

E.R.

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*Mr Foster
This meeting has postponed 2/1/96.*

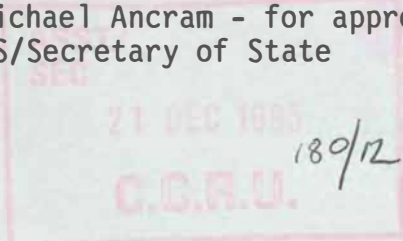
FROM: KEVIN SMITH
DENI Private Office

DATE: 15 December 1995



To: 1. Michael Ancram - for approval
2. PS/Secretary of State

cc Secretary of State (L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Carvill
Mr Smith
Mr Canavan



*21.17
in before
for Mr.
Mr. Watkinson
for file
Done
18/12*

MEETING WITH CONRADH NA GAEILGE (THE GAELIC LEAGUE)

The meeting between the Secretary of State and Conradh Na Gaeilge has been rearranged for Tuesday 19 December at 2.00 pm.

The following briefing is attached:



Background Note on Conradh Na Gaeilge

Agenda

Government Policy on Irish Language - Background and Lines to Take

Irish Medium Education - Background and Lines to Take

Teacher Training - Background and Lines to Take

Irish Language Pre-School Playgroup movement - Background Notes

Arts Council Support for the Irish Language - Background and Lines to Take

Establishment and availability of Telefis na Gaeilge - Background and Line to Take

Conradh Na Gaeilge Proposal for an Irish Language Board - Background and Line to Take

Delegation/Personality Notes.

Mr Tony Canavan (CCRU) and Mr Stanley Smith will be in attendance.

Kevin Smith
KEVIN SMITH

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BRIEFING FOR SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH CONRADH NA GAEILGE DELEGATION

BACKGROUND OF THE ORGANISATION

1. Conradh na Gaeilge/the Gaelic League is an all-Ireland body founded in 1893 as a non-sectarian, non-political organisation devoted to preserving the Irish language. Over time, it became increasingly influenced by radical nationalism and the involvement of Protestants and Unionists decreased. The organisation was influential in Ireland before the First World War and played a significant role in the development of educational and language policy in the Irish Free State. Though still an influential organisation, the league has declined in importance over the years.
2. In May Mr Gearoid O Caireallain of Belfast was elected President of the organisation. Hitherto, Northern Ireland Irish language activists have played only a marginal role in the activities of the League, but with the assistance of a well organised caucus from Belfast, Mr O Caireallain secured election. He gave early indications of taking a vigorous approach, particularly on the position of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. A consistent theme has been the drawing of comparisons between Government policy towards Irish in Northern Ireland and the position in Scotland and Wales, and with Irish Government policy in the Republic. He was quoted in the Irish News as saying "I will be using my office to direct attention to this situation where authorities in the North treat the language and the

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Irish-speaking community badly - not as badly as they used to do, but still badly."

3. In handling the meeting, a generally defensive posture will be required, though drawing attention to areas where the Government has made progress on the Irish language agenda in the past year, eg new street names legislation and MBW funding for Meanscoil Feirste. It is also anticipated that the delegation will introduce the Secretary of State to their ideas for an Irish Language Board in Northern Ireland, which was the subject of a presentation to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin, but which has not been transmitted yet to the NI authorities.

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AGENDA

THE IMPORTANCE OF IRISH

- as part of the cultural heritage of the whole community;
- its particular importance to members of the Nationalist community;
- its considerable importance within the Protestant tradition.

EDUCATION

- Irish in the general educational system;
- Irish-medium education in general;
- Meanscoil Feirste;
- training of teachers of Irish and the provision of special training for those who wish to teach in Irish-medium schools.

COMMUNITY

- Support for special Irish Language projects;
- Irish-medium pre-school playgroups.

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THE ARTS

- literature;
- publications in Irish;
- drama;
- other art forms.

MEDIA

- radio and television programmes in Irish;
- establishment and availability of Teilifis na Gaeilge.

STRUCTURES

- rights of Irish speakers vis-a-vis the State;
- support structures for Irish.

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GOVERNMENT POLICY ON IRISH LANGUAGE

1. Nationalists have always identified strongly with the Irish language. They contrast the efforts made to sustain and promote it in the Republic since 1922 with the lack of interest shown by the former Northern Ireland administration. For the past 10 years, however, Government has been increasingly responsive to Irish language interests. It is regarded as an important strand in the complex cultural background of Northern Ireland which should be valued as such by all sections of the community. The Ultach Trust (established in 1987 with a trust fund partly supported by Government) is the leading promoter of this open and non-political approach to the language. More extreme enthusiasts, often with the backing of Sinn Fein, demand bilingualism in administration and public life, as their interpretation of "parity of esteem". Extreme demands threaten to turn the language into a politically divisive issue and to alienate Unionists from it.
2. In the 1991 Census 142,000 people claimed some ability to speak, read or write Irish. This is not surprising as Irish is widely taught in almost all Catholic and integrated secondary schools. However, the number of people who would regard themselves as members of an Irish language community, or who use the language on a regular basis, is much lower (probably in the region of 5,000). Virtually everyone who uses Irish in Northern Ireland will have English as a first language, and so

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will suffer no practical inconvenience from using English, eg in administrative forms.

3. Unlike the Celtic languages of Scotland and Wales, Irish in Northern Ireland does not have a geographic heartland with an unbroken tradition of daily use of the language. Irish users are dispersed within an overwhelmingly English speaking community.
4. The Government will respond positively, where practicable, to soundly based requests for assistance. In the last financial year (1994/95) Government spent £2m on projects with an Irish language dimension. This consisted of:
 - Department of Education funding for Irish medium schools and curriculum materials - £1,140,000
 - Training and Employment Agency assistance through the ACE schemes for Irish language projects - £330,000
 - Making Belfast Work support for Irish language projects in Belfast - £64,000
 - NIO educational and translation facilities for prisoners - £37,500
 - CCRU grants to Irish language projects, including Ultach Trust - £381,000
 - Arts Council of Northern Ireland grants - £70,500

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5. The Government also seeks to remove unnecessary obstacles to the wider use of the language, eg the repeal of the 1949 legislation on street names. In public administration, the Government's policy is to deal with Irish speakers on the basis of courtesy and respect for their linguistic preference. People writing to Departments in Irish will have their letters translated and will receive a reply (in English) in the normal way. However, Government has drawn the line at steps towards official bilingualism (Secretary of State's Coleraine speech of December 1992). This could be politically divisive and would undermine progress in recent years in extending interest in the Irish language to the wider Northern Ireland community. The Government has recently decided not to sign the Council of Europe Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, as becoming a signatory would have little practical advantage for the United Kingdom's indigenous minority languages. This decision will be announced in a Parliamentary answer in the next few days.

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LINES TO TAKE

Government Policy towards the Irish Language

Government recognises the importance of the Irish language for many people in Northern Ireland as part of their cultural heritage. It respects the special importance of Irish, encourages interest in it and appreciation of it, and highlights its contribution to the cultural heritage of the whole community.

Level of Government Expenditure Much Lower than in Scotland and Wales.

Financial comparisons with expenditure on Celtic languages in Scotland and Wales can be misleading. In those two countries there are well defined areas where the ancient languages have traditionally been spoken and the residents can be assumed to be users of those languages. In Northern Ireland, in contrast, demand for Irish language facilities has to be demonstrated.

Giving Irish a Comparable Status to Welsh under the Welsh Language Act

The situations are very different. In Northern Ireland the overwhelming majority of the population (almost all Unionists and many Nationalists) have no knowledge of Irish. The Irish language has the potential to be politically divisive in a way which Welsh is not. Enforcing bilingualism on the population of Northern Ireland is neither practical nor desirable.

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Broadcasting in Irish

Broadcasting in Irish on Northern Ireland based radio and television channels is the responsibility of the BBC and the independent companies. They have shown themselves responsive to demand for Irish language broadcasting. The Irish Government has raised with the British Government their plans for an Irish language television station and the possibility of this operating on an all-Ireland basis. The issue is very complex and should in the first instance be discussed at the level of technical experts.

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IRISH MEDIUM EDUCATION

Policy

1. The Government's policy on Irish-medium education is one of responding to parental demand and it recognises the wishes of a growing number of parents to have their children taught through the medium of Irish.
2. It has therefore funded Irish-medium schools where it has been satisfied that there is reasonable evidence of sufficient demand to ensure that, in the longer term, the school will be viable. It also has to be satisfied that the school can provide effective education; that it meets the requirements of the statutory curriculum; and that it can be provided without unreasonable public expenditure. These are the criteria it applies in cases relating to the establishment of any new school. [NOTE: See para 11 below.]

Viability

3. In recognition of the special circumstances of Irish-medium schools, ie dispersed enrolments, the viability requirements for these schools were in fact halved in 1992 from enrolments of 200 to 100 for primary schools and 600 to 300 for secondary schools.
4. Schools do not have to reach these viability figures to receive funding - rather all they have to show, usually over 2/3 years, is that their annual intakes will eventually generate those levels of total enrolment.

Nursery Schools

5. The provision of nursery education of any type is not a statutory requirement on the Government and the building of nursery schools is therefore not a priority at a time of public expenditure constraint. It would not be appropriate to single out Irish-medium nursery schools for special and advantageous treatment over many other proposals of longer-standing.

Primary Schools

The Government provides 100% recurrent grant-aid to 3 Irish-medium primary schools: 2 in Belfast and 1 in Londonderry. It has also agreed to special arrangements to enable a small, as yet unviable, primary school in West Belfast to operate for 3 years as a satellite unit of an established Irish-medium primary school. The Department of Education has also approved the establishment of an Irish medium unit in an English medium school in Armagh. However, recently maintained status was refused to 3 other independent IM schools (2 in Belfast and 1 in Newry) on the basis that they had not yet proved their long-term viability. There are also 2 other independent IM primary schools - in Maghera and Coalisland - neither of which has yet sought grant-aid. A judicial review was sought on the Newry case, but the application for review was rejected by the High Court.

Secondary Education

7. There are 2 independent Irish-medium secondary schools in NI: 1 in Belfast (Meanscoil Feirste) and 1 in Londonderry (Meanscoil Doire). While respecting the rights of parents to seek this form of secondary school education, DENI has had to turn down a proposal for maintained (ie grant-aided) status for the Belfast school, as it is now, and will be for some years, well short of the level of intakes normally sought in such cases. The Government has, however, made £100,000 available from MBW for interim assistance to Meanscoil Feirste.

Wales and Scotland

8. Direct comparisons with Wales and Scotland are not entirely valid. Both Wales and Scotland still have large areas where Welsh and Gaelic respectively remain the language of the home and the community. This is not the case in Northern Ireland. In particular, Wales is officially bilingual and the provision made there reflects that special position for the Welsh language and its comparatively strong position throughout the country.

9. In Scotland, educational provision even at primary level is made almost exclusively through streams or units attached to English-medium schools. It

is only within the last 2 years or so that any significant numbers of pupils have begun to reach the stage of transfer to secondary level and only limited provision has been possible for them. There are no free-standing Gaelic medium secondary schools and the range of subjects taught is limited.

10. The situation in Scotland is, therefore, very different from that in Northern Ireland where free-standing Irish-medium secondary schools have been established by voluntary effort and it is impossible to compare the 2 approaches in any helpful way.

Irish Medium and Grant-Maintained Integrated Schools

11. There is some resentment in the Irish-medium lobby about what is seen as preferential treatment of the Grant-Maintained Integrated (GMI) sector, which consists of schools educating Protestant and Catholic children together. However, GMI schools also have to demonstrate their potential to secure a long-term viable enrolment, although DENI does accept the evidence of a projected 1st year intake which, if sustained, would ultimately generate a viable enrolment as sufficient to merit conditional funding. This reflects the Government's policy of actively facilitating integrated education. Such conditional funding relates initially only to recurrent expenditure. Grants on capital expenditure will not be paid until a GMI school has proved its viability based on about 3 years actual intakes - ie, effectively the same standard of proof required of Irish-medium schools before grant-aid status would normally be considered.

Irish-medium GCSE Examinations

12. Michael Ancram has decided that, **subject to the availability of suitable examiners**, a suite of GCSE examinations will be made available in the medium of Irish in Summer 1996 for the Meanscoil pupils, covering the subjects requested by the school. The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has already begun setting arrangements in place to identify suitable examiners. The Secretary of State has written to Dr Hendron and the principal of the school, Mr O'hir, accordingly.

LINES TO TAKE

Support for Irish-Medium Education

- The Government's policy is to respond to parental demand. We have, therefore, funded Irish-medium schools where we have been satisfied that they will remain viable in the long term.
- Any independent Irish-medium school can apply for maintained status through the publication of a statutory development proposal.
- Each proposal is assessed individually on the extent to which the school can prove that it will be able to achieve a desirable minimum enrolment within a reasonable period. This procedure applies to the establishment of any new school.
- Irish-medium primary and secondary schools - in view of their dispersed enrolments - are in fact only required to meet the lower minimum enrolments of 100 and 300 respectively which are applied to English-medium rural schools.

Comparison with integrated schools

- Integrated schools are not more favourably treated than Irish-medium schools except in so far as a single year's applications can be taken as sufficient evidence to enable recurrent funding to be given.
- All integrated schools which have been grant-aided have also had to satisfy the Department of Education of their ability to sustain the same long-term enrolments as are applied to Irish-medium schools.

Funding

- Three Irish-medium primary schools are already receiving grant-aid from Government. These are:

- Bunscoil Phobal Feirste
- Bunscoil Cholmcille
- Gaelscoil na bhFal

- In addition

An Irish-medium unit at Twinbrook, Belfast, is being funded under special arrangements as a satellite unit of the Bunscoil Feirste. A second grant-aided unit has also been opened at the Christian Brothers' Primary School in Armagh.

- The Irish-medium secondary school - Meanscoil Feirste is receiving £100,000 a year from MBW for the next 2 years while it seeks to reach the normal viability criteria.
- £40,000 per annum is being spent to support a resources unit producing books and materials for use in Irish-medium primary schools.

Examinations

It has now been decided that Irish-medium GCSE examinations will be provided for Meanscoil in the summer of 1996 - subject to the availability of suitable examiners.

IER TRAINING FOR IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION SCHOOLS

BACKGROUND

Initial Teacher Training

1. St Mary's College, which caters mainly for the primary sector and which has an almost exclusive RC student population, offers Celtic as a main subject option in its 4-year Primary BEd course and in its 1-year Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course. QUB offers a 1-year PGCE Celtic course which caters for the secondary sector. These courses, which are for student teachers of Irish, do not contain a specific element for teaching through the medium of Irish.
2. Organisations representing grant-aided Irish-Medium education schools have recently criticised the content of the BEd course, stating that it needs to be redesigned so as to meet the needs of an Irish-Medium course rather than an Irish course in English-medium schools. St Mary's College has taken the criticism on board and have examined the structure and content of their course.
3. Their initial proposals for a redesign of an Irish-medium education course have been seen by the Inspectorate, and these have been discussed with the College. A number of changes have been suggested to them and they are now examining these and are discussing the content further with Irish-medium education interests.
4. To help advance the work which the College needs to do on their new course, the Department of Education agreed to the appointment, for 1 year, of a person with recent Irish-medium education school experience for the development of the course and of new course materials in subject, professional studies and education.

5. The earliest date from which the new style BEd course could become available would be September 1996, with the first graduates being available for Irish-medium education schools from 2000. To ensure the immediate needs of Irish-medium education schools are met, the Department of Education has approved 5 additional 1-year PGCE places for 1995/96 and the College is examining how it might provide an interim "fast tracking" 2-year course for some current students so that they would be available to Irish-medium education schools by 1998.

6. What is finally submitted to the Department of Education for approval should, therefore, reflect the views of the College, Irish-medium education schools and the Inspectorate.

Inservice Training

7. As part of their responsibility to provide support to schools across all areas of the curriculum, all Education and Library Boards have an annual consultation process with schools and other interested bodies. This is designed to identify the training and support needs of each school. Each Board, through a structured programme of in-service training, will then endeavour to provide the appropriate training and support to meet the identified needs. As part of this process, Boards can and do use expertise outside of their own structure. For example, the Regional Training Unit, on behalf of all Boards, runs an Irish Immersion Course.

8. The need to provide support for teachers in Irish-medium schools has been raised with the Department on a number of occasions. The line has been taken that it would be unrealistic to expect Boards, within their existing resources, to provide the support required for Irish-medium schools across all the subjects of the curriculum. There must also be a question about the availability of Irish Language specialists suitably qualified to provide support across the various subjects of the curriculum. However, the Boards have indicated that they would be prepared to buy-in the services of Irish Language specialists if required.

LINES TO TAKE

Initial Teacher Training

1. QUB provide a secondary PGCE Celtic course and St Mary's College currently provides a primary 4-year BEd course which offers Celtic as a main subject. (However, both courses are for Irish teachers in English speaking schools.)
2. St Mary's are redesigning their Celtic course to meet the needs of grant-aided Irish-medium education primary schools. They are liaising with Irish-medium education school representatives and final proposals are expected by the Department of Education for a September 1996 start.
3. In the shorter term, five additional 1-year PGCE places have been approved for 1995/96 and a person has been appointed to develop Irish-medium education courses and teaching materials.

INSET

4. Education and Library Boards provide INSET courses for teachers of Irish and in addition the Regional Training Unit, on behalf of all Boards, runs an annual Irish Immersion Course lasting one week.
5. While the Western Board is at present the only Board to have a specialist Irish Language field officer, other Boards are prepared to buy-in the services of Irish Language specialists as required.

IRISH LANGUAGE PRE-SCHOOL PLAYGROUP MOVEMENT

1. The movement is an informal network, with no legal status or staff, associated with the all-Ireland network of pre-school groups based in Dublin. The Northern Ireland movement embraces about 20 groups, which generally focus on preparing children for admission to Irish language primary schools. While the groups are generally registered by the Health and Social Services Boards as playgroups, they have a stronger "education" component than most playgroups, in the sense that they are geared to the teaching of Irish.
2. The development of the NVQ system has provided the movement with the opportunity to develop training and accreditation arrangements. It is currently taking 20 trainees through to NVQ 2 and is developing a specialist module for the teaching of Irish at pre-school level.
3. The movement is not sufficiently representative of educational need in Northern Ireland to merit individual membership on the Regional Consultative Forum on Early Years, which is part of the liaison and co-ordination machinery established by DHSS to take forward the Government's policy framework (published September 1994) for early years services. Members of the Inter-Departmental Group on Early Years have, however, met the movement's representatives twice in recent months to discuss its issues of concern. The movement has also been offered the opportunity to give a presentation to the Regional Consultative Forum.
4. As regards funding, this will be available from the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland on the same basis as for other groups.

SUMMARY OF ARTS COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR THE IRISH LANGUAGE

1. The Council's policy in regard to support for Irish language arts is the same as that for the arts in the English language: to promote work of quality, whether it be in the genres of writing, storytelling, traditional singing or drama. The language itself is not an issue; the Council does not support the teaching of the language. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland was the first Arts Council in the United Kingdom to appoint a Traditional Arts Officer.
2. The Arts Council has, in the past, encouraged writing in Irish by such means as assisting the publication of books and magazines, instituting the first Writer-in-Residency in Irish, subsidising readings and fora, and linking readings with traditional Irish music. In its recently published Strategy for the Arts, "To the Millennium", the Council has affirmed that a less reactive and more pro-active approach is now being developed. This includes support for an Irish-language arts centre and for Irish-language activities in other arts centres.
3. Arts Council expenditure on Irish language arts activities has risen significantly in recent years: from £33,400 in 1993-94 to £70,500 in 1994-95, with spending planned at £108,500 in the current financial year - an increase of 225% over two years.
4. The Council supports several publications in Irish and has contributed over £50,000 to publishing in Irish over the last ten years. In drama, the Council provides funding for Aisteoiri Aon Drama, an Irish-speaking theatre company operating throughout Northern Ireland. Its grant of £15,000 in 1995-96 will enable it to develop relationships with existing centres where theatre practitioners are in residence. An important recent development has been the significant increase in funding for Culturlann McAdam/O Fiaich, the Irish language based arts centre. Its grant of £50,000 in 1995-96 will enable the management to employ a full-time officer to attract other sources of income and to develop its arts programme. A breakdown of Arts Council funding of Irish language arts in 1995-96 is attached at Annex 1.

4. The Council's Literature and Traditional Arts Officer (Ciaran Carson) and the current Chairman of the Creative Arts Panel (Professor Robert Welch) are both Irish speakers. Both have published poetry in Irish.

5. In common with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, An Chomhairle Ealaíon (the Arts Council in the Republic of Ireland) does not have separate designated funding for Irish language arts. Irish language arts receive support through the "subject" budget heads, notably Literature and Traditional Arts. It is not widely held in Northern Ireland that that Irish language arts are better catered for south of the border.

LINE TO TAKE

- Government funds in support of the arts in Northern Ireland are disbursed through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, which has complete independence in determining the allocation of resources in line with the exercise of its artistic judgment.
- The Arts Council's support for Irish language arts, including publishing and drama, has risen dramatically in recent years. The Council expects to spend £108,500 on Irish language arts in the 1995-96 financial year.
- The Council's new strategy for the arts, "To the Millennium", was the subject of extensive public consultation. It includes a commitment by the Council to a more pro-active approach to Irish language arts, including support for an Irish-language arts centre and for Irish-language activities in other arts centres.

Planned Arts Council funding of Irish language arts in 1995-96**Ongoing projects:**

| | |
|--|---------|
| Culturlann McAdam/O Fiaich (Irish language based arts centre) | £50,000 |
| Aisteoiri Aon Drama (Irish-speaking theatre company) | £15,000 |
| Irish language Writer-in-Residence (Shared by QUB and UU) | £9,500 |
| Coisceim Feirste (Leading Northern publisher of work in Irish) | £5,000 |
| An tUltach (Leading Irish language magazine) | £6,000 |
| The Celtic Pen (Celtic languages magazine) | £1,000 |
| Cuisle na nGael (Magazine based in Newry) | £1,000 |
| Feile Ghaeil Alban agus Eireann (Irish and Scottish Gaelic arts festival) | £1,250 |
| Scoil Sliabh gCuilinn (Irish language weekend school) | £1,250 |
| Awards and Bursaries Scheme | £3,500 |

New projects:

| | |
|---|--------|
| Newry and Mourne District Council (Irish language arts regeneration programme) | £4,000 |
| Ti Chulainn (South Armagh centre for Irish language arts) | £4,000 |
| Glor na nGael (Classes and workshops) | £1,000 |
| Comhcheol (Irish language recording venture) | £1,000 |
| Gaelic literature development in schools (eg. Poetry Prize) | £5,000 |

| | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| TOTAL | £108,500 |
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SUPPLEMENTARY BRIEFING FOR MEETING WITH CONRADH NA GAEILGE

Establishment and Availability of Telefis na Gaeilge

Background

Since the late 1980's the Irish Government has aspired to the establishment of a dedicated Irish language television channel, Telefis na Gaeilge. However, it is only in the past two years that a firm financial commitment has been made to the service, which is expected to begin transmission at the end of 1996. TnaG staff understand that the service will be capable of reception in Northern Ireland in those areas which currently receive RTE. It is likely that reception in the Greater Belfast area will be difficult and West Belfast Irish users will therefore be denied access to the channel. The issue of reception of existing RTE channels is technically complex and is the subject of on-going discussions between British and Irish experts (in the UK the expertise lies with the Radio Communications Agency of DTI).

In 1994 Mr Higgins, the Irish Minister responsible for Irish language and broadcasting issues, unilaterally proposed an all-Ireland Irish language service. This was formally raised with the British side at an IGC in 1994. Leaving aside the financial issues, the technical issues are extremely complex. With the passage of time and the establishment of Telefis na Gaeilge, the option of an all-Ireland service, supported by both Governments, may seem less attractive to Irish officials.

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In terms of reception for Telefis na Gaeilge, it seems unlikely that rapid progress will be made to enable conventional transmission from across the border to be received in Belfast. There are two technical developments which might provide a solution in the medium to long term. The first of these is cabling which is expected to begin in Belfast in 1996. Telefis na Gaeilge officials intend to meet soon with the Independent Television Commission to discuss the possibilities of their service being carried on cable, though at some point they will have to enter into negotiations with the cable company, Cabletel. In the longer term the Government's proposals for digital terrestrial broadcasting (Department of National Heritage White Paper of August 1995) may provide an acceptable means of re-broadcasting both RTE and TnaG in Northern Ireland. One drawback to the digital option is the need for householders to invest in new receiving equipment.

The Gaelic League delegation may also draw attention to the Gaelic Television Fund in Scotland, where Government currently provides about £8m per year to assist the production of programmes in Gaelic. They may suggest a comparable facility for the production of Irish language TV programmes by Northern Ireland companies, with a view to their transmission on TnaG.

Lines to Take

As with cross-border TV transmissions generally, ensuring conventional reception of Telefis na Gaeilge throughout Northern Ireland may prove technically very difficult. New

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technology (cable, digital) may offer solutions. I understand that TnaG officials are examining the possibilities of using the new cable service.

Pronunciation Note: TnaG = TELEFISH NAH GAYLIGGA

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CONRADH NA GAEILGE PROPOSAL FOR AN IRISH LANGUAGE BOARD

There has been recent correspondence through the Secretary of State from Seamus Mallon MP and Bobby Molloy TD on Conradh na Gaeilge proposals for an Irish Language Board for Northern Ireland. In neither case were details of the proposal included and it is assumed that the proposal is based on submissions made to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin by Conradh na Gaeilge. The submissions called for Irish Language Acts in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. For Northern Ireland, a new Irish Language Board was proposed. This would be based on aspects of the Welsh Language Board and Bord na Gaeilge in ROI. The Board's functions would be:

- to promote Irish among the population;
- to further Irish in those spheres in which the Government has direct or indirect input - education, broadcasting, Local Government, the arts, community schemes, employment schemes, etc;
- to prepare a code of practice that would give practical effect to the rights of citizens who wish to conduct business in Irish with the State system;
- to encourage understanding of the importance of Irish and Irish culture as an integral part of the heritage of the people of Ireland;

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- to distribute grants for the promotion of Irish to organisations and to groups, and also for various Irish language initiatives;
- to encourage cross border co-operation, cross-community co-operation in Northern Ireland, pan-Celtic co-operation and co-operation with other European people who speak lesser user languages.

this is an ambitious (and undoubtedly expensive) agenda. It is implicit that this Board should be established with Government backing and assistance, probably on a statutory basis. This would be a quantum leap in Government policy towards Irish, particularly if the Board was to have a similar status to the Welsh Language Board. In the Secretary of State's responses to Mr Mallon and Mr Molloy, he pointed out that the position in Northern Ireland differed from that in Wales and the Republic in several ways. The Government has not, therefore, considered it necessary to legislate on Irish language rights or create a statutory Board. Some of the functions of such a board, particularly in the area of appreciation of the cultural significance of the language, are already being carried out by the Ultach Trust. Some aspects of the Conradh na Gaeilge proposal also veer in the direction of bilingualism. Hence, it was not considered necessary to establish a new statutory Board to promote Irish language interests.

The Conradh na Gaeilge proposals have not yet been presented (either formally or otherwise) to Ministers or officials in Northern Ireland. The meeting with Conradh na Gaeilge therefore offers an opportunity to ask them to put the

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proposals on the table, and to justify them. It is suggested that the Secretary of State, while noting initial reservations, should agree to have the proposal considered in detail by officials, with a view to a comprehensive response.

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LINES TO TAKE

I have received letters in recent months from Seamus Mallon MP and Bobby Molloy TD on your proposals for a new Irish Language Board in Northern Ireland. Though I am aware of the submission which Conradh na Gaeilge made to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, you have not yet given details of the proposal, and the arguments for it, to Ministers and officials in Northern Ireland. This is an opportunity for you to do so.

I must admit to some initial reservations, based on my understanding of the proposal. Aspects of it may veer towards bilingualism. There may also be an overlap with the work of the Ultach Trust. However, I would like to have the proposal considered in detail and I will write to you in due course with a considered response.

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PERSONALITY NOTES

Gearoid O Caireallain (pronounced - O Carulawn) - Mr O Caireallain is 37 years old and has a long involvement in the Irish language movement in Belfast. He is the founder and former editor of the newspaper LA (it was grant aided by CCRU), a founder of the Culturlann (an Irish cultural centre on the Falls Road), a drama group and an Irish language bookshop (which is receiving financial support from EU funds). He writes a regular article in the Andersonstown News and is frequently interviewed on both Irish and English language television and radio. He is closely associated with a network of Irish language initiatives centred on the Culturlann, including Meanscoil Feirste. He was elected President of Conradh na Gaeilge/the Gaelic League in 1995, though he had previously been a critic of the organisation.

Sean Mac Mathuna (pronounced - Mac Mahoona) - Mr Mac Mathuna is the Secretary of Conradh na Gaeilge/the Gaelic League and comes from Dublin. He is a quiet, hardworking bureaucrat. His style contrasts with the ebullient Mr O Caireallain.

Fergus O'Hare - Mr O'Hare is the Headmaster of Meanscoil Feirste and has been to the fore in the campaign to attract grant aid from the Department of Education. Though grateful for the short term MBW funding for the school, his objective is full grant aid. One of his main current concerns is the provision of facilities in Irish for next year's GCSE examinations.

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Seamus MacSeain (pronounced Mac Shine) - Mr Mac Seain is the Chairman of the Board of Governors of Meanscoil Feirste.

Pronunciation Note: The Irish name of the organisation is pronounced **CONN-ROO NAH GAYLIGGA**. It should, however, be acceptable to refer to it consistently as "The Gaelic League".

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SUPPLEMENTARY PERSONALITY NOTES

Dr John Robb: Dr Robb is well known for his unusual political background as a Presbyterian Irish Nationalist. In the 1980s he served as an Irish Senator. He was the founder of the New Ireland Movement in the 1970s, which subsequently became the New Ireland Group. He regards himself as part of an old tradition of dissenting Protestant radicalism. His interest in the Irish language stems from his involvement in a cross-community Irish language group in Dunloy, County Antrim. He has written some press articles on the relevance of the Irish language for Protestants and tends to introduce his speeches with a few sentences in the language.

Dr Gabrielle Maguidhir (pronounced as Maguire in English): formerly a further education teacher and now a lecturer at St Mary's Teacher Training College, working on the syllabus for Irish medium schools. At an earlier stage in her career she had been a teacher in an Irish medium school. Dr Maguidhir is the secretary of Gaeloiliuint, an umbrella organisation for Irish medium schools which lobbies for additional funding. She recently formed part of a delegation which met Michael Ancram on this subject.

Dr Pol Mag Uidhir (also pronounced Maguire in English): a member of the group of Irish language activists associated with the Falls Road Culturlann, and associate of Mr O Caireallain. Dr Mag Uidhir's particular interest is in Irish Language drama and the arts.

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