

E. R.

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cc PS/Ministers (B&L) 1/8
PS/PUS (B&L)
1. PS/Sir Kenneth Bloomfield ✓
Mr Burns
Mr A W Stephens
Mr Parkes
Mr Elliott
Mr Chesterton
Mr Bell
Mr Spence
Mr Miles
Mr J McConnell
Mr Wood
Mr Kirk
Mr Masefield
Mr McMurray, DHSS
Dr Harbison, DFP
Mr McCusker, CCRU
Dr Sweeney, DFP

PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

2. A19

PPRU PAPER ON THE IRISH LANGUAGE

1. It was agreed at the Ministerial meeting which the Secretary of State chaired on 11 July that the text of the PPRU paper on the Irish Language should be examined further with a view to its early publication. At that meeting the Secretary of State expressed concern about the linking of the PPRU paper with the Continuous Household Survey. He also was anxious to ensure that the PPRU paper was not seen as a response to the 19th July announcement on the scope of the GB census.
2. I attach a revised draft of the paper together with a draft Press Release which would accompany its publication.
3. In preparing the revised draft DFP has taken into account the Secretary of State's point on the CHS and has consulted widely on the content and presentational aspects of the paper. The draft has met with broad agreement and has been endorsed by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield. DFP would now recommend that it be published as soon as possible. However I would

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wish to draw to the Secretary of State's attention the fact that Dr Mawhinney remains unhappy that the paper should be published in its present form. I understand that he has minuted the Secretary of State * below. separately on the subject.

4. Having consulted with NIO, DFP has prepared the attached Press Release. It is a short factual account which focusses on knowledge, interest and ability in the Irish Language. We agree with NIO that this approach is consistent with the objective of publishing the paper, which is to present publicly the results of the objective academic research which has been conducted.
5. The Secretary of State is asked to consider the draft Report and press release in the light of the DFP recommendation and Dr Mawhinney's reservations and to decide whether the report, as drafted, should be published as soon as possible, along with the press release submitted. If the Secretary of State agreed to publication, Mr Miles would then pass a pre-publication draft of the paper to the Irish for information. In the absence of any major concern or comment on their part, the report would be published on an appropriate day in the week commencing 1st August, thus facilitating an early announcement on the NI Census Paper.

JL Sample.

J L SEMPLE

29 July 1988

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DRAFT PRESS RELEASE

THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN NORTHERN IRELAND 1987

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF A SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE, INTEREST AND ABILITY

PPRU OCCASIONAL PAPER NO 17: DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

1. New information on the use of the Irish language in Northern Ireland is contained in a report published today.
2. "The Irish Language in Northern Ireland, 1987" published by the Policy Planning and Research Unit of the Department of Finance and Personnel (NI) reports the results of a recent survey which assessed the knowledge, interest and ability of the Irish Language among the general population in Northern Ireland.
3. Apart from secondary school examination entries in the subject and small local studies, little has been known in recent years of the extent of use of Irish in Northern Ireland nor of the level of competence in the language among Irish speakers. The new information is based on a survey conducted in 1987. Questions were designed to assess, on a range of dimensions, respondents' knowledge of the 9 official languages of the European Community other than English. Current ability was self-assessed by respondents on the four main language skills of 'understanding', 'speaking', 'reading' and 'writing'. Use of the languages at home was also explored.
4. The key findings of the study are noted below.
 - i. 11% of the sample reported that they had some knowledge of Irish while 4% had elementary knowledge of Irish on all four language skills.
 - ii. Knowledge of Irish was restricted almost exclusively to Catholics, 26% of whom had some knowledge of the language, compared with 2% of Protestants;
 - iii. Knowledge of Irish, as of other European languages, was higher among younger people, with 1 in 6 of those aged under 25 reporting knowledge compared with 1 in 20 of those aged 60-69.

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- iv. Two-thirds of those who reported some knowledge of Irish held no formal qualifications in the language.
 - v. Almost 1 in 4 Catholics expressed an interest in gaining further knowledge of Irish compared to 3% of Protestants. Over a third of Catholics under 25 were interested in further knowledge of Irish.
 - vi. 5% of those who claimed a knowledge of Irish placed their own ability at the highest level on all four language skills. 39% of respondents with some knowledge of Irish considered that they had no current ability in any of the self-assessed language skills ie 'understanding', 'speaking', 'reading', and 'writing';
 - vii. Among those with a knowledge of the language, Irish was not used extensively at home. 1% used it daily and 15% reported using it at home occasionally.
 - viii. The majority of parents with responsibility for children aged between 3 and 15 years considered that knowledge of a second language was important (83%); 6% of children aged 3 to 10 had knowledge of at least one language although the proportion in Catholic homes was 10% and this tended to be almost exclusively Irish while children of Protestant parents were more likely to have a knowledge of French. The proportion of Catholic children having some knowledge of Irish rose to 51% for those aged 11 to 15.
5. The report concludes that widespread knowledge of the Irish language is restricted almost exclusively to Catholics and, in common with the other European languages in the study, is more widely known among younger age groups. Of those who claimed knowledge of Irish, somewhat less than half were able to converse in the language while just under two-thirds were able to understand the spoken language. The report concludes that Irish is widely known among the Catholic community in Northern Ireland but there is little evidence that the language is used widely in daily life. However, there is a significant amount of interest in the Catholic community in gaining further knowledge of the language, particularly among young people.

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