

Programme of Co-operation between Ireland and the United Kingdom

Developing East/West Relations

Second Progress Report

At their meeting on 21 December 1995 in Dublin, the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister endorsed a report by officials on a programme of co-operation between Ireland and the United Kingdom. In February 1996 the First Progress Report was drawn up. This Second Progress Report outlines subsequent progress in developing East/West relations.

Tourism

As part of the East/West relations initiative a meeting was convened on 28 June between top-level representatives from the Department of Tourism and Trade, Bord Fáilte, the Department of Economic Development (N.I.), the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (N.I.T.B.), the Department of National Heritage and the British Tourist Authority to discuss co-operation in tourism development in the islands. Since this meeting, follow-up action has taken place on the following issues :

British Travel Trade Fair

The British Tourist Authority (BTA.) invited Bord Fáilte to join the British Travel Trade Fair in Birmingham, participating as a sub-section of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board stand.

Exploratory meetings between Bord Fáilte and BTA

Bord Fáilte have met BTA (and are due to meet again) to explore the potential for joint marketing of niche products. "Waterfront Britain" is the first niche product under discussion.

Statistics

Regular contacts and information-sharing continue between statisticians in the Central Statistics Office, the Department of National Heritage and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Further Contacts

It was also agreed that consideration will be given to holding a meeting to review progress once the Irish Presidency is over (update).

Trade

Regular contact is maintained at various levels between the Department of Trade and Industry and An Bord Tráchtála. In May 1996, for example, the two bodies organised a joint conference on Anglo-Irish rail projects. The Department of Tourism and Trade is arranging for the matter of co-operation in the area of promotional literature to be further explored at agency level with a view to identifying a possible meaningful agenda for the Minister.

General Economic Co-operation, Deregulation and Consumer Affairs

The proposed meeting between the Minister for Enterprise and Employment and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (the UK Minister responsible for deregulation) took place earlier this year and involved a useful exchange of information. A further meeting took place with officials of the Deregulation Unit in May in the context of the Presidency and the Internal Market Council.

In addition, Mr. Kevin Bonner, Chairman of the Regulatory Reform Working Group (part of the Government's Strategic Management Initiative) met with the officials and head of the Deregulation Unit, Ms. Lucy Neville-Rolfe on 23 October 1996. At the meeting deregulation developments in the UK. and the EU. were discussed. Mr. Bonner also met with relevant officials in the Department of Trade and Industry.

A tri-partite seminar on labour market issues was organised in March 1996 by the Department of Enterprise and Employment and the British Embassy and was attended by senior policy-makers and academics. The two key areas for discussion were (i) the role of Employment Services and the Long-term Unemployed and (ii) incentives to work for the Long-term Unemployed. The seminar was deemed to be very successful and consideration is now being given by the British Embassy and the Department to the organisation of a further seminar to discuss specific aspects of these issues.

With regard to Competition Policy, meetings in London and Dublin have been held periodically to discuss matters of current importance either at the level of Minister or at official level. The Competition Authority also maintains close contact with the UK. Office of Fair Trading. Such contacts include meetings in the respective capitals, meetings en marge of OECD meetings and exchange of non-confidential information.

In respect of consumer affairs, bilateral talks have taken place at official level and this matter was discussed at the Consumer Council on 25 November, 1996.

While there is agreement on the consumer credit issue, the question of access to justice has not advanced sufficiently for this type of bilateral consultation.

Infrastructure

Excellent progress was made in 1996 in terms of co-operation in the area of transport infrastructure. The EU Ireland /Wales INTERREG programme is making a major contribution to the development of transport links - EU funding under this initiative amounts to £67m of which approximately £56m is for Ireland.

Ports

Significant co-ordinated investment in ports infrastructure and shipping is underway. Port facilities in Dun Laoghaire Harbour, Holyhead, Rosslare and Pembroke were upgraded to cater for the world's first multi-purpose high speed ferry and a new multi-purpose superferry introduced on these routes during the year. The development of Dublin Ferry Port is also advancing with the aid of the Maritime INTERREG funding. New freight services from Dublin Port have contributed to considerable growth in ro/ro and lo/lo traffic to the UK. Statistics show a 55% increase in ro/ro freight carried in the first half of 1996 compared to 1995. Passenger numbers recorded a 7% growth in the same period. At a meeting on 27 November 1996, the Minister of State in Department of Marine and the Under Secretary for Wales welcomed the extensive development undertaken at ports serving the Central and Southern Irish Sea Corridors.

Roads and Rail

As regards co-operation on Trans European Networks (TEN's), the Irish and British Authorities continue to actively co-operate on the development of the priority transport projects under this initiative. Two of these projects are of direct relevance to Ireland, namely the *Cork/Dublin/Belfast/Larne/Stranraer Rail Project* and the *Ireland/UK/Benelux Road Project*. Two other projects were of indirect concern to Ireland, namely the *UK West Coast Rail Project* and the *London/Channel Tunnel Rail Link Project*. In the main, work is progressing well on all four projects. Ireland continues to record support for the development of the two UK Priority Projects, which will be of major potential benefit for Irish tourism and trade.

In June 1996 a major project at Dublin Port, of which the rail link is an integral part, was approved for ERDF funding through the Ireland/Wales Maritime INTERREG Programme at an aid rate of 35%. The provision of this facility should result in an easier and more efficient freight access to Dublin Port and more efficient inter-modal transport. Work on the rail connection is expected to commence in January 1997.

Air transport

There has been an increased level of services on the traditional larger routes and a wider availability of other routings served between Ireland and the UK leading to a significant increase in air traffic between the two countries.

There were a number of meetings at Ministerial level during 1996. Minister Lowry and Minister of State Stagg met with UK Ministers in London on 22 May as part of the Anglo-Irish Conference. Minister Lowry also met with the British Transport Secretary of State on 17 June on the margins of the EU Transport Council in Luxembourg. This meeting was convened in the context of the Infrastructure Agenda item of this East/West Co-Operation Programme. Discussion centred on transport matters of common interest. A meeting took place between Minister of State Stagg and Viscount Goschen who holds responsibility for aviation, shipping matters and EU transport matters in the British Government in November 1996 where they discussed a number of transport matters, mainly relating to Ireland's Presidency of the EU.

UK and Irish officials met on 21 March 1996 under the umbrella of the Joint Group on Ireland /UK Transport links to discuss a range of transport issues of mutual interest. Broad agreement was reached on the development of the Transport Trans European Networks.

Social Welfare

A fact finding visit to the UK Department of Social Security was arranged at the request of Mr. Bernard Durkan T.D., Minister of State, for the purpose of (a) being briefed on the new Fraud Bill being introduced by the UK Department of Social Security and (b) a discussion on the introduction of Social Service cards by the Department of Social Security. During the course of his three day visit in November 1996, the Minister of State met with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and officials of the UK Department of Social Security Benefits Agency. In addition, the Minister of State briefed his UK counterpart on the recently launched report on the Integrated Social Services System (ISSS). This System sets forth a strategy for the administration, delivery, management and control of state income support services.

Co-operation between the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Social Security on anti-fraud measures became more co-ordinated in 1996 with a joint review of 1,500 cases being undertaken. This has led to a significant level of savings being achieved.

A meeting between the Department of Social Welfare, the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency and the UK Department of Social Security took place in Dublin on 22/23 February 1996 to discuss areas of mutual interest in relation to control of fraud and abuse. Further liaison meetings are planned in 1997 with a view to further developing joint measures to combat fraud.

A meeting took place between officials of the Department of Social Welfare and the UK Department of Social Security on 21 January 1997. The purpose of the meeting was to review progress in relation to medical assessments undertaken in 1996 by the Department of Social Welfare on behalf of the UK Department of Social Security, on persons resident in this country who are in receipt of UK Incapacity Benefit. Agreement was reached on the provision of such assistance in 1997.

In late 1996, the UK authorities proposed a high-level Memorandum of Understanding on Fraud between Ireland and the United Kingdom which will significantly strengthen joint efforts in fighting fraud. The Minister for Social Welfare, Mr. De Rossa, has expressed an interest in pursuing this proposal further. It is expected that there will be preliminary discussions at official level, followed by a Ministerial level meeting between Secretary of State Lilley and Minister De Rossa.

In addition to co-operation on control of fraud, reciprocal arrangements exist between the Medical Review and Assessment Section of the Department of Social Welfare and the Pensions and Overseas Benefits Directorate of the Department of Social Security. Under these arrangements, Department of Social Welfare medical referees carry out medical assessments, on request, on Department of Social Security recipients of illness and incapacity benefits resident in this country. Equivalent arrangements are in place for Department of Social Welfare beneficiaries of illness and incapacity payments resident in the United Kingdom.

Electronic messaging links have been developed between the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Social Security to speed the processing of claims in the Sickness, Child Benefit, Invalidity and Old Age Pensions areas. Such links also facilitate the exchange of data necessary to establish entitlement to insurance benefits in the area of sickness benefit.

In addition, Ireland is also currently involved with the UK and Germany in developing an electronic exchange of data directly from their systems for social security pensions purposes.

Health

There has been continued co-operation between the Department of Health Ireland and its UK counterpart in many areas of mutual interest such as the development of drug misuse policy and the provision of treatment services. During 1996 Mr. Brian O'Shea, Minister of State, and Chairperson of the National Co-ordinating Committee on Drug Misuse and Department of Health officials visited policy makers and drug treatment service providers in London and Edinburgh in order to share information and experiences on effective methods of treating drug misusers, specifically those injecting heroin.

There has also been co-operation on a number of items of child care policy. An informal arrangement exists for the exchange of information on families and children at risk between Ireland and England, Scotland and Wales. It is hoped to commence work shortly to try and formalise these arrangements.

Both the Department of Health and DHSS contributed to the funding of an international conference on child abuse held in Dublin in August, 1996. Representatives of both Departments were on the organising committee for the conference.

The process initiated in 1995 regarding the mutual recognition of postgraduate medical qualifications and training programmes proceeded smoothly in 1996. Approval for the creation of a Specialist Register in Ireland, one of the steps required to be taken to ensure continued reciprocal recognition, was recently granted by the Minister.

There has been informal contact between the Department of Health and its UK counterpart in relation to the Lookback Programme (a blood screening and tracing programme).

Finance

Mr. Hugh Coveney, Minister of State at the Department of Finance met with Mrs Angela Knight, Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 13 June 1996 in Dublin. The meeting covered a number of topics of interest to both countries including Government Debt Management, Financial Services issues and EU issues. Officials of both countries continued discussions on these issues while Mrs. Knight paid a visit to the National Treasury Management Agency. The visit provided a valuable opportunity for an exchange of views in relation the above issues.

Public Services

Progress has been made in relation to establishing a scheme of staff exchanges between the Department of Finance and the UK Treasury. The first exchanges (one officer on each side) took up their new assignments in January 1997.

Justice

A meeting took place in Dublin on 27 September 1996 in the margins of the Informal Justice and Home Affairs Council between the Minister for Justice and the Home Secretary. There was agreement on the value of developing co-operation in the areas identified in the 1995 Report - police/drugs, legal co-operation, prisons, immigration - and it was agreed that there would be contact at Secretary /PUS level with a view to taking forward work in these areas. A meeting is to be arranged between the Secretary and Permanent Under-Secretary to agree a framework on co-operation in the fight against drugs and crime and also to provide an opportunity to strengthen links between the two administrations generally.

The Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons was also addressed by the Minister and Home Secretary who recommended a review of its operation by officials which has begun.

Environment/ Marine

Co-operation on Irish Sea Matters

At a meeting between the Minister for the Environment and the UK Secretary of State for the Environment in May 1996, it was agreed that arrangements for Irish/UK co-operation on the Irish Sea should be strengthened. Following a meeting at official level a forum was proposed in which matters of mutual interest or concern could be discussed in areas such as fishing, sea traffic, accidents etc. It was agreed that nuclear matters/difficulties with radioactive substances might best continue to be pursued through the existing Anglo-Irish Contact Group on Nuclear and Safety matters and should not be allowed to inhibit co-operation in other important, though less contentious areas. The Departments of the Marine, Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht (habitat and wildlife interests) in addition to the Department of the Environment would be involved as appropriate on the Irish side in liaising with UK officials. Meetings at 6 or possibly 12 month intervals were proposed. The response by UK officials to specific Irish proposals on this matter is currently awaited.

The main current platform for co-operation on Irish Sea issues has been that afforded by Irish/UK joint efforts on the preparation of a Quality Status Report (QSR) for the Celtic Seas area (including the Irish Sea). A joint Irish/UK

Regional Task Team (RTT) representative of the relevant Government Departments and agencies was established early in 1996 to progress the matter. The next meeting of the RTT will take place in April 1997, when complete data on the Irish Sea should be available from both UK and Irish sources.

Tropospheric Ozone

It was also agreed at the Ministers' meeting in May 1996 that both countries would put in place a mechanism to provide for the exchange of data in respect of pollution by tropospheric ozone. The necessary administrative arrangements have now been put in place.

A meeting between the Minister of State at Department of Marine and UK Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment, Scottish Office and the Parliamentary Secretary of State, UK Ministry of Defence took place on 29 February 1996 to discuss the management and monitoring of weapons dump sites. It was agreed that the Scottish Office would undertake a new study of the Beaufort Dyke dump site in order to re-map and re-chart the extent of the site and distribution of munitions within the site. British and Irish scientists co-operated on a methodology and method of analysis for the study. The report was published on 28 November 1996. The results of the report were assessed by the Ministers at a meeting on 19 December 1996 in Dublin.

Officials from the Department of the Marine met with their counterparts from the UK Department of Transport on 30 September 1996 to discuss a wide range of Presidency and bilateral issues. A further meeting is planned for London early in 1997 and it is intended that these bilateral contacts should continue on a regular basis from now on.

Seven collaborative projects submitted under the "Protection of the Marine and Coastal Environment" Measure of Maritime INTERREG will receive their first tranche of funds shortly following the meeting of the Joint Working Group in November 1996. The successful projects address marine, environmental and conservation management issues.

A scheme of co-operation for fire fighting at sea is being developed, under the leadership of the Department of the Marine and involving the Dublin Corporation fire services. The Department of the Marine has funded the construction of a module ship at the Fire Services training centre (OBI, Marino) to facilitate training for firefighters at sea. To date eighty members of the service have completed the training. The training of the Dublin Fire Service has been part-funded by the Department of the Marine.

The Department of the Marine plans to run a full exercise in the Irish Sea in 1997 involving co-operation between the Irish and Welsh fire services.

Education

There was significant co-operation in 1996 between Ireland and the UK through youth and educational links and exchanges. Léargas (the Exchange Bureau which reports to the Department of Education) has well-established and positive links with the Youth Exchange Centre (YEC) and the Central Bureau, both of which are departments of the British Council. Léargas and the YEC are jointly organising a youth conference in June 1997 in Dublin on behalf of Encounter which will examine the contribution of youth work and exchange activity to inter-community relations.

Ongoing activity in the cultural and education area is considered and co-ordinated by the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council Working Group on Education and Culture. At its last meeting on 26 April 1996 it reviewed the extensive range of educational and youth exchange schemes that operate between the two countries. It decided that an independent evaluation report of the European Studies Project should be considered at its next meeting, scheduled for 7 February. British proposals to enhance co-operation in the Youth sector by further developing youth exchanges were considered inter-departmentally in Dublin and will be further explored at the AIIC Working Group meeting.

Fisheries

On the fisheries front, there has been regular contact throughout 1996, both at Ministerial and official level. Ministers Barrett and Baldry have met in May, June and October as well as en marge at the autumn Fisheries Councils. Minister Barrett also met Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Scottish Office) Raymond Robertson in August. At official level there has been liaison both around the Ministerial bilaterals and on a regular basis in between.

Bilateral discussions and liaison over the last few months has been dominated by EU issues. The more routine co-operation (on control/fisheries protection notably) has continued to improve and it is expected that there will be more substantive focus on this in 1997.

Ireland and the UK have developed a largely bipartisan approach on tackling the problem of dumping of farmed salmon by Norway on the EU market. Both countries are jointly keeping the pressure on Norway and indeed the

Commission to get action to protect the industry from ongoing market instability. Department of the Marine officials work closely with Scottish Office colleagues on this and the liaison will continue next year.

Equality and Law Reform

There has been, on an ongoing basis, a useful exchange of information between the Department of Equality and Law Reform and the Lord Chancellor's office on family law matters, including developments on both sides of the Channel, in relation to divorce, mediation, counselling and legal aid. The Irish Central Authority for Child Abductions continues to co-operate very successfully with its counterparts in the UK. A meeting between officials of the Department of Equality and Law Reform, Department of Justice and the Lord Chancellor's Office is being arranged to discuss issues of mutual interest.

Culture and Heritage

In general, most of the structured co-operation which exists in the East/West context is of an informal nature. The National Museum has been able to avail of informal assistance from the UK. Museum and Galleries Commission in relation to the new facility being provided for the National Museum at Collins Barracks in Dublin. This valuable assistance has included advice on security and conservation provisions to be employed in the new location. Staff members have also been able to visit the Victoria and Albert Museum for familiarisation and educational purposes, owing to the strength of the relationships established between the Museum with this and other UK. Museums.

Officials of the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht met recently (check) with officials of the Department of Heritage in the UK to discuss issues of common interest. These included their respective plans for extending current deposit arrangements for books to other forms of library material (e.g. films, CD Roms).

The Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht and the Minister with responsibility for the Arts in Scotland held a meeting in Dublin on 19 December 1996. The discussion centred on film matters and Teilifís na Gaeilge. It was agreed that there could be scope for co-operation in areas such as the sharing of information on training modules in the area of film. It was also agreed that there could be scope for co-productions between Teilifís na Gaeilge and Scots Gallic television producers.

Broadcasting

Major progress was made in the area of improving RTE reception in Northern Ireland. On 10 May 1996 a joint report was agreed between the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications and the Radiocommunications Agency in London. The British Government confirmed in November that it had no objection to the improving of RTE reception in Northern Ireland, provided that this did not interfere with the reception of the UK channels. Practical issues with regard to the implementation of the technical agreement reached in May are being considered at the moment in consultation with the relevant bodies and Departments. (Check latest position - it was envisaged in 4 February letter that implementation agreement would be completed by end of February).

Defence

East/West relations in the Defence context are developing and will be further expanded as opportunity offers.

On 10 September 1996 the British Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Mr. N. Soames, M.P. met with the Minister for Defence in Dublin. The British Minister was accompanied by officials from the Ministry of Defence, the British Ambassador and the Military Attaché to Ireland. Discussion included the question of continued co-operation in the field of peacekeeping.

There is close and continuing contact between the Royal Air Force and the Air Corps, particularly in the SAR context.

The United Nations Training School Ireland (UNTSI), established as part of the Military College at the Curragh in 1995, provides courses, seminars, etc., in UN Peacekeeping and British military personnel have participated. This included visits to the School by Sir Dudley Smith, MP., President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the WEU, and by General Sir Michael Rose.

Agriculture

The Minister for Agriculture met with his British counterpart Minister Douglas Hogg, in Dublin on 3 July. Discussion centred mainly on matters that would come before the council during the remaining months of Ireland's Presidency. Included in those discussions were the situation regarding BSE and changes required in the beef regime to restore balance in the market.

Official level meetings on 22 May 1996 and 15 October 1996 focused mainly on Ireland's Presidency programme in the agriculture sector.