asked the Northern Ireland Office to double the grant. They refused to give us any increase. On 20 November 1999 the Department of Foreign Affairs wrote to us informing us that the campaign over a long period to obtain an increase on the grant from CCRU for LÁ had made little progress.

From April onwards Nuachtain (the newspaper group involving the Andersonstown News and North Belfast News) has made a significant investment in LÁ in terms of time, personnel and funding.

We employed one of the most experienced newspaper designers in the country to give the paper a new format. We have bought the most up-to-date equipment for the team. We have employed a full team (LÁ is presently the largest Irish language employer in the private sector in the North) and we started the Irish language supplement, An Lár.

We also enrolled LÁ with the Newspaper Society, with the Press Association and with the audit company ABC. We have launched a marketing campaign and so far have spent around £10,000 on marketing alone. As part of the campaign we ran

adds on TG4 and UTV – the first time that Irish language advertising has appeared on the station. In the meanwhile we have won Investors in People and Excellence through People awards (these prestigious awards have not been gained by any other paper in Ireland).

Before Nuachtain went into partnership with LÁ the paper was selling 110 copies a week in shops in the South and 130 copies in the North.

Sales have increased to around 1,000 copies through the shops (with 500 subscribers in addition) and we are hopeful, in spite of limited resources, that we will reach the milestone of 2,000 copies before the end of this financial year.

Although the standard of journalism and presentation in LÁ is as high as any newspaper in the land – in Irish or English – the paper is being run on a very small budget. We are proud of the journalistic work which we have produced over the past 9 months and we are particularly happy that LÁ has continuously broken major news stories before any other newspaper.

But the development plan which we have in mind for LÁ is just beginning. We would like to increase our readership, increase the number of pages from 12 to 16 (which we are already doing once a month), broaden the diversity of writers, train the staff and employ more people. We estimate that we will have invested £100,000 in this effort before the end of the financial year. In this context and in the context of promoting Irish, especially in the 6 counties, we believe that the grant to LÁ should be doubled.

It is an open secret in the North that any increase in the Northern grant to LÁ was avoided because the paper was not happy to follow the NIO line. We hope that those dark days are now over.

We promise to everyone in partnership with LÁ in publishing the paper – now including the Language Body – that we will deliver an excellent paper and that we

intend to ensure that each edition is better than the last. Our aim is to produce a lively, independent newspaper which will contribute to the development of the Irish language community.

We hope that both Ministers responsible for Irish and responsible for the language body will look favourably on this application and that the members of the body will take the same view.

Yours sincerely

Mr. Michael McGimpsey
Roinn Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta
Interpoint, York Street
Béal Féirste

MÁIRTÍN Ó MUILLÉOIR

Managing Editor, LÁ

Tá mé ag scríobh chugat mar bheiristeoir eagarthóireachta ar an nuachtán Lá le cás ar con tuilleadh maoinithe a chur romhat lenn mar Aire a bhíonn freagracht An Fhórais Teanga air. Tá súil agam go gcuirfidh tú an t-ádh seo roimh an Fhóras Teanga ar an dóigh chuí.

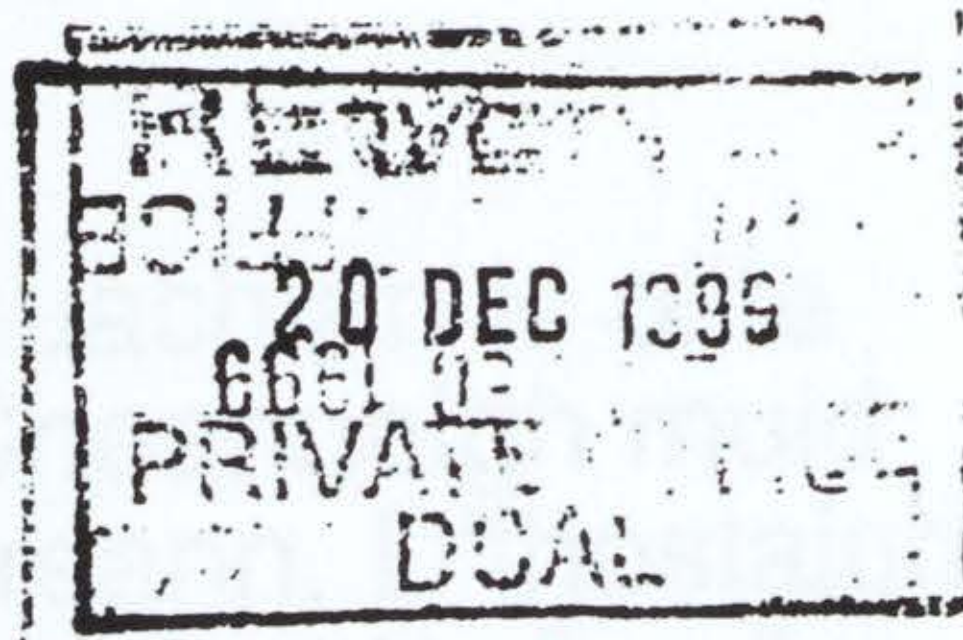
Ar na mallaibh d'iar mé, thar cheann an nuachtáin, ardu ar an deontas atá á dhíol ag an Rialtas ó thuaidh le Lá le deich míliona anuas. Is £24,000 le cuidiú le costais cíó atá á íoc le Lá. Téann £2,500 eile go díreach ón Central Community Relations Unit ó thuaidh chuig ár guntasóir.

D'iar muid ar Oifig Thuaisceart Éireann an deontas a mhéadú faoi dhó. Dhiúltaigh siad don ardu de chineál ar bith a thabhairt dúinn. Ar 20 Samhain 1999 scríobh An Roinn Grótha Eachtracha chugainn, ag tabhairt le fios dúinn gur "beag toradh" a bhí ar an síocaireacht "thar thréimse fada ar an CCRU méadú (a thá) ar an deontas do Lá."

Nuachtán don tríú mílaois

Lá

www.nuacht.com



An tAire Michael McGimpsey
Roinn Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta
Interpoint, York Street
Béal Feirste

15 Nollaig 1999

A chara,

Tá mé ag scríobh chugat mar bhainisteoir eagarthóireachta ar an nuachtán Lá le cáis ar son tuilleadh maoinithe a chur romhat féin mar Aire a bhfuil freagracht An Fhorais Teanga air. Tá súil agam go gcuirfidh tú an t-iarratas seo roimh an Fhoras Teanga ar an dóigh chuí.

Ar na mallaibh d'iarr mé, thar cheann an nuachtáin, ardú ar an deontas atá á dhíol ag an Rialtas ó thuaidh le Lá le deich mbliana anuas. Is £24,000 le cuidiú le costais cló atá á íoc le Lá. Téann £2,500 eile go díreach ón Central Community Relations Unit ó thuaidh chuig ár gcuntasóir.

D'iarr muid ar Oifig Thuaisceart Éireann an deontas a mhéadú faoi dhó. Dhiúltaigh siad aon ardú de chineál ar bith a thabhairt dúinn. Ar 20 Samhain 1999 scríobh An Roinn Gnótha Eachtracha chugainn, ag tabhairt le fios dúinn gur "beag toradh" a bhí ar an stocaireacht "thar thréimse fada ar an CCRU méadú (a fháil) ar an deontas do Lá."

Ó mhí Aibreáin i leith tá infheistíocht mhór déanta ag Nuachtáin (an grúpa nuachtán a bhfuil an Andersonstown News agus North Belfast News bainte leis) i Lá i dtéarmaí ama, pearsanra agus airgid.

D'fhostaigh muid duine de na dearthóirí nuachtán is oilte sa tír le crot nua a chur ar an pháipéar. Cheannaigh muid an treallamh is nua-aoisí amuigh don fhoireann. D'fhostaigh muid foireann iomlán (faoi láthair is é Lá an fostóir Gaeilge is mó san earnáil phríobháideach ó thuaidh) agus thosaigh muid an forlíonadh bisiúil Gaeilge, An Lár.

Lena chois, chláraigh muid Lá leis an Newspaper Society, leis an Press Association agus le comhlacht na n-iniúcháir, ABC. Tá feachtas margaíochta seolta againn agus cheana tá corradh le £10,000stg caite againn ar mhargaíocht amháin. Mar chuid den fheachtas bhí fógraí againn ar TG4 agus ar UTV - an chéad uair a craoladh fógra Gaeilge ar an stáisiún. Idir amanna, tá na gradaim gnó, Infheisteoir i nDaoine agus Foirfeacht Tré Dhaoine bainte amach againn (níl na gradaim chlúiteacha seo gnóthaithe ag aon nuachtán eile in Éirinn).

Sula ndeachaigh Nuachtáin i bpáirt le Lá, bhí an nuachtán ag díol 110 cóip per seachtain sna siopaí ó dheas agus 130 cóip sa tuaisceart.

Tá an díolachán méadaithe go dtí corradh le 1,000 cóip tríd na siopaí amháin ó shin (tá corradh le 500 síntiúsóir againn chomh maith) agus táimid dóchasach, d'ainneoin go bhfuilimid ar bheagán áiseanna, go mbainfimid amach an sprioc díolacháin de 2,000 cóip roimh dheireadh na bliana airgid seo.

Cé go bhfuil an caighdeán iriseoireachta agus dearaidh ar Lá chomh hard le haon nuachtán sa tír - i nGaeilge nó i mBéarla — tá an páipéar a reachtáil ar bhúiséad an-bheag. Táimid bródúil as an tsaothar iriseoireachta atá foilsithe

againn le naoi mí anuas agus is cúis áthais againn ach go háirithe go bhfuil, arís is arís eile, scéaltaí móra nuachta briste ag Lá roimh aon pháipéar eile.

Ach níl an plean forbartha atá againn do Lá ach ina thús. Ba mhaith linn líon na léitheoirí a ardú, líon na leathanach a ardú ó 12 go dtí 16 (rud a dhéanaimid uair amháin sa mhí faoi láthair), cur le héagsúlacht na scríbhneoirí, an fhoireann a thraenáil, agus tuilleadh daoine a fhostú. Measaimid go mbeidh £100,000 infheistithe againn sa togra seo againn roimh dheireadh na bliana airgid. Sa chomhthéacs sin, agus i gcomhthéacs tógáil na Gaeilge sna Sé Chontae ach go háirithe, creidimid gur chóir an deontas do Lá a dhúbláil.

Is 'rún oscailte' ó thuaidh é gur céanadh ardú deontais do Lá sa Tuaisceart as siocair nach raibh sé sásta 'líne' an NIO a ghlacadh. Tá súil againn go bhfuil na laethanta dorcha sin anois thart.

Is é ar ngeallúint do gach páirtneir atá ag Lá i bhfoilsíú an pháipéir — An Foras Teanga anois ina measc — go soláthróidh muid páipéar den scoth agus gurb é an rún atá againn gach páipéar a dhéanamh níos fearr ná an ceann a chuaigh roimhe. Páipéar bríomhar, neamhspleách a chuideoidh le forbairt pobal na Gaeilge an aidhm atá againn.

Tá súil agam go gcaithfidh an dá Aire a bhfuil freagracht na Gaeilge orthu agus freagracht An Fhorais Teanga go fábhreach leis an iarratas seo agus gurb amhlaidh an cás é ag baill an Fhorais féin.

le mór-mheas,



Máirtín Ó Muilleoir
Bainisteoir Eagarthóireachta Lá

The Office of the First Minister
And Deputy First Minister

COMMUNITY RELATIONS UNIT
20-24 DONEGALL STREET
BELFAST BT1 2GP

Tel: 028-90-520700 Fax: 028-90-544500
Direct Line: 544516

cc Mr Ritchie

From: John Carson
Community Relations Unit – OFM-DFM

26 January 2000

To: Pat McAlister
Linguistic Diversity – DCAL

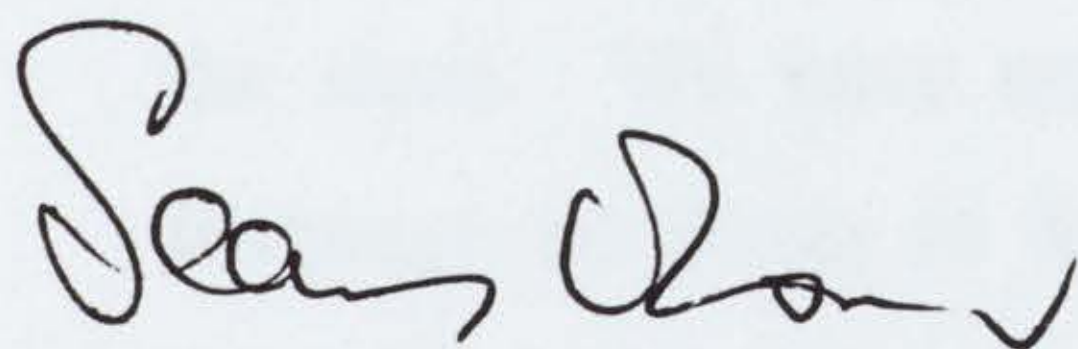
COR/149/2000: LETTER DATED 5 DECEMBER 1999 FROM MARTIN Ó MUILLEOIR TO MR McGIMPSEY, MINISTER FOR DCAL, REQUESTING INCREASED FUNDING FOR IRISH LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER LÁ

1. The attached Private Office Enquiry has been passed by your Branch to CRU for CRU's part input into the briefing response to the above letter.
2. Community Relations Unit (formerly Central Community Relations Unit) has since April 1990 provided funding to Preas an Phobal Ltd for the production of the weekly Irish language newspaper La.
3. CCRU funding was provided on the basis that the newspaper would become self funding but it became apparent that La was unlikely to survive without continued Government support.
4. In total, since April 1990 CCRU has provided financial assistance of £212,926 towards the paper's print costs, along with current funding of £2,500 per annum for the costs of producing annual audited accounts. Additionally in 1999 CCRU provided £2,500 towards the cost of the preparation of a development plan (also funded by Making Belfast Work £2,500).

U:0159/MM

The Office of the First Minister And Deputy First Minister

5. On 1 April 1999, following recommendations contained in the completed development plan Nuachtain (a group which publishes the Andersonstown News and North Belfast News) acquired the shares of Preas an Phobail Ltd, and it claims to have subsequently invested heavily in the cost of improvements seen to be necessary for increasing the readership of the newspaper.
6. In April 1999 CCRU made a one-off payment of £4,500 towards the cost of the purchase of new capital equipment.
7. Current funding (£24K per annum) of Lá by CRU will cease 31/3/2000 and the responsibility for funding thereafter will rest with DCAL and the North/South Language Body.
8. Included in the measures to promote the use of regional or minority languages listed in Part III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is the encouragement, facilitation or maintenance of at least one newspaper in the language concerned. Lá is the only Irish language newspaper in Northern Ireland and in consequence it would seem likely that the new North/South Language Body would consider favourably an application for financial assistance. However the amount of this, what it would cover and the conditions attaching to it will be matters for consideration and decision by the North/South Language Body.
9. I hope that this response is helpful in assisting you with your reply.



RP
JOHN CARSON

U:0159/MM

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Yours sincerely

MÁIRTÍN Ó MUILLEÓIR

Managing Editor, LÁ

Request to double funding for LÁ