



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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# Background briefing: North-South language bodies

## 1 North-South Language Bodies

The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement established 12 areas of North/South cooperation, six of which are served through the establishment of North/South Implementation Bodies. The Supplementary Agreement was given effect in Northern Ireland by the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, and in the Republic of Ireland by the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999.

The North/South Language Body (An Foras Teanga) is one of the Implementation Bodies established by the North/South Co-operation Order. It is a single body, composed of two separate and largely autonomous agencies: Foras na Gaeilge, and the Ulster-Scots Agency (Tha Boord O Ulstér-Scotch).

Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord O Ulstér-Scotch operate on an all-island basis, and both bodies are accountable to the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly. They are co-sponsored by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. Decisions regarding the work of the North/South Language Body are made by the North/South Ministerial Council which discusses its policies and actions during 'Language Sector' meetings.

### (a) Foras na Gaeilge

Foras na Gaeilge, which took over the functions of the previously existing Bord na Gaeilge, has responsibility for the promotion of the Irish Language on an all-island basis. It conducts a range of functions, as follows<sup>1</sup>:

- Promotion of the Irish language;
- Facilitating and encouraging its use in speech and writing in public and private life in the Republic of Ireland and, in the context of Part III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, in Northern Ireland where there is appropriate demand;
- Advising both administrations, public bodies and other groups in the private and voluntary sectors;
- Undertaking supportive projects, and grant-aiding bodies and groups as considered necessary;
- Undertaking research, promotional campaigns, and public and media relations;
- Developing terminology and dictionaries;
- Supporting Irish-medium education and the teaching of Irish.

### (b) Ulster-Scots Agency

The aims of the Ulster-Scots Agency are to:

*...promote the study, conservation, development and use of Ulster-Scots as a living language; to encourage and develop the full range of its attendant culture; and to promote an understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots<sup>2</sup>.*

Similar to Foras na Gaeilge, the Ulster-Scots Agency has its own board which, together with that of Foras Gaeilge, constitutes the Board of the North/South Language Body or (Tha Boord o Leid in Ullans).

The agency carries out a range of functions, including the following<sup>3</sup>:

- Provides advice for administrations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, public bodies and other groups in the private and voluntary sectors;
- Increases public awareness and understanding of Ulster-Scots;
- Undertakes research and promotional campaigns;
- Supports projects and grant-aid bodies and groups;
- Produces a range of publications;
- Supports and informs broadcasters and produces broadcast materials;

<sup>1</sup> British-Irish Agreement Act 1999: Annex 1, Part 5 – Language; see also Foras na Gaeilge website. 2010. 'About Foras na Gaeilge': Accessed 15.11.10.

<sup>2</sup> Ulster-Scots Agency. 'About us': <http://www.ulsterscotsagency.com/about-us> Accessed 1.6.11.

<sup>3</sup> Tha Boord O Ulstér-Scotch /Ulster-Scots Agency. *Corporate Plan 2008 - 2010*.

- Forms schools programmes;
- Delivers workshops, summer schools, conferences and seminars;
- Broadcasts news of events and other developments in the sector.

### (c) Departmental responsibilities

The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure states that its responsibilities in regard to Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency are as follows:

‘The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) jointly sponsors the North/South Language Body along with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA). The North/South Language Body was established on 2 December 1999 following the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. It comprises Foras na Gaeilge, (Irish Language Agency) and Ulster-Scots Agency (Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch). DCRGA funds 75% of the budget of Foras na Gaeilge and DCAL the remaining 25%. DCAL funds 75% of the budget of the Ulster-Scots Agency and DCRGA the remaining 25%.’<sup>4</sup>

The Department for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCEGA) in the Republic of Ireland describes a broader range of relationships with Irish language bodies and funds. It describes these relationships as follows:

*The Department supports and works closely with other agencies, particularly An Foras Teanga (the North-South Language Body) and Údarás na Gaeltachta (the Gaeltacht authority), in pursuing its objectives. Ciste na Gaeilge is a fund from which Irish language organisations and various Irish initiatives are grant-aided...The Placenames Branch researches the placenames of Ireland and provides authoritative Irish language forms of those placenames. Colmcille is a tripartite initiative, which comes under the remit of Foras na Gaeilge (one of the two Agencies of An Foras Teanga), the main objectives of which comprise strengthening the links between Ireland (North and South) and Scotland in addition to the promotion of the Irish and Scots Gaelic languages.*<sup>5</sup>

With regard to its Ulster-Scots responsibilities, DCEGA states the following:

*A number of State Boards and agencies with responsibilities in the Community, Rural, Equality, Gaeltacht and Irish language sectors are funded from within the Department's Vote Group, including two cross-border implementation bodies - An Foras Teanga comprising Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch and Waterways Ireland who are co-*

<sup>4</sup> Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure website. ‘Language/Cultural Diversity’: <http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/language-cultural-diversity-r08.htm> Accessed 17.11.10.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. ‘The Irish Language’: <http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage> Accessed 17.11.10.

*sponsored by the Department (along with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Northern Ireland) in accordance with the terms of the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999.<sup>6</sup>*

The Ministers who attend the Language Sector of the North-South Ministerial Council are the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Education from Northern Ireland, and the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs in the Republic of Ireland.

## 2 Budgets

The following is a summary of the funding provided to each of the two language agencies. This information was provided by DCAL<sup>7</sup>.

### Income

#### Foras na Gaeilge

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
DCAL budget	4,016,055	3,928,857	3,577,092	3,781,000
Dept of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs*	12,950,004	16,216,579	16,850,812	-
Other sources	-	-	-	-

*\*These totals may also include 'other sources' since the figures were not provided in a broken down manner.*

#### Ulster Scots Agency

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
DCAL budget	1,946,069	2,481,932	2,384,123	2,996,000
Dept of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs	627,548	846,112	793,152	-
Other sources	46,143	165,406	2,244	-

<sup>6</sup> Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. 'About us': <http://www.pobail.ie/en/AboutUs/index.html> Accessed 1.6.11.

<sup>7</sup> Information provided by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 10.9.10, and included in NI Assembly Research Paper NIAR 384-10 *DCAL's Arms-Length Bodies: Accountability, Governance and Resources*, 13.9.10.

## Expenditure

### Foras na Gaeilge

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Grant spend	9,536,815	11,581,859	11,358,542	-
Capital spend	22,867	44,940	70,257	-
Fixed asset/ collections additions	-	-	-	-
Overhead/admin costs	7,160,423	8,260,426	9,556,907	-
	<b>16,720,105</b>	<b>19,887,225</b>	<b>20,985,706</b>	-
Admin as proportion of overall expenditure	42.83%	41.54%	45.54%	-

### Ulster Scots Agency

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Grant spend	1,007,945	1,245,678	1,371,954	-
Capital spend	13,173	58,217	15,365	-
Fixed asset/ collections additions	-	-	-	-
Overhead/admin costs	1,910,531	1,964,182	1,536,179	-
	<b>2,931,649</b>	<b>3,268,077</b>	<b>2,923,498</b>	-
Admin as proportion of overall expenditure	65.17%	60.10%	52.55%	-

In its submission to the CAL Committee in January 2011, DCAL outlined its proposed allocations for each of its arms-length bodies<sup>8</sup>. For 'N/S Body – Languages', it was proposed that the current allocation be reduced from £6.48m in 2010/11 to £6.28m in 2011/12, £6.02m in 2012/13, £5.85m in 2013/14, and £5.49m in 2014/15. It was stated at the time that these proposed reductions had yet to be agreed by the North/South Ministerial Council.

<sup>8</sup> Written submission from DCAL, *Draft Budget 2011-15: Spending and savings proposals within the department of culture, arts and leisure*, 30.12.10.

### 3 Recent policy developments

The following is a summary of some key recent developments within the minority languages sector in Northern Ireland:

#### (a) Foras na Gaeilge consultation

Foras na Gaeilge currently has a consultation open regarding proposed changes to the way in which funding is allocated to 19 'core-funded' Irish language groups (seven of which are based in Northern Ireland). This new funding model involves a switch away from the current core-funding model, and towards a more thematic approach where any voluntary sector Irish language organisation is eligible to apply for project funding, made available via a set of discrete subject headings which may vary from year-to-year. These plans were drawn up at the request of the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC), and have been described by Foras na Gaeilge as a 'significant realignment'<sup>9</sup>. The plans were initially made available for consultation in September 2010, and then again in March 2011. It was initially proposed that this new model would be implemented via a series of steps, with full implementation from mid-2011. It was later concluded that this timetable should be extended so that full implementation is achieved by December 2011.

Further details of this policy, and a number of concerns expressed by the Irish language voluntary sector, are outlined in a separate Research and Information Service paper<sup>10</sup>.

#### (b) European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

The Charter is an international convention designed to 'protect and promote regional and minority languages, as a threatened aspect of Europe's cultural heritage and on the other hand to enable speakers of a regional or minority language to use it in private and public life'. The Charter defines regional and minority languages as:

*...languages traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population; they are different from the official language(s) of that state, and they include neither dialects of the official language(s) of the state nor the languages of migrants<sup>11</sup>.*

The Charter was adopted as a convention on 25 June 1992 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and was opened for signature in Strasbourg on 5 November 1992. It entered into force on 1 March 1998. The UK government signed the Charter on 2 March 2000 and ratified it on 27 March 2001. The Charter came into force in the UK on 2 July 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Foras na Gaeilge. 2010. *New Funding Model for the Core-Funded Organizations*: p8.

<sup>10</sup> NI Assembly Research and Information Service. 3.6.11. *A summary of proposed funding changes for the Irish language voluntary sector: recent developments*.

<sup>11</sup> Council of Europe. 'Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: What is the purpose of the charter?': [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/aboutcharter/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/aboutcharter/default_en.asp) Accessed 1.6.11.

In Northern Ireland, the Charter applies to both Irish and Ulster-Scots. The Irish language has been registered by the UK under Parts II (which sets out a series of general objectives and principles) and III (containing 36 specific undertakings, six of which are the responsibility of the UK government, and 30 of which are matters devolved to Northern Ireland). Ulster-Scots has been registered in Part II only.

The Charter is binding on each of the ratifying States, and thus has implications for all the departments of the Northern Ireland Executive and associated bodies, for UK government departments operating in Northern Ireland, and for local government. The UK government must provide periodic reports to the Council of Europe Committee of Experts who report periodically on each state's compliance with its Charter obligations. To date, three reports have been completed by the Council's Committee of Experts, in 2003, 2006 and 2009. The latest recommendations from the Council of Ministers state the following in relation to Irish:

*2. adopt and implement a comprehensive Irish language policy, preferably through the adoption of legislation;*

The following recommendation is made in relation to Ulster-Scots:

*4. adopt a strategy to enhance and develop Ulster Scots, in co-operation with the speakers<sup>12</sup>.*

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<sup>12</sup> Council of Europe. *Recommendation RecChL(2010)4 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by the United Kingdom*. 21.4.10.