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DENI 88 PES

308/84 - Community Relations

NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

27 February 1989

COMMUNITY RELATIONS - NEW INITIATIVE

Education Minister, Dr Brian Mawhinney MP, today launched a major £2 million, four-point initiative to help improve community relations in Northern Ireland.

At a press conference at Stormont Dr Mawhinney said that this extra money being made available in the incoming financial year was to:-

1. Launch a Cultural Traditions Programme through a new Cultural Traditions Group and support for work in the schools, the arts, the museums and local heritage activities designed to widen the appreciation of NI's rich and diverse cultural heritage; "I envisage that up to £1 million of this extra money will be available each year for this programme";
2. Provide an extra £250,000 to expand cross-community contact amongst young people;

3. Support the creation of a new charitable body to provide a focal point and resource centre for all those working to improve community relations; and
4. Enable district councils to develop a role in improving community relations in their areas.

The new initiatives follow an earlier decision by the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Tom King MP, to make extra money available for community relations activities and the proposals are based on work initiated by the Government's Central Community Relations Unit in conjunction with the Department of Education.

In launching these measures, Dr Mawhinney said:

"I am seeking to help the many dedicated individuals and organisations who are genuinely working to improve relationships between the different parts of the community."

"People of goodwill, across all sections of the community and from diverse social backgrounds are, I believe, determined to work together to build on what they have in common and to increase appreciation of each other's traditions and values. They will not allow violence and sectarianism to deflect their efforts."

"This extra £2 million spending on community relations is another example of Government's wholehearted commitment to support those in the Northern Ireland community who are determined to work for a better society."

Dr Mawhinney spelt out some of the detail of his four-point initiative.

On cross-community contact, he said:

"I am providing an extra £250,000 for the cross-community

contact scheme amongst young people through the schools and the youth service. I launched a scheme in 1987 which has proved to be an outstanding success, with more than 350 applications for assistance being received. Of these, 186 projects involve 315 schools across Northern Ireland. Hopefully, this extra money will allow new schools and youth groups to join the scheme and will also encourage the development of existing linkages."

"I would like to see increased cross-community contact among adults and I hope the Churches will play a useful role in this task. I plan to further develop these thoughts at a later date."

Community Relations Resource Body: Dr Mawhinney said:

"I will be providing an initial launching payment of £30,000 to establish a Community Relations Resource Body which will provide a new focus for all of those working to improve community relations in Northern Ireland. I will announce further decisions on funding for the longer-term when plans for the new body are fully developed."

Cultural Traditions: Dr Mawhinney said:

"I am delighted that this body has been established at the Institute for Irish Studies under the Chairmanship of Dr James Hawthorne (formerly NI Controller of the BBC). Northern Ireland has a rich cultural heritage, and diversity in tradition, if properly understood and appreciated, can be a great strength to the province.

"I know that this new group, drawn from a wide range of experience in the arts, media, museums and education, is preparing an exciting and challenging programme of events to encourage a more constructive debate about the cultural traditions in Northern Ireland and I am looking forward to

considering their detailed proposals. Their first venture is a major conference on cultural traditions planned for 3 and 4 March and other activities will follow."

"The Museums, Arts Council and local cultural and heritage groups have a major role to play in shaping this programme and I look forward to receiving their proposals."

District Councils: Dr Mawhinney said:

"I will be willing to offer financial help where all the constitutional parties on a Council agree to initiate a community relations programme. I hope that district councillors will look carefully at this new opportunity. My door is always open to councillors who wish to come and talk about what their Council might do."

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Central Community Relations Unit was created in September 1987 by the Secretary of State to advise him through Dr Mawhinney on "all aspects of the relations between the two traditions in Northern Ireland." It works closely with the Department of Education which has the statutory responsibility for "formulating and sponsoring policies for the improvement of community relations." The Unit's main roles are to advise on the impact on community relations of Government policies and programmes and to bring forward ideas on what further action might be taken to improve community relations. The Unit has been consulting widely with interested organisations.

2. The idea of a community relations resource body builds on an analysis contained in a report prepared by Mr Hugh Frazer and Ms Mari Fitzduff for the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (which was itself based on wide consultation with interested bodies and individuals) and on ideas formulated in 1987 by an Ad Hoc Group which contained representatives of the Churches Central Committee for Community Work, the Corrymeela Community, the Inter-Church Group on Faith and Politics, the Northern Consensus Group, Peace and Reconciliation - Derry, the Quaker Peace Service and the Two Traditions Group. In Autumn 1987, the CCRU brought together a group of individuals to develop these concepts further.

3. Cross-Community Contact Scheme: Initially Government made available £200,000 for each year of the Scheme but uptake has been extremely encouraging and to maintain its impetus and effect a further £125,000 was made available in the current financial year. The Scheme is an important mechanism for the establishment and development of structured links between children and young adults of different religions in schools, youth clubs and other organisations.

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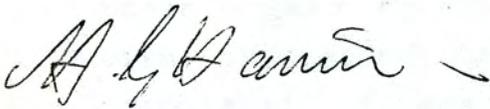
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cc: J Fleming
Mrs Potter
J McKibbin

A G McCormick

COMMUNITY RELATIONS: ACCOUNTING OFFICER

1. You asked about the database implications of the proposal to introduce a new DFP Vote to accommodate Community Relations expenditure.
2. Essentially we need to know the components which will constitute the new vote, its structure, the precise areas where the resources are presently held for the relevant activities and the resources which should transfer from these areas to the new vote.
3. I spoke to Jim Fleming who, having spoken to Stephen Hughes (Central Secretariat), told me that the picture had not crystallised sufficiently to take any action at the moment - the range of activities the new DFP Vote will comprise is unclear and he does not expect to be able to introduce same before Autumn Supplementary Estimates stage in 1989/90 at the earliest. He will keep an eye on developments and keep ourselves and Supply informed.
4. I have discussed with Mr McKibbin and advised Mrs Potter.



H G HARRISON

GH March 1989

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