

C O N F I D E N T I A L

HCS/9/26

FROM: SIR KENNETH BLOOMFIELD
DATE: SEPTEMBER 1990

cc. PS/MOS (B&L) - B
PS/Dr Mawhinney (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
Mr Chilcot - B
Mr Ledlie - B
Mr Parkes
Mr Murray
Mr Alston - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr Wood - B
Mr J McConnell - B
Mr Blackwell - B
Mr Hill - B

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L) - B

IRISH LANGUAGE

1. At the meeting yesterday to discuss Irish proposals to amend the legislation in respect of street names, the Secretary of State asked for a note summarising our current policy towards the Irish language.
2. The attached note summarises that policy and offers a line to take at the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference. It covers the general principles which have guided us, the specifics on the use of the Irish language in official business, including the issue of street and place names, and gives some examples of Government support for Irish language activities. This has been produced by way of confirmation of our existing policy and as defensive briefing for the Conference. Should Irish language become a substantive item

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at this, or a subsequent Conference, then further detailed briefing would also be required in other areas such as prisons, the education curriculum, and the 1991 Census.

GENERAL POLICY

Lines to Take

K P BLOOMFIELD

Since the 1989 review of the working of the Intergovernmental Conference, the Government has been and will continue to support efforts to enhance awareness and appreciation of the Irish language, in the context of encouraging greater mutual understanding across the community, including respect for the cultural heritage of both traditions, but does not propose to give Irish parity with English.

Background

- the overall policy is to recognise and respect the cultural identities and traditions of both sides of the community;

- within this, the Government recognises the symbolic importance of the Irish language, principally to the minority side of the community;

- the objective is to encourage interest and appreciation of the Irish language and the contribution it has made to the cultural heritage of the whole community;

- the 1991 Census will contain a question on the Irish language and the information obtained will be very

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IRISH LANGUAGE

1. GENERAL POLICY

Line to Take

In accordance with the 1989 review of the working of the Intergovernmental Conference, the Government has been and will continue to support efforts to enhance awareness and appreciation of the Irish language, in the context of encouraging greater mutual understanding across the community, including respect for the cultural heritage of both traditions, but does not propose to give Irish parity with English.

Background

- the overall policy is to recognise and respect the cultural identities and traditions of both sides of the community;
- within this, the Government recognises the symbolic importance of the Irish language, principally to the minority side of the community;
- the objective is to encourage interest and appreciation of the Irish language and the contribution it has made to the cultural heritage of the whole community;
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valuable in helping to shape policy on the place of the Irish language in NI;

- the Government does not propose to give Irish parity with English;
- Government is prepared to respond, where practical, to soundly based requests for assistance for Irish language activities. Examples include:-
 - (a) the announcement by Dr Mawhinney on 17 January 1990 of Government support of £50,000 towards Irish language projects which enhance awareness and appreciation of the language in the context of promoting greater mutual understanding across the whole community;
 - (b) grant aid of £50,000 in 1990/91 to the Ultach Trust and the offer of a contribution of up to £250,000 to the Trust's Capital Fund on the basis of £1 for every £3 raised from other sources. The Ultach Trust was established in September 1989 with the aim of widening appreciation of the contribution which the Irish language makes to Northern Ireland's cultural heritage and to increase knowledge of the language throughout the community;
 - (c) the very substantial Government support to the Irish language within the framework of the education sector, including the curricular developments announced as part of the education reforms.

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2. IRISH LANGUAGE IN OFFICIAL BUSINESS

A. Personal Names

Line to Take

Government Departments continue to respect the wishes of any individual who has indicated a desire to be known by a personal name in the Irish language, and will use this form of address for all official purposes, including correspondence and official documents.

Background

- any individual is entitled to use an Irish name in correspondence with Government;
- Departments will, on request, use this Irish form of address in official correspondence or documents;
- District Councils have statutory responsibility for the use of Irish names in official business and records;
- records of previously used versions of names may have to be retained for purposes of identification;
- Departments have been advised that only the version requested by the individual should be used in correspondence etc.

B. Street and Place Names

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Line to Take

Government policy is that only the English version of place and street names is used in official business and records. The Secretary of State has only just returned from holiday and will now be considering the Irish proposal to remove the legislative prohibition. This will include consideration of any changed circumstances since 1988 when the current policy was reviewed and confirmed.

Background

- Departments should exercise special care where a name in Irish could have legal implications to ensure accurate translation.
- Departments use only the English version of place and street names in official business and records;
- departures from this practice could cause many difficulties, eg it is potentially very divisive and it has proved difficult to devise a practicable scheme;
- District Councils have statutory responsibility for determination of street names;
- existing law requires names to be displayed only in English.

C. Correspondence

Line to Take

Government Departments continue to accept correspondence written in Irish.

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Background

- correspondents in Irish are not asked to re-submit their letters in English;
- if necessary, correspondents may be asked to confirm the Department's understanding of difficult or technical points in the letter;
- Departments should exercise special care where a letter in Irish could have legal implications to ensure accurate translation.

Mr. [illegible] (343) - B
Mr. [illegible] - B
Mr. [illegible] - B
Mr. [illegible] - B
Mr. [illegible] - B

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