

Updated submission from Conradh na Gaeilge to the UN committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

May 2016



31. *In light of the Committee's previous recommendations (E/C.12/GBR/CO/5, para 37), please indicate whether the Draft Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language, mentioned in paragraph 83 of the State party's report, has been adopted and provide updated information on the progress made to adopt an Irish Language Act.*

Irish Language Strategy and Act

In relation to an Irish Language Act, a consultation held in 2015 received more than 13,000 responses, 95% of which were in favour of the implementation of legislation to protect the language. In spite of this, in March 2016 the Executive refused to bring an Irish Language Bill to the Assembly and also rejected the Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language, which was also comprehensively consulted on by community and other government departments.

Following the refusal to implement the Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language, Conradh na Gaeilge has sought leave to bring a judicial review against the Executive. The adoption of an Irish Language Strategy was one of the commitments made in the 2011-2016 Programme for Government, and the failure to implement this strategy means that they have pointedly failed to fulfil the obligations which all the parties of the executive had previously agreed on. A case was taken on a similar basis in 2015 by the Committee for the Administration of Justice (CAJ) over the Executive's failure to implement a poverty strategy, and the judicial review found in favour of the CAJ.

We would therefore demand that the British Government fulfils its own commitments under international treaties such as ICESCR, but also emanating from the St Andrews Agreement 2006 – in

which they committed to introducing an Irish language Act and a Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the development of the Irish language. It is no longer viable, given the executives recent failure to adapt the Act or the Strategy, for the British Government to argue that this is a devolved matter and that responsibility falls under Stormont. Stormont has been and will be unable to agree on legislation or protection for the Irish language, yet the international commitments the British Government has signed up to remain.

Irish-medium Education

Throughout the 2016 Assembly election campaign, constant attacks were made on the Irish-medium education sector. The Democratic Unionist Party's manifesto stated that it would 'tackle the preferential treatment of the Irish-medium education sector.' This statement was followed by a series of news articles and statements from political representatives showing total disregard for the Irish-medium sector and for the children who attend Irish-medium schools.

Local Councils

Only three out of the eleven new councils currently have an Irish language policy in place, despite their obligations under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML). An audit of the services available from local councils found that in some council areas, little or no services were available and none of the council areas met the requirements under the ECRML. In the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, the principle of 'progressive realisation' was used as a justification not to provide a bilingual website at this point in time because this was something that could be done in the future, even though one of the pre-decessor Councils had a bilingual website already. This council is generally regarded as one of the strongest councils in terms of provision for the Irish language, which shows how basic and fundamental the difficulties and lack of understanding currently are.

Council Expenditure

The average spend of local Councils on promoting the Irish language or providing services through the medium of Irish in the 2014-2015 financial year was less than 0.1% of the Council's overall spend. The most that any Council spent on Irish language provision was 0.4% of the former Omagh District Council's annual spend. Five out of the eleven new Councils reported that there had been no Council money spent on providing Irish language services in any of their predecessor Councils in the 2014-2015 financial year.

Tourism Centres

Publicly funded tourist attractions currently provide pre-recorded guided tours through electronic devices in a number of different languages. In spite of the wide range of choice that tourists have in relation to language selection, the Irish language is not included as one of the options. For example, the Titanic Centre in Belfast currently provides its guided tours in eight languages. When asked whether they would provide the same service through the medium of Irish, they stated that they have no legal obligation to do so. That said, there is no legal obligation to provide services in any particular language. They also stated that they provide services in various languages based on demand, but yet there is no provision made for the 6,000 students who are currently attending Irish-

medium schools who could use these facilities through Irish on school trips, not to mention the many parents who are currently raising their children through Irish.

BBC News, 6 April 2016

DUP pledges to stop 'squandering money' on Irish language schools



First Minister Arlene Foster

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The DUP has pledged to stop "squandering money" on Irish language schools and bring grading systems into line with the rest of the UK.

Vocational qualifications would enjoy parity of esteem with academic subjects and families supported to tackle educational underachievement.

DUP leader Arlene Foster said she wanted to give every child the opportunity to succeed.

"No more squandering money on Irish medium schools which cater for as few as 14 pupils.

"I want to build an education system that does not play favourites but is fair to every sector, every school and every child."

The unionist party has previously claimed Sinn Fein has "weaponised" the Irish language as part of a cultural war.

Sinn Fein education minister John O'Dowd has said Nelson McCausland's allegations were "nonsense".

The DUP launched a policy paper on education on Wednesday in Armagh.

BBC News, 4 April 2016

Conradh na Gaeilge: Irish language group in NI Executive challenge

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The group said the Irish language community felt 'hugely disappointed'

Irish language campaign group, Conradh na Gaeilge, is to challenge the Northern Ireland Executive in court.

It claims that the government has failed in its duty to implement an Irish language strategy.

The group said the Irish language community felt "hugely disappointed and frustrated".

Conradh president Cólín Ó Cearbhaill said a strategy for Irish had been published in January 2015.

It followed consultation carried out by Culture Minister Caral ní Chuilín.

"Conradh na Gaeilge therefore finds it unsatisfactory that the strategy has not yet been accepted by the executive, despite the progressive steps as outlined above having been taken," he said.

In a statement on Monday, the group said it was taking legal proceedings against the executive to see that the Irish language strategy 2015-2035 was implemented, as outlined under the 2006 St Andrew's Agreement.

Belfast Telegraph, 8 March 2016

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Irish words on Ballymena's manhole covers sparks unionists demand for their removal

By Nevin Farrell

PUBLISHED 08/03/2016

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The call echoes the time when fast-food giants McDonald's famously 'gave way' to unionist councillors.

Timothy Gaston, the deputy mayor of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, a member of Jim Allister's Traditional Unionist Voice party, wants metal coverings installed as part of a £4m public realm scheme in Ballymena to be replaced.

The coverings are bilingual and as well as the word 'water' they also contain the word 'uisce', which is the Irish word for water.

Several years ago the councillor's father Sam Gaston, then a DUP councillor, succeeded in getting McDonald's to replace the word 'yield' from the drive-through at their Ballymena restaurant.

He said it was the word used in the Republic and McDonald's said they had made a mistake and replaced it with the phrase used in Northern Ireland - 'Give way'.

Now, Timothy Gaston is urging the removal of recently applied water covers which feature the Irish language. He said: "I hope this is an oversight and I encourage the contractor to get these changed as soon as possible.

"Constituents have contacted me to raise questions over the use of the Irish water hydrant covers on the ratepayer-funded public realm project in Ballymena town centre." A Mid and East Antrim Borough Council spokesman said: "Our officials are currently looking into the issue of the water main covers in Ballymena, so cannot make any further comment at the moment."

The Irish language row coincided with further uproar in Ballymena in recent days about fake flowers being put in to brighten up unsightly digging on the town's streets as part of the public realm scheme to install new footpaths.

The plastic flowers on Ballymena's streets are not fantastic, says Mr Gaston. He branded them a waste of money and questioned whether the placement of the flower tubs was the best use of public cash. "If the council wants to spend money to help the appearance of the town centre I certainly would be encouraging them to use that money to make the coned areas more wheelchair and buggy-friendly," he said.

Many traders and members of the public in Ballymena slammed the fake flowers as tacky but others praised the bid to take away from the unsightly look of the dug-up streets.

The council spokesman said: "The flower displays are designed to visually soften the impact of the ongoing works."

The council has not revealed how much the fake flowers cost or how much it could cost if the 'Irish' covers are replaced.