

Traditional Unionist Voice Response to consultation on Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language

Lack of Costing and Release of Strategy

At the outset TUV would note that there is no breakdown of costs for a Strategy which, were it to be implemented, would entail considerable outlay from the public purse. Indeed, in all 53 pages of the consultation document the word “cost” does not appear even once!

We believe that this displays the Minister’s cavalier attitude to public money as long as policies advance her Republican agenda.

Additionally, we have serious questions about how this consultation was launched. Given that the Strategy in its current form would impact upon the work of all government departments and is undoubtedly controversial was it brought before the Executive? If it wasn’t it should not have been released and if it was why did Unionists not veto it?

Finally, TUV notes that the strategy was released on 11th July.

DCAL did this knowing that the attention of the Unionist community and indeed the press would be on the 12th July celebrations the following day. We believe that this was an obvious attempt to let the Strategy slip under the radar of Unionists and thus decrease the number of negative responses to the consultation.

Ministerial Forward

TUV takes issue with the Minister’s contention that “the Irish language is a valuable part of our shared cultural heritage”. The reality is that the Unionist community in Northern Ireland do not share this “cultural heritage” and regard Irish as an alien language which they have no interest in seeing promoted – as the statistics quoted in the EQIA attached to this consultation prove.

Unionists have no interest in the Minister’s attempts to force Irish down their throats.

We note that the Minister encourages “anyone with an interest in enhancing the development and protection of the Irish language” to participate in the consultation process. However, were the proposals in the document to be implemented they would radically impact upon everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of their attitude towards the Irish language. It is disappointing but not surprising that the Minister should seek to encourage responses only from those groups which support her own narrow anti-British agenda.

Part 1: Executive Summary

TUV will deal with the issues outlined in the executive summary in the respective sections of the consultation document dedicated to them.

Part 2: Vision and Context

TUV notes that the Sinn Fein controlled DCAL again repeats its nonsense about Irish being part of “our shared cultural heritage” (2.3) while at the same time acknowledging that the Irish language revival movement began around 1890 (2.6). What the consultation fails to mention is that the Gaelic Revival was closely linked to Nationalism and indeed violent Republicanism. 1916 leaders Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Mary Plunkett were all active in the Gaelic Revival – something which was repudiated by Unionists.

The fact that the use of Irish by Republicans both in the 19th and 20th centuries is deliberately ignored in this document will not fool Unionists into believing that they have a “shared cultural heritage” in a language one the DCAL Minister’s party colleagues described in very graphic terms as a cultural weapon:

“Every word spoken in Irish is another bullet in the freedom struggle” (Danny Morrison).

It is evident that the Minister intends to use this Strategy as a vehicle to erode the Britishness of Northern Ireland.

TUV notes that this Strategy is designed to “complement the approach envisaged in the 20 Year Strategy of the Dublin Government for the Irish Language 2010 – 2030” (2.12). This confirms us in our view that the Strategy is more about eroding distinctions between Northern Ireland and the Republic and making the distinction between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK more profound than any real interest in promoting a dead language.

TUV recognises that there are many benefits to being bilingual (2.14 and 2.15). However, to claim that Irish will improve a child’s employment options (2.14) is laughable. It would be much wiser to invest money in the teaching of French, German and other languages which are actually used in day to day life.

That said TUV does recognise that should this strategy be implemented as envisaged by DCAL an ability to speak Irish could become a distinct advantage when it comes to applying for jobs in the public sector. This is an extremely worrying development which will discriminate against the Unionist/Protestant community and one which we will return to at a later point in our response.

TUV notes that the Belfast and St Andrews Agreements are cited as reasons for bringing forward these proposals (2.16 and 2.18). This confirms us in our view that we were correct in opposing St Andrews and clarifies that warnings issued by the Party in relation to the Irish language were correct, regardless of what our opponents may have said.

It is disingenuous in the extreme for DCAL to cite the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages as support for these wide-ranging and radical proposals (2.35). The ECRML places no such obligations on national or regional governments.

Part 3: Aims, Objectives and Stakeholders

As these are dealt with in detail in section 4 and merely listed here TUV will respond to these respective areas in the section below.

Part 4: Areas for Action

Irish Medium Education (IME)

TUV opposes the proposal that the criteria for the enrolment of bilingual/Irish medium pre-schools should be reviewed (4.4.3).

Irish medium schools should have to fulfil the same enrolment criteria as other schools. To do otherwise would be to disadvantage those pupils who attend controlled or state schools. It would also be discriminatory against the Unionist/Protestant community because, as the data in the EQIA attached to this consultation shows, those who speak or want to learn Irish are overwhelmingly Nationalist/Roman Catholic.

TUV opposes the suggestion that “capacity in English medium pre-schooling in a particular area should not deter the opening/development/financing of IME pre-schools” (4.4.4). Again, this is discriminatory against the Unionist/Protestant community and is a luxury which Northern Ireland can ill-afford in a time of austerity.

TUV opposes the proposal that the thresholds for entitlement to capital funding for Irish Medium Primary Schools should be reviewed (4.4.6).

TUV is opposed to the suggestion that an alleged shortage of qualified teachers for some subjects in Irish Medium Primary Schools should be addressed including the adequacy of teaching materials (4.4.7).

We would, rather, note that it is a matter of public record that there is an over provision of teachers for Northern Ireland’s schools with many qualified young people unable to obtain teaching jobs. To create additional teacher training places to fill posts in schools which cannot meet the enrolment criteria or the thresholds for entitlement to capital funding expected for other schools is totally unacceptable, a scandalous waste of public money and a gross insult to the many young teachers who cannot obtain work at the present time.

TUV notes that similar points should be made in relation to the Strategy’s proposals relating to Irish Medium post-primary education (4.4.8 Measures should be taken to address the complexity in establishing new Post Primary IME Secondary Schools; 4.4.9 Extra teacher training places for IME trainee teachers should be provided and 4.4.10 Eligibility criteria for the establishment of IME post-primary schools should be reviewed).

TUV notes the already extensive support provided to the teaching of Irish in English Medium Primary Schools (4.4.11 – 4.4.13) and the fact that GCSE and A level Irish can be accessed in both Irish and English Medium schools by those who want to study it (4.4.14 – 4.4.16). TUV believes that this is sufficient.

TUV opposes the suggestion that “Expanded support should be considered to ensure that an appropriate number of teachers qualify to meet the demands of the IME sector and the teaching of Irish in English medium schools” (4.4.17).

As noted above, Northern Ireland already has a considerable surplus of teachers.

TUV opposes the suggestion that the education sector should work in partnership with relevant agencies such as Foras na Gaeilge and youth clubs to foster the development of the Irish language (4.4.22) and that the Gaeltacht based summer colleges should continue to be utilised and young people should be encouraged to visit the Gaeltacht where they can apply and develop their existing Irish language (4.4.23).

The Department of Education should invest in schemes which all the community can engage in and which do not carry the political baggage associated with the Irish language. Young people in the Unionist/Protestant community should not be disadvantaged because out of school extra-curricular activity is geared towards those interested in the Irish language.

Similarly, TUV is opposed to the development of a scholarship scheme for those from disadvantaged areas to attend courses in the Gaeltacht (4.4.25).

TUV is opposed to the suggestion that “provision should be made for technical and vocational learning through the medium of Irish. Accreditation of vocational qualifications through the medium of Irish should also be facilitated” (4.4.26) on the grounds that (a) centres which provided such training would be less inviting to the Protestant / Unionist community and (b) there is no serious demand for such.

TUV is opposed to the suggestion that language learning courses should be developed to facilitate parents in supporting their child’s learning in IME (4.4.28) on the grounds of cost. Prudent use of public finances should not play second fiddle to Sinn Fein’s narrow political agenda.

Family Transmission of the Language – Early Intervention

TUV is opposed to DCAL and other government departments wasting resources on making parents aware of the supposed “economic, employment and educational advantages of speaking Irish to their children” (4.5.3).

However, it is evident that DCAL desires to **make** knowledge of Irish an advantage when it comes to employment in the public sector though the implementation of this strategy.

Administration, Services and Community

TUV is particularly concerned about the contents of this section of the strategy.

We oppose the suggestion that “Irish speakers should have the right to conduct their business through Irish with all local government, Executive and other state departments, and the legal system and public sector bodies should facilitate the use of Irish by citizens” (4.6.1).

Given that the figures included in the EQIA attached to this consultation state that just 2% of Protestants have some knowledge of Irish as opposed to 39% of Roman Catholics it is obvious that were this suggestion to be implemented it would seriously disadvantage one section of the community as they would be unable to conduct business through Irish with members of the public and therefore Protestants would be disadvantaged when it came to applying for posts within the NICS.

TUV opposes the suggestions contained within 4.6.2 and 4.6.3 on similar grounds (4.6.2 Language awareness and language training programmes need to be provided so that a higher proportion of public service staff are truly functional in Irish and can deliver services in Irish to customers who seek them. The Interdepartmental Strategy Delivery Group should devise appropriate arrangements to increase the number of public

servants who are functional bilinguals. 4.6.3 Irish speakers should be facilitated in dealing with the public sector including local authorities both orally and in writing, including Census returns and other legal /quasi-legal intervention by citizens).

Again, TUV oppose the promotion of Irish in Washington, Brussels and anywhere else where the Executive has permanent international representation (4.6.4). The reality is that any such measures would simply be part of Sinn Fein's project to rob Northern Ireland of any vestige of Britishness on the international stage and would serve no useful purpose as English is the world's lingua franca and no amount of Republican vanity projects in Northern Ireland are going to change that.

TUV opposes DCAL's suggestion that those Executive departments and local authorities who do not yet have a reliable service through Irish should undertake to provide it within a reasonable time-scale and to publicise its availability (4.6.5).

Again, this would have serious implications for Protestant applicants for jobs who are much less likely to speak Irish – or indeed want to speak it.

TUV opposes 4.6.6 (Local authorities should adopt Irish language policies and plans and appoint Irish language officers where needed. The provision of services through Irish should be maximised); 4.6.7 (Local authorities should expand/initiate facilities for the use of Irish in their council/committee meetings) and 4.6.8 (Local authorities should guard against any diminution of services provided through the Irish language as a result of those authorities with Irish language policies and services being merged under the Review of Public Administration with those authorities that do not) on similar grounds and because of the cost which this will involve.

TUV opposes 4.6.9 (Local authorities should provide an Irish or bilingual version of all publications, official documents and forms in line with the approach of this Strategy and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages) on the grounds of (a) cost and (b) because there is no such requirement for such in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

TUV opposes the suggestion that Local authorities should facilitate the proper preservation and signposting of Irish place-names and the naming of new housing developments to reflect local or national heritage (4.6.10) because in most parts of Northern Ireland there is no desire to do this. Secondly, it leads to confusion for drivers and the emergency services. Finally, the signposting of Irish place-names is used to "mark" an area as belonging to a particular culture and tradition.

TUV opposes 4.6.11 (Local authorities should encourage tourism and cultural initiatives through Irish) because there is no desire for this. As noted previously, English is the world's lingua franca. When tourists visit they wish to have material in languages which they can actually understand, not a dead language.

TUV is opposed to the suggestion of local language planning initiatives (4.6.12) as the maintenance of Irish language officers in local authorities and the appointment of them in local authorities where they do not already exist (4.6.13) is an unacceptable waste of public money.

TUV is opposed to the establishment of "Physical Resource Centres" on the grounds of cost (4.6.20). It would be totally unacceptable for centres which "might include theatre

space, coffee shops and restaurants, bookshops, offices for Irish language organisations, internet centres, historical materials, meeting and conference rooms, display areas, and research and development start-up units” to be established with the help of public money – particularly when it is highly likely that they will be the exclusive preserve of Nationalist/Roman Catholic community.

Media and Technology

TUV opposes the use of public libraries to promote Irish literary events and prominent display of new materials in Irish in selected designated leading bookstores, with suitable promotional materials, stands, bookmarks, promotional events, window-displays and author presence (with collaboration and support of relevant public agencies if necessary) (4.7.2).

This is an unacceptable waste of public money and will make the locations where they are displayed uninviting to the Protestant/Unionist community.

TUV opposes the continuation of support to the Irish Language Broadcasting Fund (4.7.4).

We oppose the BBC being encouraged to continue their current provision for the Irish language and expand this where possible (4.7.5).

TUV opposes the facilitation of the expansion of TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta (R na G) as it appears that this will involve expense to the public purse (4.7.6). Similarly, we oppose increased support being provided to Irish language radio stations (4.7.7), support being provided for the creation of an Irish language community radio network (4.7.8) and the opening up of National Lottery funding distributed through the Arts Council to audio-visual productions in Irish (4.7.9).

TUV opposes the development of an attractive on-line store for Irish materials, showcasing new titles, authors, reviews, blogs and other resources, which could also be used in schools and classes for adult learners; Development of apps to promote and assist language development and use; Promotion and development of book clubs in Irish as a priority in local community language initiatives, and provision of appropriate on-line support for book clubs; Development of initiatives and appropriate training courses to encourage writing in Irish by young people in a range of media - journalism, blogging, creative writing, drama and film scripts; and Promotion of the Irish language internationally (4.7.10) on cost grounds.

Legislation and Status of the Language

TUV opposes the suggestion that DoJ should “prorogue” the Administration of Justice Act (Ireland) 1737 (4.8.1).

TUV reiterates its longstanding opposition to an Irish Language Bill (4.8.2) but we question what additionally such a Bill could bring in were this strategy to be implemented.

The suggestion that applicants for citizenship or residency should be allowed to take their qualifying test in Irish (4.8.3) is foolish in the extreme as one of the key points of the

qualifying test is to ensure that people arriving in the United Kingdom are able to go about daily life here. One cannot do that solely in Irish.

TUV opposes the suggestion that important legal texts should be provided in Irish (4.8.4) as it is unnecessary.

Economic Life

TUV opposes the wasting of government resources on encouraging private sector companies to develop services through the medium of Irish and use Irish language signage (4.9.1).

This would have serious equality implications in the workplace as it would make it a very unpleasant environment for people from the Protestant/Unionist tradition.

TUV opposes the suggestion that the Gaeltacht areas of Belfast and Co Londonderry should be considered for support as a generator of local economic development (4.9.2).

TUV would note that this would result in disproportionate Government support for investment going to Roman Catholic/Nationalist areas.

We believe that the self-interest of the Minister's political party had a great deal to do with this suggestion being included in the consultation.

Implementation, Monitoring and Reporting

TUV notes the wide-ranging implications of this strategy ("this Strategy have implications for all Executive Departments and their Arms Length Bodies, for local government and other state bodies, the private sector and all our people" 5.1).

Additionally, TUV notes the content of 5.5 and 5.6 (5.5 An Interdepartmental Strategy Delivery Group (ISDG) should be established involving senior officials from all Executive Departments to ensure full and appropriate interdepartmental communication and the implementation of good practice across departments; 5.6 A Strategy Unit within the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure should be established with dedicated staff to provide administrative support to the ISDG).

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

TUV believes that DCAL's conclusion that "the introduction of an Irish Language Strategy has the potential to improve good relations, as it will potentially give the Irish Language a more accessible platform for all sections of the community" (page 45) after reproducing data which shows that:

based on community background in the 2001 Census, Catholics (22%) were more likely to have some knowledge of Irish than Protestants (1%);

in the 2007 Omnibus Survey, Catholic respondents (39%) were more likely than Protestant respondents (2%) to have some knowledge of Irish;

In the 2012 Omnibus Survey respondents were asked about their attitudes towards the Irish language. A considerably higher proportion of Catholic respondents than Protestant respondents were in favour of Irish language usage (66% and 14% respectively);

And in the 1999 Life and Times Survey, respondents were asked if they spoke Irish.

Nationalists (31%) were more likely to speak Irish than unionists (2%) and those classified as neither nationalist nor unionist.

is indicative of a Department which is merely going through the motions with this consultation and does not care a jot about the feelings or opinions of the Unionist community towards the policy which it wishes to implement.