

## CONFIDENTIAL

From: D A LAVERY  
Central Secretariat  
5 June 1996

cc	Mr Thomas	-B
	Mr Leach	-B
	Mr Bell	-B
	Mr Watkins	-B
	Mr Stephens	-B
	Mr Maccabe	-B
	Miss Harrison	-B
	Mr Whysall	-B
	Ms Checksfield	-B

Mr D J R Hill

TALKS: DRAFT OUTLINE HANDLING PLAN

1. This is to let you have some comments on the draft Handling Plan which you circulated earlier today.

Managing the Process

2. At paragraphs 4 and 5 of your draft covering minute you make a number of practical suggestions to ensure that information is rapidly transmitted around the system during the Talks. Clearly, the issue of internal communication will be of vital importance as the pace quickens. The suggestions you have made in this regard should prove helpful in keeping all of the relevant players up to speed.

3. For our part, Central Secretariat have put in place arrangements with the Northern Ireland Permanent Secretaries to enable us to act as the contact point with the Northern Ireland Departments.

Talks Handling Plan

4. At the third tiret of your paragraph 2, you suggest that "the Talks take place against the background of "a widespread consensus on the key constitutional issues"". If you mean by this that there is widespread consensus regarding the constitutional issues to be addressed in the Talks, I would entirely agree with you. But surely

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You cannot be suggesting that there is consensus as to the way forward on these issues?

5. Regarding the last tirect of paragraph 2, I agree with the comments made in Mr Thomas' reply. I made a very similar point in my minute to you of 16 May commenting on your earlier draft of the handling plan. I suggested that one option might be to have some of the material from Common Themes and Common Principles presented in a different guise on this occasion.

**Broad strategy**

6. At the sixth tirect of paragraph 7 you suggest that moving to a sub-committee format would allow negotiations to take place between small teams representing the two Governments and the five main parties. Personally, I would not be at all confident that the other smaller parties will be prepared to be marginalised in this way. I suspect we may have to accept full participation from all of the negotiating teams albeit in reduced numbers.

7. At your paragraph 8 first tirect, I am not sure why you think it should be a fairly easy to accommodate Mr Trimble's desire to run Strand 2 and Strand 3 discussions together. I suspect that there may be difficulties ahead more generally if Trimble pushes for an holistic approach involving all three Strands given that there are distinct sensitivities regarding who is allowed to share the 'stage' in Strand 1 and Strand 3.

**Tactical devices**

8. In paragraph 11 you suggest that Ministers should have regular "Adare" meetings with Irish colleagues. Doubtless this may well prove to be necessary from time to time. However, I suspect that there will be strong Unionist suspicions of any bilateral contacts of this type - they would be only too willing to accuse us of

CONFIDENTIAL



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conspiring with the Irish Government to outmanoeuvre them. Contacts of this type may, therefore, require to be handled with some sensitivity.

9. Also, I would tend to suggest caution regarding the suggestion that the Prime Minister may have a role to play in contacts with Mr Trimble. I think we should be cautious in case the Unionist parties seek to open a separate channel of communication 'over the heads' of the Government negotiating team. While direct contact with the Prime Minister has been unavoidable in the period leading up to the Election and the beginning of Talks, once the Talks are under way this may need to be handled more circumspectly.

Publicity

10. One point which falls outside the immediate remit of your Handling Plan, but which may merit further thought, concerns publicity. Our draft procedural rules have proposed that the negotiations will take place in private unless the parties decide otherwise. The Chairman/Chairmen will have an important role to play in enforcing this given the temptation for delegates to give a read-out on progress to the media on emerging from the Talks venue. I would imagine that we might have a better overall prospect of success if we could keep this to a minimum in order to avoid the parties adopting public positions which restrict their room for manoeuvre within the actual negotiations. If we could work to develop a secure and 'neutral' environment for the negotiations, away from the immediate spotlight of publicity, we might be able to begin to draw-out the underlying interests of the parties (and to explore the extent to which these converge) rather than their well-rehearsed public positions.

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11. Apart from these points, nothing further occurs to me regarding your very comprehensive paper.

[Signed: DAL]

D A LAVERY

PS/Michael Anoran(L+B) -2  
PS/CUS(L+B) -2  
PS/Sir David Well -2  
Mr Thomas -2  
Mr Leach -2  
Mr Bell -2  
Mr Watkins -2  
Mr Steele -2  
Mr Stephens -2  
Mr Maccabe -2  
Mr Lavery -2  
Mr Currie -2  
Mr Whysall -2  
Miss Harrison -2  
Ms Hapstone -2  
Ms Chackfield -2  
Mr Campbell-Bannerman -2  
Mr Lamont, RJP -2  
HMA Dublin -2  
Ms Collins, Cabinet Office -2

PS/Secretary of State(L+B) -2

TALKS: AGENDA AND PROCEDURAL RULES

For the record, I attach the draft agenda and procedural rules as they currently stand.

1. The agenda has been amended in the light of last night's Ministerial discussion but not yet formally cleared with the Irish side. [We will in any event need to look again at the wording of paragraph 1 as it will need to reflect the fact that the agenda for Strand 1 is only being proposed by HMG.]

2. The procedural rules represent a conflation of the British and Irish drafts by Mr Cooney and myself. The meeting with Irish officials this morning had cleared the text down to paragraph 21 before it broke up. The rest (which retains the original paragraph numbering and therefore commences at paragraph 24) should be capable of being cleared rapidly, all ad referendum to Ministers. There is

LM/DL/204

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