

FROM:

PS/MR HANLEY  
8 JANUARY 1993

cc: PS/Mr Hanley (L&B, DENI)  
PS/Mr Fell  
Mr Carvill  
Miss Mills  
Mr Taggart (DED)

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Mr Holmes

MEETING WITH DR BEVERIDGE TO DISCUSS FAIR EMPLOYMENT AT QUB

The Minister and you together with Mr Fell, Miss Mills and Mr Taggart met Dr Beveridge and Mr Young from Queens University Belfast on 7 January to discuss Fair Employment at QUB. The Minister began the meeting by telling Dr Beveridge that he was aware that he had a number of problems. He asked him to explain these difficulties, as this would give the department an opportunity to see how it could help.

2. Dr Beveridge replied by explaining that since the publishing of the University's Charter in 1908 the institution has been fully committed to equality. They were almost totally religiously neutral and indeed had no involvement in the running of the chaplaincies situated on the campus. However after the 1987 Jones & Cassidy Fair Employment report, ripples began to be felt. When compared to the make up of the Northern Ireland population it was shown that Queens had a considerable imbalance. Only 20.7% of the teaching staff were catholic but Dr Beveridge explained that this was because a very large proportion, (44%), of the teaching staff came from outside Northern Ireland. He had taken the report seriously and in fact had been monitoring the religious composition of the total workforce since 1987. This had shown a steady increase in the percentage of catholic employees each year since then.

3. The Minister noted these points but asked Dr Beveridge why the University had settled its last two Fair Employment cases out of court. Dr Beveridge explained that due to a number of problems in

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their personnel office they had realised that they would not win at court and, it was for this reason that they had taken the action that the Minister had outlined. Dr Beveridge added that in his opinion the University had a good record on Fair Employment. Out of 11,000 applications for 800 jobs there had only been 15 complaints taken to the Fair Employment Commission.

4. The Minister commented that Queens University was bound to be a target because of its high profile. Dr Beveridge agreed, but said it was more than that. At a recent convocation meeting he had been attacked personally although in the end he had won unanimously. The group which had vilified him had been led by Alex Attwood, an SDLP Councillor on Belfast City Council. Dr Beveridge felt that QUB had been an easy target for him on which to cut his political teeth as it was one of the most accountable and open organisations in the Province. QUB had, however, very little to hide. At this point Mr Fell made it clear to Dr Beveridge that by settling out of court he had led people to believe that this was not the case. The Minister agreed and said that the danger was that it took much longer to lose a bad label than it took to gain it. He recommended that they speak to Shorts who had recently overcome the bad image which once blighted the company. Mr Fell recommended that they speak to Brian Carlin who would be able to give them more detail of how Shorts resolved their difficulties.

5. The Minister then turned the discussion to the Students Union. Dr Beveridge explained that the executive body of the Students Union was basically Republican in make up and they were bent on asking aggressive questions on nearly everything. Dr Beveridge said that he would prefer a separation of the Student executive from the Student Union facilities. In response to further questioning from the Minister on problems which he was experiencing, Dr Beveridge indicated that The Irish News had been proving problematical. He had talked to the editor but as the situation was not improving he intended to speak with the newspaper's owner.

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6. The Minister suggested that we should create a grey band for higher education which could help show the fairness of our system to the overseas audience. Dr Beveridge welcomed this move but said that he found it strange that visitors from America were not brought to the University on a regular basis. The Minister accepted that this was something which we could give further attention.

7. The Minister then questioned Dr Beveridge on the playing of the national anthem at graduation ceremonies. Dr Beveridge agreed that this was indeed a problem and said that it was important that he get both external and professional advice on how to move forward. The national anthem had not been played at a graduation ceremony in July, by mistake, and it had resulted in a large number of complaints. He also suggested that the perception of what the Secretary of State had said in Coleraine had not helped those who opposed the use of the Irish language in the Student's Union. Mr Fell emphasised that the Secretary of State had been talking about "parity of esteem" and not the exclusive use of one language over another. <

8. Mr Fell then questioned Dr Beveridge on the rumours that the University had a provision of some £400,000 for settling Fair Employment cases. Dr Beveridge explained that this was a general legal costs cost centre and not for fair employment alone. Mr Fell agreed but said that this was not the public perception of what this money was to be used for. Mr Fell continued by advising that the University should take steps to sort out the problems associated with its personnel office. He said it was also important to be ahead of the game regarding legislation and to set goals and timetables for the future. Dr Beveridge agreed but said that he feared a Protestant backlash if too many changes were seen to be made.

9. The Minister brought the meeting to a close by saying that he was convinced that both the Department and Queens University were totally committed to fair employment. The University was a centre



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of excellence and it was in everyone's interest that its reputation continued to be held in the highest esteem. He again offered Dr Beveridge his full support and offered help in overcoming the various problems which the University was facing.

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