

Minister Meeting *brief min.*
Note of Meeting with Nigel Dodds – 2 February 2004

Present : Angela Smith
Nigel Dodds
John McIntyre – Ulster Scots Language Society
Philip Robinson – Ulster Scots Language Society
Anne Smyth – Chair of Ulster Scots Language Society and
Director of the Ulster Scots Academy

Brian Doherty – Departmental Solicitor's Office
Victor Douglas – DCAL
Bryan Davis – DCAL

Nigel Dodds thanked the Minister for agreeing to meet the delegation and outlined the agenda: Ulster Scots Agency Board Appointments, Ulster Scots Agency funding and implementation, Project funding applications.

Anne Smyth pointed out that there were no Ulster Scots speakers on the board and that those nominated to the board are there because of political patronage with no track record or background in Ulster Scots.

Minister explained that appointments to the Board do not fall within the remit of DCAL and explained that nominations come from both Irish and British administrations.

Philip Robinson stated that he wants a complete revamping of the personnel structures within the Ulster Scots Agency to ensure equality. He feels that the Agency has not delivered anything for the Ulster Scots language compared with the Irish language. He believes that Ulster Scots should have level 3 parity with Irish i.e. equality in the European Charter.

The Minister said that £2m which has been allocated to deliver language programmes has not been claimed.

Philip Robinson said that some grants had been allocated and they are working through the rest. Mr Robinson became agitated about proper funding for the Ulster Scots Academy.

Nigel Dodds refocused the meeting – he said there was a sense of frustration amongst Ulster Scots language people, a sense that the Board is made up of political cronies which is intolerable; a sense that the issue of the Ulster Scots Academy has been thrown into the political melting pot. He said that the issues were all now political considerations which undermines the language and the culture.

Minister thanked Nigel, saying his summary was helpful.

John McIntyre expressed concerns about the business case criteria – he said these were not right and represented a very narrow approach. He feels that the economic appraisal did not take account of building capacity in the community because it was prepared by a socio-linguist with no knowledge of Ulster Scots.

Philip Robinson distributed a "Draft Proposal and Development Plan for Start-Up Funding" for an Ulster Scots Academy together with a submission to the Minister – "A Programme for Equality for Ulster-Scots". He said that they would deliver agreed language programmes through the Academy.

Minister said that the Department can only look at how the Academy will operate, she stressed that there was no preferred option.

Philip Robinson said that their academy is the only one which can deliver, that it represents a means to an end, that they did not want an alternative academy.

Minister stated that she has to work within the Joint Declaration Commitment.

Nigel Dodds concluded that the frustration lay in there being no proper consultations, no taking on board what the Ulster Scots Community wants itself. He said they should go back to first principles.

Minister agreed to raise the funding points with the Agency – action Bryan Davis.

After the meeting the Minister commented that there appears to be a lot of division within the Ulster Scots community.

Marie Hayes
12/2/2004