

① JEH o/c
JH o/c
MC o/c
MW o/c

This briefing went well last year (and the PM quite enjoyed it). I wd. put it in the "strongly desirable" rather than "essential" category, however. Well worth doing, if the diary can accommodate it w/o too much pain. Any views?



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

20 August 1996

(over)
20/8

② M. A.

KH
26/9

Dear Edward,

Irish Journalists

I am writing to ask if the Prime Minister would be willing to grant an interview in late September to a group of Irish journalists. The journalists will be on an FCO sponsored visit to the UK to attend the plenary session of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body being held in Bath from 23 to 25 September.

A similar sponsored visit took place last year and the Prime Minister agreed to give a 45 minute interview to the group in Downing Street. This was much appreciated by the journalists, who regarded it as the highlight of their visit. If the Prime Minister were able to see the group this year, it would make a very substantial contribution to our objective of achieving more positive presentation of British policy on Northern Ireland in the Republic. The goodwill generated by the last interview has carried over beyond the coverage of the interview itself, which was excellent. Although exact numbers cannot be gauged at this time, all the leading Irish newspapers and broadcast media would be represented (last year the total was 12). The interview would be taking place shortly after the resumption of the multi-party talks in Belfast.

If the Prime Minister is able to see the group, their programme could be arranged to include the interview either before or after the plenary in Bath. Perhaps you could let me know when the most suitable timing might be. Our Information Department, who will be coordinating the journalists' programme, will then make arrangements direct with the No 10 Press Office.

I am copying this letter to Ken Lindsay (NIO).

Yours ever,
Sam

(S J Sharpe)
Private Secretary

Edward Oakden Esq
10 Downing Street

RESTRICTED