

E. R.

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

COPY

RBS/155/89

FROM: R B SPENCE  
US CENT SEC  
DATE: 21 APRIL 1989

cc. PS/Sir Kenneth Bloomfield  
Mr Parkes  
Mr Burns  
Mr Miles  
Mr Thomas  
Mr Blackwell  
Mr Kirk  
Mr Masefield  
Mr J McConnell  
Mr McCusker

PS/DR MAWHINNEY (B&L)

IRISH LANGUAGE TRUST

1. This minute provides briefing for the Minister's meeting with the people who are proposing the creation of a charitable body to handle the Irish language.
2. Attached is a copy of the letter which contains the proposal.
3. Those attending the meeting will include, in addition to Dr James Hawthorne and Mrs Maurina Crozier:-

Dr Ian Adamson - Farset Community Trust (he may be standing as an OUP candidate in East Belfast);

Dr Patrick Loughrey - BBC Schools Broadcasting;

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Dr Roger Blaney - retired doctor;

Mr Christopher Napier - Solicitor, Board Member of Gael Linn, member of EC funded Bureau for Lesser Known European Languages;

Dr Maurice Hayes

Professor Gerry Stockman - Professor of Celtic Studies at QUB.

4. Officials in NIO, DENI and CCRU support the concept of a charitable body with the sort of terms of reference which are proposed. We believe that the emergence of such a body offers Government the opportunity to work constructively with those who genuinely wish to foster the Irish language. A voluntary body of this nature partly funded by Government represents the best way of demonstrating goodwill while avoiding the difficulties of institutionalising the language somewhere within the public sector.
5. Government's perceived attitude to the Irish language has always been a source of grievance amongst the minority side of the community. It remains an issue of considerable symbolism - as the recent controversy over the place of the language in the school curriculum showed. To a large extent Sinn Fein has succeeded in highjacking the Irish language issue and it is, therefore, in Government's interests to offer tangible help to the more moderate Irish language enthusiasts.
6. During the review of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Irish Government suggested the creation of "a special institute ..... to promote the use and knowledge of the Irish

language and traditions." The Communique on the Review is likely to commit the Government "to support efforts to enhance awareness and appreciation" of the Irish language.

7. In his interim reply of 3 April, the Minister welcomed the initiative, in particular the objectives, but said that he wanted to think further about whether a separate trust offered the best means of achieving those objectives.
8. The alternatives to a separate trust include handling the Irish language through:-
  - 8.1 the proposed Community Relations Council - our view is that this specific issue would not fit easily within the new body; it is likely to have its hands very full in establishing its role and credibility with all sides of the community;
  - 8.2 a NI Institute for Irish Studies - such an Institute will have a very useful role to play in many aspects of developing respect for cultural diversity; but it will essentially be an academic body; the Irish language movement is strongest at local community level; the Institute would be perceived as part of the formal education system and unable to relate effectively to Irish language interests.
9. Our advice is, therefore, to accept in principle the concept of a separate body. It is likely that the concept will be launched whether or not Government supports it. Government could lose an important opportunity if it fails to back the idea from the start.
10. There are, however, a number of questions which need to be explored:-

- 10.1 who will be the original trustees; will they be able to command the respect of most of the existing organisations which seek to promote the Irish language; how will vacancies be filled; can the trustees undertake to exclude people who support the use of violence?
- 10.2 what level of funding is justified and what other sources of finance are being approached - it would be wrong for Government to be the only source; what response has there been to the approach to the International Fund?
- 10.3 what is the timing of any public statement by the trustees or Government, bearing in mind what might be said, probably in late May, in the Communique on the Review?
- 11. If the Minister is broadly satisfied with the discussion with the sponsors of the concept, he might
  - 11.1 indicate that Government is prepared in principle to offer financial support;
  - 11.2 invite the submission of more detailed proposals, including a draft trust deed, a fuller statement of objectives, a proposed work programme, and more detailed estimates of costs;
  - 11.3 encourage the sponsors to explore energetically other potential sources of funding;

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- 11.4 offer a seeding grant of £10,000 to finance initial development work, including legal advice; and
- 11.5 suggest that no publicity should be given to the plans until there has been a further meeting to discuss and agree the details.

RBJ

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CENTRAL SECRETARIAT  
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