

E.R.

FROM: M BROWN (MRS)  
PS/Michael Ancram (DENI)

DATE: 20 June 1995

To: 1. Michael Ancram - for approval  
2. PS/Secretary of State (B & L)

PA  
23/1/6  
26/6..  
C. Carver...  
C.C. 116

Contra MA

26/6..

cc Mr Carvill  
Mr Capavan (CCRU)  
Private Office (DFP)

#### FUNDING FOR THE IRISH SCHOOL OF ECUMENICS

1. Dr Geraldine Smyth, Director of the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) which is Dublin based, has written to the Secretary of State requesting a meeting to explore possible avenues of funding for the work of the School.

2. Dr John Alderdice has also written urging Government to offer financial assistance.

#### BACKGROUND

3. A background note on the ISE, details of funding, past and present, by the Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) and the Community Relations Council (CRC) are attached.

4. Despite the fact that all concerned, both North and South, agree that the ISE is a worthy organisation with laudable aims, the School has, over recent years, been in severe financial difficulties because of a lack of resources. Indeed, in May of this year it was threatened with closure and only a last minute decision by the Irish Government to provide IR£100K in emergency funding has enabled its continued existence.

5. In Northern Ireland, as well as its community outreach programmes, the ISE is associated with the 2 Universities in providing adult continuing education courses. In particular, through its link with the University of Ulster, it is involved in a 2-year adult education Certificate course and Postgraduate Degree



and Diploma courses in Ecumenical and Peace Studies. These courses may be undertaken by serving teachers who wish to study this area as part of their professional development.

6. DENI's higher education funding remit does not extend to funding the ISE directly. However, the ISE courses run by the 2 NI Universities are funded through the block grant paid by DENI which includes provision for all continuing education courses. Although no specific sums are earmarked within the grant for particular courses, it can be assumed that the level of fees charged to students will not cover the total costs of the course. In effect, therefore, the courses are subvented, directly, by the Universities and, indirectly, by Government.

7. DENI is empowered to meet the cost of course fees and travel and subsistence expenses for teachers undertaking in-service training courses and in the past some awards have been made to teachers undertaking ISE courses. Financial resources have been limited in recent years, however, and the allocation of in-service awards has focused primarily on the education reform programme. Because of this and the lower priority given to the ISE courses, the Department has not in recent years offered grant aid to teachers wishing to follow these courses.

8. Dr Smyth also claims that students who wish to do an MPhil in Ecumenics or in Peace Studies at the ISE are not grant-aided by DENI, even though the degrees are awarded by Trinity College, Dublin. Her claim about the MPhil in Ecumenics is incorrect as this course has been approved by DENI for Postgraduate Awards for at least 10 years.

9. Postgraduate Awards are made on a competitive basis because the number of applicants usually far exceeds the number of awards available. Last year, the Department received applications from 2 students wishing to undertake the MPhil in Ecumenics course. One of these applicants did not meet the minimum academic requirement of an upper second class honours degree and the other, while holding an upper second class honours degree, was unsuccessful because only those with a first class honours degree obtained an award and even some with firsts were unsuccessful.



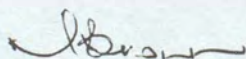
10. This year, for the first time, a student enquired about the possibility of obtaining an award to undertake the MPhil in Peace Studies at the ISE. As a new course, the Department had to consider whether it should be approved as an advanced course of study leading to a higher degree and the student was therefore requested to provide details of the course. There appears, however, to be a problem with the course structure which could result in the Department supporting a student for a postgraduate diploma which should be the responsibility of the education and library boards under their Discretionary Awards Scheme. As such, it has not been possible to approve the course but it is suggested that the ISE should contact DENI's Student Support Branch about the matter.

#### RECOMMENDATION

11. In light of the unresolved position on CRC funding and since there is no scope within DENI's funding programmes for support for the School, it is considered that no useful purpose would be served by the Secretary of State meeting a group from the ISE. The situation in relation to indirect funding for teachers and students following ISE courses can be clarified by letter.

12. Michael Ancram is in agreement with this recommendation. He feels that this is the only line to take sensibly in what could become another emotive issue of the sort which destabilises other areas of funding.

13. A draft reply to Dr Smyth is attached for PS/Secretary of State's signature together with a draft reply to Dr Alderdice for the Secretary of State's signature.



M BROWN (MRS)

Encs



## BACKGROUND NOTE

## IRISH SCHOOL OF ECUMENICS

ISE was founded in 1970 by Father Michael Hurley SJ and is associated with Trinity College, Dublin. In Northern Ireland the School is associated with the University of Ulster and sponsors certificates in Queen's University, Belfast. ISE is an international academic institution, Christian in its inspiration and ethos, interdenominational in structure and personnel. It exists to promote, through teaching, research and extra-mural activities, the unity of Christians, dialogue between religions and work for peace and justice in Ireland and abroad.

For some years it has provided a two-year adult education certificate course at centres in Belfast and Londonderry under the auspices of the University of Ulster. This involves evening classes and one residential weekend each term. ISE also provides post-graduate degree and diploma courses in ecumenical studies and peace studies. As well as research and teaching, ISE has an outreach programme, especially in Northern Ireland which consists of arranging encounters for people of differing backgrounds and promoting projects for reconciliation and renewal in the churches and society.



**FUNDING****Past funding by CCRU and CRC**

Between 1987 and 1992 CCRU provided modest grants totalling over £8k for student bursaries for ISE's courses, and for the two years 1993 and 1994, CRC provided a total of £2.4k to ISE towards student bursary awards. In addition CRC, through its Inter Community Grant Scheme, provided project funding totalling £4,250 from 1992 to 1994 for bursaries and seminars. Further assistance from CRC included a grant of £2k in 1994 towards the preparation of a report into ISE's work in Northern Ireland by the Reverend Dr Johnston McMaster.

It was recognised by ISE, CRC and other parties that significant issues and problems confronted the School's work, and this evaluation was seen as an important process in addressing these issues. The evaluation found that there was a widely held view that much of ISE's activities in NI were tangential or even irrelevant to community relations. Dr McMaster's report contained 24 "potential points for development" which, if implemented, would have far-reaching consequences for the nature and activities of ISE in Northern Ireland.

**Application to CRC for core funding in 1995**

With effect from April 1994, full policy responsibility for the core-funding of reconciliation groups transferred from CCRU to CRC. In February 1995 ISE applied to CRC for financial assistance of £28,291 towards the salary and administration costs of their Northern Ireland Lecturer in Continuing Education. The post holder is the Reverend Dr John Morrow, who has held the position for the last two years in a



full-time capacity.

In March the Council's Core-funding Committee decided to defer a decision on ISE's application until such times as the recommendations of Dr McMaster's report have been implemented. These recommendations are fundamental to ISE's approach to community relations work in Northern Ireland

Officials of the Community Relations Council and Dr Smyth are currently engaged in discussions about the implementation of the report's recommendations.

#### **Research grant under EC PSEP**

In February 1995, under the EC Physical and Social Environment Programme, ISE was offered grant of £10,000 towards a research project on sectarianism, the total cost of which is £114,500. The objectives of the project are:

- to explore factors which inhibit or encourage inter-church and cross-community relationships in NI;
- to develop models of honouring differences and of cross-community co-operation and interdependence; and
- to engage practically the dynamics and structures of sectarianism.

#### **Irish Government Funding**

In the RoI, the Department of Foreign Affairs has regularly provided a grant (IR£25k in 1994/95 and IR£30k in 1995/96) towards ISE's work for North/South reconciliation. Since Dr Smyth's appointment as Director, the School has lobbied



intensively for its funding from the Irish Government to be put on a more formal basis and pitched at a higher level. In particular the School's promoters have sought recognition by the Irish Department of Education as a third level college with commensurate grant aid. The latter Department resisted this pressure until the beginning of May when Dr Smyth threatened closure of the School unless its financial problems were resolved.

The Irish Department of Education has now agreed that the School's courses will be examined with a view to future consideration of its status as a third level college. The Irish Government has also agreed to provide emergency funding of IR£100k for this financial year in addition to the DFA grant. This would appear to have lifted the threat of closure. Dr Smyth has, however, continued to maintain the pressure for a guarantee of long term support.



## ADDRESSEE'S REFERENCE

To:	<u>Enclosures</u>	<u>Copies to be sent to</u>
Dr Geraldine Smyth OP Director Irish School of Ecumenics Milltown Park DUBLIN 6 Republic of Ireland		Hidden copy list  PS/SOS (L) PS/Michael Ancram (DENI & B) Mr Carvill (DENI) Mr Canavan (CCRU) Private Office (DFP)

DRAFT LETTER FOR SIGNATURE BY PS/SECRETARY OF STATE

June 1995

You wrote to the Secretary of State on 3 May requesting a meeting to explore possible avenues of funding for the Irish School of Ecumenics. The Secretary of State has asked me to reply on his behalf.

The Secretary of State is aware of the work of the Irish School of Ecumenics and of its unique contribution over many years to reconciliation between the main denominations and to bringing individual Christians to a greater understanding of the role which they can play in creating a peaceful society. He hopes that the work of the school can continue, developing in response to the challenges offered by the cessation of violence.

Funding through Higher Education Sources

Turning to the question of funding, the school, as you know, already receives some indirect support through the block grant paid by the Department of Education (DENI) to the two Northern Ireland universities which enables them to operate their continuing education courses. Course provision is, however, at the discretion of the universities and it is not DENI's policy under block grant funding mechanisms to earmark provision for specific courses.



On the question of in-service support for teachers wishing to undertake the School's Certificate course, I understand that it is not a matter of the course not being recognised for funding. Rather, because of limited resources, awards are currently being directed primarily towards mainstream professional development courses which relate directly to the recently introduced education reforms. Unfortunately, therefore, more specialised non-priority courses such as the Certificate course cannot be supported at this time.

Regarding your concern about grant-aid for students who wish to undertake the MPhil in Ecumenics or in Peace Studies at the School, I understand from DENI that at least in the case of the MPhil in Ecumenics that this course has indeed been approved by DENI for Postgraduate Awards purposes for many years.

As you will be aware, Postgraduate Awards are made on a competitive basis because the number of applicants usually far exceeds the number of awards available. Last year, the Department received applications from 2 students wishing to undertake the School's course in Ecumenics. One of these applicants did not meet the minimum academic requirement of an upper second class honours degree for this type of course and the other, while holding an upper second class honours degree, was unsuccessful because only those with a first class honours degree obtained an award and even some with firsts were unsuccessful.

In the case of the MPhil in Peace Studies, I have been informed by DENI that this year was the first time a student enquired about the possibility of obtaining an award to undertake the course. As a new course, consideration had to be given to its approval and a possible problem has arisen with the course structure. In the circumstances DENI has suggested that you might like to contact ~~contact~~ its Student Support Branch at Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down, BT19 7PR, to see if it is possible to resolve the matter.

#### Funding through Community Relations Sources

As you know, in the past, core funding of the School's activities in Northern Ireland has been the responsibility of the Central Community



Relations Unit, but, from April 1994, responsibility for funding of all community relations bodies was transferred to the Community Relations Council. I understand that the Council recently contributed to funding a consultant's report which made a number of recommendations about the future nature and activities of ISE in Northern Ireland and that an official from the Council recently met with representatives of the School to discuss the implementation of the report's recommendations.

As funding for community relations work in Northern Ireland is solely a matter for the Council, I am sure you will appreciate that it would be inappropriate for the Secretary of State to intervene in the Council's consideration of the future funding for the School.

Having carefully examined the position of the School in the context of the above possible avenues of Government funding, the Secretary of State is unable to identify any further provision which the Government can make. In the circumstances, he does not consider that any useful purpose would be served in a meeting with a group from the School at this time.

Yours sincerely



ADDRESSEE'S REFERENCE

	<u>Enclosures</u>	<u>Copies to be sent to</u>
Dr John T Alderdice Party Leader The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland 447a Newtownards Road BELFAST BT4 1AQ		Hidden copy list  PS/SOS (L) PS/Michael Ancram (DENI&B) Mr Carvill (DENI) Mr Canavan

LETTER DRAFTED FOR SECRETARY OF STATE SIGNATURE

June 1995

Thank you for your letter of 2 May, in which you urged the Government to offer financial assistance towards the work of the Irish School of Ecumenics.

Healing the divisions in Northern Ireland society, through policies which promote cross-community contact and the acceptance of cultural diversity, remains central to the Government's policy.

I fully recognise and am grateful to the Irish School of Ecumenics for its unique contribution over many years to reconciliation between the main denominations and to bringing individual Christians to a greater understanding of the role which they can play in creating a peaceful society. I hope that the work of the School can continue, developing in response to the new challenges of peace.

On the issue of financial assistance from the Government, I understand that the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council recently contributed to the funding of a consultant's report on the School's work in Northern Ireland. This report has proposed areas of potential development which would help to focus the School's work, complementing the activities of other community



relations bodies in Northern Ireland. Future funding for the School's community relations work in Northern Ireland is a matter for the Community Relations Council and Council officials are currently engaged in discussions with Dr Geraldine Smyth, the School's Director, about the implementation of the report's recommendations.

I am sure you appreciate that it would be inappropriate for me to intervene in the Council's consideration of future funding for the School.

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW QC MP