

Written Ministerial Statement

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Culture, Arts and Leisure

REVIEW OF THE MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP ULSTER-SCOTS ACADEMY AND PLANS FOR AN ULSTER-SCOTS ACADEMY AND AN IRISH LANGUAGE ACADEMY

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Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am writing to update members on the Review of the Ministerial Advisory Group Ulster- Scots Academy (MAGUSA) and plans for an Ulster-Scots Academy and an Irish Language Academy.

Ulster-Scots Academy

The MAGUSA was established in March 2011 to provide strategic advice in relation to the Ulster-Scots sector and to progress plans for the creation of an Ulster- Scots Academy. The MAGUSA has worked together for almost 5 years. The terms of appointment of its Board members was due to expire in March 2015, but I extended their term to December 2015 to enable a Review of the functions of the group to be undertaken and consider how to continue to build on progress that has been made in developing an Ulster-Scots Academy.

A member of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) conducted the Review on my behalf. The Review considered what contribution projects funded by MAGUSA have made towards increasing the level of public knowledge, understanding and engagement with Ulster-Scots, what extent the objectives and outcomes agreed for its funded projects have been achieved, whether value for money has been obtained from the resources used and the progress made towards the creation of a physical Academy.

The Review found that the MAGUSA has made good progress towards achieving its original tasks in terms of research and projects and that this work will be of lasting value for a future Ulster- Scots Academy. The Review also commented positively on the significant contribution the MAGUSA has made in relation to the establishment of the new Ulster-Scots Hub and Visitor Centre in Corn Exchange, Belfast. However the Review also concluded that the MAGUSA has taken its work as far as it can and therefore I decided not to extend the appointment of the Chair and Members of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Ulster-Scots Academy beyond 31 December 2015.

I would like to state publically how much I appreciate the contribution which the group has made. I want to pay tribute to the Chair and Members of the Ministerial Advisory Group as well as the Secretariat staff who have supported them. The MAGUSA have delivered a range of important interventions which will underpin future initiatives.

In terms of going forward, I have asked the Ulster- Scots Agency, working with my Department, to draft proposals to establish an Ulster- Scots Academy and I have set up a Project Team within my Department to assist with this work. Once I receive the proposals, I intend to make an Oral Statement setting out the way forward and the role of the Ulster- Scots Agency in this process.

I hope this Statement shows both my clear support of the Ulster- Scots culture and my intention to implement the commitment, within the Ulster- Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy, to establish an Ulster- Scots Academy.

I will publish the findings of the Department's Review in due course.

Irish Language Academy

There has been substantial growth in the demand for both Irish-medium education and adult learning of Irish. Over the last 5 years alone there has been a 24% increase in the numbers being educated through the medium of Irish. The growth in post-primary education is especially pronounced with a 29% increase over the 5 year period to 2014/15. This is impressive growth and is particularly significant at a time when there has been an overall fall in the numbers of pupils in schools throughout the north.

The recent growth and expansion of the Irish Language has been impressive but has also thrown up gaps in provision. These include the need to provide training for Irish-Medium Education support staff; to develop pathways to employment for Irish language speakers; the need for an Irish Language Planning Body; the need for practical use/socialising opportunities in relation to the language; the need for research to underpin development; the need for local 'crash courses' and 'immersion' courses for fast language: the need for locally available courses that emulate those available elsewhere and the need for courses tailored to specific learner motivations. These complex sets of needs are best met through the establishment of an Irish Language Academy.

Economic and social development in general and especially for young adults is the next step in Irish Language development. The recent expansion and advances in Irish-medium education reinforce and prioritise the need to create a policy framework capable of providing a high quality training experience for young people and ensuring that adequate pathways are available to progress to further study and employment through the Irish language.

I have asked that work be taken forward on how economic and social development and employment opportunities in relation to the Irish Language can be developed together with adult learning within the framework of the Irish Language Academy.

As with the Ulster-Scots Academy, subject to the work being completed, I intend to make a Statement setting out the way forward.

Le dea-mhéin

CARÁL NÍ CHUILÍN MLA

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure