



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

RESPONSES OF BOTH GOVERNMENTS

to

**THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON
EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

on

MATTERS RELATING TO
1. SABHAL MÒR OSTAIG AND THE COLUMBA INITIATIVE 2. THE
WARRINGTON PROJECT

Response by the Irish Government

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the Columba Initiative, and the Warrington Project

The Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Michael Woods, TD, welcomes the report from Committee D on the cultural and linguistic links between the Gaelic speaking communities of Scotland and the island of Ireland, through Sábhal Mór Ostaig and the Columba Initiative. The Minister also welcomes the report on the Warrington project following the Committee's most recent visits. The Minister's response to the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee are set out below.

1. Sábhal Mór Ostaig

I welcome the emergence and continuing development of Irish language links between the Gaelic speaking communities of Ireland and Scotland. The diversity of initiatives and the imaginative use of resources, including new technology, at Sabhal Mór Ostaig is very impressive. In the context of paragraphs 10 and 11, regarding the issue of the availability of attractive teaching materials in the Irish language, you may be interested to learn of a current initiative in the production of Irish-medium materials.

This is a Department of Education and Science/Department of Education Northern Ireland Joint Project, for the development of materials in the Ulster dialect for use in Irish Medium Schools in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. The project is administered by the Western Education and Library Board on behalf of the two Departments and is overseen by a Steering Committee representative of both Departments of Education and Irish Language interests. It involves translation of reading materials and children's encyclopedia; production of Irish-medium educational texts, audio material and software; electronic linking of schools; provision of material for parents; the setting up of a web site etc. The first publications were launched in Derry in October 1999.

The project is funded under the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation with matching funding from both administrations North and South.

In this context, I should say that the decision of Mr. David Blunkett, MP, Secretary of State for Education, that Irish should be included among the national curriculum languages with effect from the last academic year, was also particularly welcome.

As you will know the North/South Language Body - An Foras Teanga was set up as one of the All-island Implementation Bodies under the Belfast Agreement. This Body is charged with the promotion and development of the Irish language and of Ullans (Ulster Scots). I would expect that as this Body

develops, co-operation and cross fertilisation will occur with initiatives such as Sabhal Mor Ostaig and the Columba Initiative. It may also be possible to explore joint initiatives through European Minority Languages initiatives.

2. The Warrington Project

The achievements of the Warrington project in contributing to mutual understanding and reconciliation are valuable and important and are very much welcomed by the Irish Government.

The Department of Education and Science has provided funding for the exchange activities associated with the project in the current year. The possibility of providing further support is currently under consideration. I know that the committee will appreciate the need for my Department to consult closely on this matter with colleagues in the Department for Education and Employment, particularly given the potential impact of the project on aspects of the UK curriculum. The broader context of East/West co-operation in the area of education will, in addition, provide a framework for this consideration.

The Committee may also be interested to know of the East/West schools programme. This initiative, which is operated through Léargas and the Central Bureau, aims to strengthen school partnerships and to encourage friendship and understanding between young people in Ireland and Great Britain. *Causeway*, a parallel programme in the non-formal education sector, is also managed by these two agencies and provides activities through youth organisations such as short study visits, thematic training opportunities, co-operation projects, seminars and conferences.

I note that many of the areas explored by the Warrington project are common to the Civil, Social and Political Education syllabus here in Ireland. Civic education is a feature of some of the current North/South co-operation initiatives in education. I would be interested to explore how all of those involved in this important work may benefit from exchange of information and joint approaches in the future.

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Letter from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office, to the Vice-Chairman of Committee D

19 September 2000

Report of Committee D on Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the Columba Initiative, and the Warrington Project

I was grateful to receive a copy of Committee D's report about the work of the Columba Initiative and the Warrington Project, which built on their previous report on Education and Inter-community Relations. I note that the Body agreed with the conclusions and recommendations of this report, and that both the British and Irish Governments are now required to provide their observations. I am, therefore, pleased to enclose the attached response on behalf of the British Government. This has been prepared in conjunction with the Scotland Office and the Department for Education and Employment.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Body for their careful consideration of these important issues.

I am copying this to Brian Wilson, Scotland Office and Baroness Blackstone, DfEE.

GEORGE HOWARTH
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

Response by the UK Government

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the Columba Initiative

1. The Scotland Office consulted the Scottish Executive on the report, as the Executive has responsibility for Gaelic issues in Scotland. The Scottish Executive welcomes the report as an accurate reflection of the work done by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. As you may be aware the First Minister gave the annual Sabhal Mòr Ostaig lecture on 8 September. His subject was 'Gaelic, the Highlands and the new Scotland'. He announced at the same time that the Scottish Executive has decided to grant £250,000 per year with effect from 2000101 for the Gaelic cultural activities of the college. The lecture was part of the Columba Initiative week, which featured musicians and other artists from Ireland.
2. As you may also be aware, Brian Wilson, Minister of State at the Scotland Office, is committed to the promotion and development of Gaelic language and culture, and takes a keen interest in the Columba initiative. Mr Wilson has recently been involved in discussions about the Ballycastle ferry and its potential benefit for cultural tourism between Scotland and Ireland.

The Warrington Project

3. The Committee's report on the Warrington Project is extremely informative. The DfEE is pleased to learn of the good impressions the Project made on the Committee. The DfEE is aware of the funding difficulties in the recent past and would like to update the Committee on the current position in relation to DfEE funding.
4. From Autumn 2002, Citizenship will be part of the National Curriculum for secondary schools. Citizenship education will involve developing pupils' formal knowledge of how political processes work, how decisions are made and how individuals can play a part. It will help to give them an appreciation of the value of bringing about change through negotiation, the law and government and about the importance of resolving conflict fairly. It will help them to develop the skills of enquiry, reflection and discussion; to reason, to distinguish between facts and values and to exercise social and moral responsibility. Citizenship will also provide opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and action in their neighbourhoods and communities to change things for the better. Learning about mutual respect and understanding will be an important aspect of the programme of study. The work of the Warrington Project will enhance such understanding as the example at paragraph 28 of the Committee's report describing how the exercise "finding out about others" stimulated a discussion about prejudice illustrates.
5. In February, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment agreed to allocate funding for a specific project over the next three years. This will be managed by the Citizenship team within the Curriculum Division at the DfEE. This project has not yet been launched as the Warrington Project is putting together a detailed proposal that sets out the outcomes they intend to achieve.

6. In July, officials from the Citizenship Team met with John Donlan and Professor Patrick Buckland. At this meeting it became apparent that Ireland in Schools (led by Professor Patrick Buckland) may separate from the Warrington Project. Officials from the Warrington Project assured us that the project would continue the good work of encouraging understanding of British-Irish relations and conflict resolution in schools.

7. The DfEE funding will allow the work of the project to be disseminated more widely and the opportunities for this in the new Citizenship aspect of the national curriculum provide a useful focus for this. DfEE will keep the Committee updated of developments.

8. It should also be noted that the DfEE is also supporting the Warrington Peace Centre programme. The Peace Centre focus on much the same issues as the Warrington Project, however, they are separate and they do approach the issue differently. DfEE are currently organising a secondee from the DfEE for the Warrington Peace Centre.