

REPORT FROM

THA BOORD o ULSTÈR-SCOTCH

ULSTER-SCOTS AGENCY

2007

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MISSION STATEMENT

“The aim of the Ulster-Scots Agency is to promote the study, conservation, development and use of Ulster-Scots as a living language; to encourage and develop the full range of its attendant culture; and to promote an understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots”

1. BACKGROUND TO THE ULSTER-SCOTS AGENCY

The North/South Language Body was set up as one of the North/South bodies under the Belfast Agreement of 1998. This body comprises two agencies, Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch (The Ulster-Scots Agency) and Foras na Gaeilge (The Irish Language Agency). Each of these Agencies has a separate Board; the two Boards together constitute the Board of the North/South Language Body. The Chairpersons of the Agencies are the Joint Chairs of the North/South Language Body – otherwise known as Tha Boord o Leid in Ulster-Scots and An Foras Teanga in Irish.

The Body has a Board of 24 members appointed by the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC). Of those members:-

- 16 are drawn from among persons appearing to NSMC to have an interest in, or experience of, matters relating to the functions of the Body in relation to the Irish language; and
- 8 are drawn from among persons appearing to NSMC to have an interest in, or experience of, matters relating to the functions of the Body in relation to Ullans and Ulster-Scots cultural issues.

The Agency is responsible to the North/South Ministerial Council, and in particular to the two Ministers, in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Dáil Eireann, whose remit includes language and culture. During the period of suspension of the Assembly the Agency reported to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

2. THA BOORD/THE BOARD

During 2007, the Board of the Agency comprised the following:-

Mark Thompson	(Chairman)
Dr. Ian Adamson	
Jim Devenney	(term ended December 2007)
Dr Linde Lunney	(term ended December 2007)
Eddie O'Donnell	(term ended December 2007)
Alistair Simpson	(term ended December 2007)
Robert Stoker	(term ended December 2007)
Pat Wall	(term ended December 2007)

3. STRATEGIC THEMES

The Agency has developed four strategic themes for its programme of work, namely:-

3.1 Linguistic Development

“To support Ulster-Scots as a living language and to promote its use and development.”

3.2 Culture

“To be a key contributor to the development of Ulster-Scots.”

3.3 Education

“To establish partnerships with the education and community sectors to promote the study of the Ulster-Scots language, culture and history.”

3.4 Understanding of Ulster-Scots

“To develop the public understands of the Ulster-Scots language and culture.”

4. REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The Agency continues to make real progress in its programme of work. The continuing growth in Ulster Scots activity is both exciting and encouraging and tremendous credit must go to the community for their enthusiasm and commitment.

The Board and Agency are grateful to the sponsor Departments and the NSMC for their continued support during 2006.

We would wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those Board members whose term of office finished in December. Many of them were involved with the Agency since the formation of the Board and the progress made by the Agency is tribute to their dedication and commitment.

The Agency's Corporate Plan 2004 – 2007 contains four strategic themes and based on these specific targets were set in the 2006 Business Plan and essentially these have been met.

Following the restoration of devolution a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council Language Sector was held in Altnaveigh House Newry in October.

4.1 Linguistic Development:

The Agency continues to work on promoting the use of the Ulster Scots language in Ulster, and to promote, in other parts of the island, awareness of the heritage of the language. The work of the Ulster Scots Academy Implementation Group, in preparation for the establishment of an Academy which will study aspects of the language in Northern Ireland, will be a valuable adjunct to the work of the Agency.

Following on from the previous year's publication of poems written in the nineteenth century a book of contemporary poems by Wilson Burgess was published and has proven to be very

successful. It is vitally important both in terms of raising awareness and increasing the use of the language that we can show the language both in historic and modern context.

In excess of thirty language summer schools were organised during July and August and proved extremely successful. The various community groups involved in running these displayed a real enthusiasm for this work.

A very successful “Ulster Scots Library week” was organised involving twenty libraries and 1500 schoolchildren who were introduced to Ulster Scots storytelling.

The Director of Language and Education continues to work on the development of the community based programmes.

The language content of the Ulster Scot newspaper was increased over the year. This aspect of language promotion is particularly important and will be further developed. Language awareness classes were delivered to a number of community groups and other organisations such as DVLNI

4.2 Culture

The Agency was responsible for a widespread programme of cultural activity in 2007; widespread both in terms of the range of activity and of the coverage of the whole province.

Over the past year the Agency engaged with and provided financial assistance to a number of new groups or organizations, demonstrating the continuing growth and development in the area. We recognize of course that this brings extra pressure on our budget and are conscious that Agency resources must be carefully husbanded, and if possible augmented, in order to supply the demands.

The Agency continues to implement its Financial Assistance Scheme with great care, and closely monitors events funded by the Agency. We are pleased that this monitoring reveals very clearly the determination of the numerous groups funded by the Agency to use the resources provided effectively and efficiently. We appreciate the real need for extra

resources to be made available to these groups to help them develop their potential, and we note with satisfaction the work of the Agency Development Officers in assisting the groups to secure funding from other sources.

In general terms we recognise that the Ulster Scots community is still not adequately developed in terms of infrastructure and skills, and we are moving to find ways to address this. Again our Development Officers are actively engaged in moving this forward. In March we organised a conference to develop skills within groups to run a community festival. The Agency also organised festivals in Bushmills and Enniskillen involving local community groups in a mentoring project to provide them with the requirements of organising an event and empowering them to take their own projects forward. There is clear evidence that this strategy has been successful with an increase in Ulster Scots activities in both areas.

Interest in Dance remains extremely high but we are still experiencing major difficulties in providing sufficient numbers of qualified teachers particularly in Highland dance with teachers having to be brought in from Scotland each week. Accordingly the Agency has prioritised dance teacher training.

2007 saw the 700th anniversary of the refuge of Robert the Bruce on Rathlin Island from whence he returned to Scotland eventually achieving independence after the Battle of Bannockburn. The Agency marked this anniversary in a variety of ways and it was particularly pleasing to be able to support the local community on Rathlin in their commemorations.

The Agency continues to enjoy an excellent relationship with the Ulster Scots Heritage Council which has an important role in the development of Ulster Scots.

4.3 Education

The material for primary schools produced by the Ulster Scots Curriculum Development Unit at Stranmillis University College has been placed on the Agency website www.ulsterscotsagency.com/weans and made available as a website and is proving to be

extremely popular. During the year work finished on the secondary schools material and again this will be made available as a website.

The Adult language course was made available to community groups in 2007 and a programme to equip teachers to deliver this in the community proved to be very successful allowing language awareness classes to be rolled out.

The Institute of Ulster Scots Studies at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster continues to deliver a number of papers and publications.

The Institute has also been instrumental in taking forward a project to establish a heritage and research centre at the former Presbyterian Manse, Monreagh, and County Donegal. Towards the end of the year an academic review of the work of the Institute was undertaken by an external consultant and a positive report was received.

4.4 Public Awareness and Understanding

During the year Ms Gillian Gilmore commenced employment with the Agency as our Information and Communication Manager. This is an essential position for a promotional agency and one of Gillian's first tasks was to draw up a communications strategy for the Agency. This was approved by the Board and will form the basis of our work in this area going forward.

The Ulster Scot newspaper continues to be a most effective medium for the dissemination of information. The "Crack" column has been discontinued in the Belfast Newsletter having served a useful purpose as an introduction to the written language for many people. The Agency continued to actively pursue a policy of taking Ulster Scots to the wider community during the year and again of the major successes of this outreach was our presence at the Irish National Ploughing Championships. Attendance at other events such as the Royal Ulster Agricultural Show at Balmoral and Belfast International Horse Show in the Odyssey arena were equally successful.

The single most successful event of the year however was undoubtedly the “David Healy Fitba Day” in Newtownards. Using the medium of football and an iconic figure like David Healey the Agency was able to bring Ulster Scots language and culture to over 2000 young people. The resultant media attention was phenomenal and provided a perfect stage to promote Ulster Scots.

During the year the Agency offered community the opportunity to avail of Ulster Scots radio using the medium of Restricted Service Licences. This pilot scheme proved to be both successful and popular both with the community groups involved in running the stations but with the audience.

A survey was conducted by Customer and Marketing Surveys Ltd on behalf of the Agency following on from a similar survey conducted the previous year. The findings indicated that 86% of respondents believe it is important to recognise cultural diversity. 70% of respondents consider it worthwhile to have an organisation that promotes Ulster Scots whilst 75% believe that an increased emphasis on Ulster Scots offers opportunities to develop cultural tourism.

4.5 Grants Offered

Throughout the year the Agency supported a wide range of Ulster-Scots cultural development through the financial assistance scheme.

Whilst the majority of applications received were to fund cultural events, linguistic development, education and the development of the public’s understanding of Ulster-Scots were also financed.