

WEDNESDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2005

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Present

Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury, B  
Fowler, L (Chairman)  
Maxton, L  
Peston, L

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**Memoranda submitted by Foras Na Gaeilge, Ultach Trust  
and Ulster-Scots Heritage Council**

**Examination of Witnesses**

Witnesses: **Mr Ferdie MacanFhailigh**, Assistant Chief Executive, Foras Na Gaeilge, **Mr Jim Millar**, Director of Language and Education, Ulster-Scots Agency, **Aodán Mac Póilin**, Director, Ultach Trust and **Mr John MacIntyre**, Member, Ulster-Scots Heritage Council, examined.

**Q781 Chairman:** Welcome, thank you very much for coming in. You perhaps know the position with us, that we have already presented and published one report on the BBC – and it is the BBC that we are particularly concerned about and concerned with. This is the second part of our inquiry where we are going into a number of areas which we did not have time to devote to in the first part. I think it might be useful, to get this conversation going, if you would all introduce yourselves and say what you are doing and what your role is. So why do we not start from you, Mr MacanFhailigh, and move down to Mr Miller?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** My name is Ferdie MacanFhailigh and I work for Foras Na Gaeilge. We are one part of the cross-border language body, the other part being the board of Ulster-Scots, which is represented by Jim, here. We were set up on 2 December 1999 – it came out of the Good Friday Agreement. We have an all Ireland remit in promoting the Irish language. We advise governments, government departments, statutory bodies and public organisations.

We also provide funding for projects and groups that promote the Irish language, and we support Irish-medium education, the teaching of Irish, and we are also involved in the development of new terminology for the Irish language, the production of dictionaries and the production of teaching materials for both Irish-medium education and the teaching of Irish as a subject.

**Mr Mac Póilin:** I am Aodán Mac Póilin; I am the Director of the Ultach Trust, an organisation set up in 1990 to promote the Irish language throughout Northern Ireland with government funding. We are the first organisation to get government funding spent specifically to promote the language. We have a very strong cross-community ethos – that is code for one of my jobs being to try to sell the Irish language to the Protestant and Unionist community. We have had some success; we take the credit for the growth in the number of Protestants who claim knowledge of the language. It has gone from 5000 odd in 1991 to almost 11,000 in the 2001 consensus. So we take the credit, whether we deserve it or not, for that. We are quite a small organisation but because we were sort of respectable we took it upon ourselves to try to advise government, and the very first thing that we did was to publish a report on Irish-medium broadcasting, Irish-medium television, which came out in March 1990, and we have produced five reports since then. So the broadcasting area is one we are particularly interested in.

**Mr MacIntyre:** I am with the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council. I am on the board, I am not a full-time worker, and I work for a living! I did not mean that pejoratively. The Heritage Council is an umbrella group which covers language but it also covers all aspects of culture, dance, music and all that sort of thing. There really is very little being done in relation to Ulster-Scots, and public funding has not come down to us to do any of the things which my two colleagues have been describing for the Irish language. There is a committee sitting at the moment to set up an Academy for Ulster-Scots, to engage in a whole language-planning

programme. As well as that, I am a member of the Ulster-Scots Language Society and sit on their committee. I also sit on the Board at the Ulster-Scots Academy, which is a voluntary community academy, self-financed. I am also Vice President of the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, and I was President of the UK Committee of the European Bureau.

**Mr Millar:** My name is Jim Millar. I am the recently appointed Director of Language and Education at the Ulster-Scots Agency, and the aim of the Agency is to promote the study, conservation, development and use of Ulster-Scots as a living language. The Agency is the other part of the cross-border language body that Ferdie alluded to earlier.

**Q782 Chairman:** Let us start with some basic questions. What proportion of the community in Northern Ireland are Irish language speakers?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** According to the last census figures there are 10.3 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland who have a command of Irish; that is 167,490.

**Q783 Chairman:** When you say a “command” of Irish, does that mean they speak it as a first language?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** The census is a very blunt instrument. The question is asked, “Can you read, write, understand, speak?” and you tick the box. The census does not go into usage or the level of command; it is a very, very blunt instrument.

**Q784 Chairman:** In your experience would the 167,000 be at the top end of how you would define it?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** Yes, it would be at the top end.

**Q785 Lord Maxton:** Just on that very point, we did get a slightly different definition, that those who speak it fluently were about 75,000 and the rest had some knowledge and usage of it.

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** As I said, the census is a very blunt instrument; it does not ask for the level of usage or the level of command.

**Mr Mac Póilin:** Some analysis has been done of it. The best analysis was done by a man in Wales called Diarmait MacGiolla Chríost, and his analysis comes out with something where he has between 30,000 and 40,000 at the top level of fluency and another 30,000 or so with moderate fluency in speaking. A large number of people have a receptive knowledge; it is always easier to understand a language than to speak it. So the rest of that would be people with different levels of comprehension.

**Q786 Chairman:** So Lord Maxton's point about 75,000 being fluent probably is not a bad estimate?

**Mr Mac Póilin:** I would be reasonably happy with that. In terms of broadcasting and comprehension of an audience, you would of course put it higher.

**Q787 Chairman:** What about Ulster-Scots?

**Mr MacIntyre:** The official figures are between 35,000 and 100,000. 35,000 was a survey done in 1999. There have been four pieces of work which have been done by the voluntary sector and we consider it to be probably close to 100,000 speakers. We are talking about native speakers, people who learn it in the home, learn it from their parents and the previous generation. People do not learn Ulster-Scots in school, they do not learn it through the media, it is simply generationally transmitted.

**Q788 Chairman:** There is no census figure?

**Mr MacIntyre:** No. We wanted a census but it was not given to us. It depends where you draw the boundary. Those are, we would consider, native speakers who would be fluent and would probably use it every day in the home.

**Q789 Chairman:** Would you use it every day in the home?

**Mr MacIntyre:** Not every day – I live in Belfast, and my children – but I would use a lot of the words every day, particularly with the children because they do not have a good knowledge of it anyway, and even my knowledge is not great. On top of that most English speakers would have some knowledge of it; they would probably have maybe 100, 200 words, and they would unconsciously use a lot of the grammatical constructions that come from Ulster-Scots. So, for a lot of English speakers Ulster-Scots can be accessible; it is not like a totally differentiated language where you cannot access it. So it depends where you draw the boundary, but if you are being purist and within a native speaking population then you are looking at that figure, 35,000 and 100,000.

**Q790 Chairman:** Mr Millar, could you tell me a bit about the language itself?

**Mr Millar:** The language of both English and Scots and indeed Ulster-Scots originated from the same old English dialects. Northumbrian Anglo-Saxon or old English was a basis for Scots. While Mercian Anglo-Saxon became the basis for English. So up until the 1600s in fact Scots was a completely separate diplomatic language from English. At the advent of the Union of the Crowns in 1603 what happened was that English became the priority language and so it became the language of State, in fact, and as a consequence of that, it meant that Scots became undervalued, and obviously after the period at the time of the Plantation, when a large number of Scots came to Ireland, they brought with them their own spoken language. So Ulster-Scots is a spoken language and it is a language, as John has quite rightly indicated, that has passed down through generations, in much the same way as Scots in Scotland has. So it is a separate language from spoken English.

**Q791 Chairman:** When was it last taught in a school?

**Mr Millar:** It has not been taught in schools, that is the difficulty.

**Q792 Chairman:** For the last 400 years or whatever?

**Mr Millar:** Yes, I would say that would be correct, and in fact there has been a continual process by which children who have used the vernacular and people who have used Ulster-Scots in schools in Northern Ireland have been encouraged not to use it and there has been a complete erosion of Ulster-Scots. The big difficulty that John has alluded to as well is that we do not have any real figures of how many Ulster-Scots speakers we have in Northern Ireland. The figure of 100,000 came from a piece of research that was conducted in 1963 by Professor Bob Gregg, who indicated and has researched that there was somewhere in the region of 100,000 people in three distinct areas: that was in East Donegal, the central part, which included Coleraine to Antrim, and there was another section in Northdown. That piece of research did not do any survey work to find out how many native speakers there were outside of those areas. But since 1963 there has been no real significant research. The piece of work that John referred to, that survey that said there were 35,000 speakers, that was the N.I. Life and Times survey, but that was conducted in 1999. What was asked there was, “Do you speak Scots or Ulster-Scots, or do you know someone who does?” That represented something like two per cent of the population in Northern Ireland who regarded themselves as Ulster-Scots speakers, and that roughly in 1999 meant about 34,000 people.

**Chairman:** I am going to allow my colleagues to come in, and I want to come on to the BBC and what they are doing, but there may be some points coming out of this.

**Q793 Lord Maxton:** As someone who lives in Scotland I could almost define myself as a Scots speaker, despite my accent, despite the way I was brought up, despite the way I speak because in your terms I use words and expressions which are from the Scottish language rather than from the English language. My three sons, born and brought up in Lanarkshire, speak, I suppose, what you might term Lanarkshire-Scots, but they were not taught it – they were never taught it at school. There is Ayrshire-Scots; there is the Burns language. I do not

see what the difference is between that sort of Scots and your sort of Scots. Is there a difference? People in Scotland do not tend to speak – there are a few but not very many.

*Mr Millar:* There are. In fact there are a number of regional variations of Scots, yes.

**Q794 Lord Maxton:** There are, yes, but no great drive to make it part of the curricula and have it taught or to have it broadcast, as far as I am aware.

*Mr Millar:* With respect, I think that is not entirely accurate. I suppose it really depends on who one speaks to, but I speak to a number of people who are very keen on actually retaining this language, and I think it has a certain significance in Northern Ireland that perhaps it may not have back in Scotland. I think the difficulty about our language is that if we lose this language – and that is why the BBC has such an important part to play in this, and it is not like a building being knocked down because we can rebuild the buildings – if we lose Ulster-Scots in this community then it has gone. It is a part of a cultural tradition, a cultural heritage, it is part of our history, and that is why it is so important.

**Q795 Lord Maxton:** Why would it be gone in the modern technological world? There is no reason why we should not these days ensure that it is recorded. It may be that eventually it might die out – and one would hope maybe not – but essentially you could form a massive database of all the information, you could get the best present Burns’ speakers in Scotland and record all the Burns’ poems and so on and also get native speakers to speak it and talk about it and then record it, and once you have that you still have it.

*Mr MacIntyre:* The danger is it will stop being used as a community language because of the pressures on it. It is not taught in school, it is only in occasional programmes on the media; it has no status because the “establishment” do not give it any status. It tends to be the people who are least touched by education that speak it the most and are the most fluent in it. There are also political and social issues in here as well. The Ulster-Scots community are coming

under very strong assimilationist pressures here, not just in the use of English but also in Irish as well, and there is a will there to try and maintain that identity. Our situation is very different from Scotland; in Scotland you are the majority population there, you are not under the same assimilationist pressures that we are under. So it is really about trying to ensure some sort of community cohesion here, getting tolerance, about avoiding division, avoiding misunderstanding and avoiding resentment. All those negative factors come into play here and that is what this is about.

**Q796 Chairman:** Let us go from that, which is very useful, to what BBC Northern Ireland can do about it, basically. Let me ask you both in turn, do you actually think that BBC Northern Ireland's current provision is adequate for the different communities here? What about the Irish language?

**Mr Mac Póilin:** As you know, the UK is a signatory of the European Charter for Lesser Used Languages and the Irish language community was more or less unanimous in accepting that the radio broadcasting service for Irish speakers in Northern Ireland was adequate; there are absolutely no complaints about that.

**Q797 Chairman:** That is roughly about five hours a week in the BBC?

**Mr Mac Póilin:** Yes, 250 hours a year. And there was again universal agreement that the television service was woefully inadequate.

**Q798 Chairman:** Which is almost five hours a year, as I understand it.

**Mr Mac Póilin:** Yes, on a good year.

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** In 2004 it was five hours.

**Mr Mac Póilin:** The year before that it was three, the year before that it was two, the year before that it was 26.

**Q799 Chairman:** We can take it that it is not a high priority.

**Mr Mac Póilin:** It is not very high. One of the difficulties for the broadcasters in this is the fact that less used language broadcasting has to come out of the BBC budget, basically, and has to fight for a place within the budget. And if you add the number of Irish language programmes within the current budget then you have to cut something else, and there is going to be a loss. So the burden of the submission that we made to you and to Ofcom and all the other bodies was that the languages needed protection through the Charter. This is what happens in Scotland, this is what happens in Wales, that the Charter gives the BBC a duty to provide this, and that then protects them and means that they do not have to fight with all the other services. It also means that we are not depriving any of the rest of the community of their service, if it is brought in as requirement from Westminster and if there is a budget line set aside for it.

**Q800 Chairman:** If I were the BBC or if I were the Chief Secretary to the Treasury or something like that, what would you say about demand? Is there a demand for this to take place? Obviously you feel strongly on it, but what is the objective evidence of demand?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** We have the census figures; we also have in Irish-medium education at the minute just in excess of 4,000 kids in Northern Ireland in Irish-medium education. The Council for the Promotion of Irish-medium Education, if they meet their strategic objectives by 2008, there will be somewhere in the region of 10,000 kids involved in Irish-medium education. It is a burgeoning sector; it is a growing sector. From when the question was first put in 1991 on the census regarding the Irish language the numbers have grown. The Irish speaking population, whom we are here to represent, feel that the service provided on BBC television is non-existent, practically – five hours annually. The service for the schools sector, Irish in Irish-medium education is part of the core curriculum. There is a provision for the English-medium sector in *Bitesize*, for Irish at GCSE. This is the only place where Irish is

studied for GCSE; they have provided that provision. But in terms of the Irish speaking population here – and let us not forget that in England, Scotland and Wales there are also a large number of Irish speakers from the republic of Ireland, who have emigrated, who are there, and that those people also deserve a service to be provided by the BBC.

**Mr Mac Póilin:** Could I add to that that the only firm figures we have are the responses to the Ofcom 3 consultation? There are more responses on the Irish language from here than on all the rest of the issues that were raised. I think it was something like 53 per cent of the responses related to the Irish language. I am not just talking about myself and Ferdie's commitment to this, this is the only objective figure we have, and the level of the response to the consultation on the Renewal of the BBC Charter has been very, very high, and we can pull out those figures for you.

**Q801 Chairman:** Yes, we would be interested. Just tell us about what your first feelings are as far as Ulster-Scots is concerned.

**Mr MacIntyre:** I did circulate that statement.

**Q802 Chairman:** You did.

**Mr MacIntyre:** So we have that and I will refer to it. In 2005 there will be ten and a half hours of broadcasting Ulster-Scots, and it will be mostly on the radio. I do not know what the TV is, it might be one hour, it might be two hours, but that is all it is. It comes on an occasional basis, people do not know when it is going to come; it comes for maybe four weeks and then it stops and then another series runs later on. We feel that there has to be a minimum level of provision and we would say that a programme time has to be raised, and we would put 30 minutes as a reasonable programme length, and that has to be regular.

**Q803 Chairman:** Before you go into what it is that you actually want in detail, what is the evidence of demand?

**Mr MacIntyre:** In the paper that I did give you the evidence we have is that *The Night o Ulster-Scots* programming there was the third highest popular programme that year; it came third after a Celtic v Rangers match and after a *Country Times* programme. The figures for the other programmes we know were high but those figures are not in the public domain so we do not know exactly what they are, and the BBC could supply those figures. The feedback we are getting is that the viewing figures are high and the feedback we get in the community is that we know a lot of people watch it and they tell us how much they enjoyed it. So we get that sort of analytical feedback as well. Some of us who have been active with Ulster-Scots have appeared on some of these programmes and you always have people coming up and talking to you about them. Even a programme that I appeared on three years, I still have people tapping me on the shoulder and talking to me about it. So there is an audience there for it.

**Mr Millar:** I think one of the significant difficulties with regard to making an assessment of how much programming should be available on the BBC is the assessment of the level of Ulster-Scots speakers within Northern Ireland and within the nine counties of Ulster generally. So one of the big difficulties, I think, is the census. Whenever you ask Ferdie and Aodán those questions about how they would justify it, they both go back to the census and say, “This is the census that tells us exactly how many speakers there are.” I think there is a real need for us to establish the actual extent to which there is a significant interest and enthusiasm for Ulster-Scots. People like John and myself are convinced that there is a significant level of enthusiasm. One of the difficulties with Ulster-Scots is that it is so close to English and some people who are fluent speakers, who are native Ulster-Scots speakers – and you, sir, probably will recognise this sentiment – some people do not regard themselves

even as Ulster-Scots speakers because they think they are speaking bad English, and all of that information that is contained in their heads is because of the way that the educational system has used this. So whilst John might say that there are 34,000 or 35,000 Ulster-Scots speakers in Northern Ireland, that figure could be grossly underestimated and it could be ten-fold as much figures on the actual Ulster-Scots speakers. In terms of the BBC, I think there is a great issue about confidence for people who are speakers, to use Ulster-Scots because it has been so undervalued. I think that the role that the BBC has to play in that is in terms of allowing people the opportunity to see that there is a valued linguistic tradition within this country. John is quite right to indicate that there is ten hours of language on BBC radio – and that is in stark comparison to over 240 hours for Irish language. We do not expect that both languages, because they are at different levels of development, should have the same type of commitment from the BBC, but we expect that as time goes on the gap between Irish and Ulster-Scots should begin to close. But I think in fact the reality is that the gap is increasingly becoming larger, and that would be of some concern. There is a background in the BBC in terms of Ulster-Scots programming, but clearly there is no long-term joined-up strategy in the way in which the Ulster-Scots programmes are developed. Ten hours of language, there was another 19 hours of programming that could be linked to some form of Ulster-Scots culture, whether it was *A Touch of Tartan* or *Pipes and Drums*, or whatever, but all of those programmes are organised by different producers and it shows that it is a separate set of individuals within the BBC who are dealing with those issues. What we would like to see would be some systematic, some rigorous way of organising the development of Ulster-Scots programmes within Northern Ireland to reflect the growing enthusiasm and interest that John has already highlighted for Ulster-Scots.

**Q804 Chairman:** Has it ever been better than it is now? Have the television and radio ever covered Ulster-Scots better than they do now?

**Mr Millar:** I think whenever we look at the level of provision it is virtually zero, and that has to be under all the legislation. Aodán talked about the European Charter and Ulster-Scots is recognised within the European Charter and it is recognised within the Good Friday Agreement.

**Q805 Chairman:** Yes, but if you go back to 1990 would it have been any different?

**Mr Millar:** No.

**Q806 Lord Peston:** Just going back to the adequacy of the provision at the moment. I did not ask these questions this morning because they did not occur to me until hearing this morning's evidence, but two aspects of provision which are not exactly programmed occurred to me whilst I was thinking about this morning. Is any bit of the *Radio Times* published in Northern Ireland in Irish?

**Mr Mac Póilin:** The titles of the programmes, if they are in Irish.

**Q807 Lord Peston:** But there is no Irish version or even sub-version of the *Radio Times*?

**Mr Mac Póilin:** It would not bother me what language they are published in.

**Q808 Lord Peston:** It would not? You would like programmes in Irish but you do not care whether the listings are in Irish?

**Mr Mac Póilin:** No, I do not care.

**Q809 Lord Peston:** Would you therefore take the same view about Teletext? Again, when I was flicking through Teletext I could not see any Teletext in our hotel. Is there a Teletex in Irish?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** No. The only thing that is available in those terms in Irish is on the website. BBC have *Bitesize* revision for GCSE and they have produced a GCSE Irish in that.

In terms of Teletex, *Radio Times*, nothing. Again, as Aodán said, in terms of what language the TV, the *Radio Times* is published in, I do not care.

**Q810 Lord Peston:** No, but you do care about education and promoting the language. I am a devotee of Teletext, I would rather watch Teletext than any of the news programmes because it gives me all I want; it just tells me the simple news and that is good enough for me, and I do not want any comment. But if I were trying to promote the Irish language I would very much want Teletext to be in Irish because it is an ideal form; it is easy to understand and it would help the younger people in particular to get used to the language. But that does not bother you?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** I would not object to it, but I would not see it as a priority.

**Lord Maxton:** Do RTÉ run a Teletext, or TG4? I hear from Mr O Ciardha that young people are not great users of Teletext.

**Q811 Lord Peston:** I did not realise it was an old person's thing, I must drop it immediately!

**Mr Mac Póilin:** Could I pick up on a point arising from what Jim said earlier, about losing it, and support what he is saying? The BBC can do much more Ulster-Scots material with the culture and linguistically without the displacement element that will happen with Irish. I have been arguing for a long, long time that Ulster-Scots should be in the mainstream within BBC Northern Ireland because it is accessible to most of the population here. Most people who are brought up here have a latent understanding of Ulster-Scots; there is a fair degree of intensity. Most Ulster-Scots people I will understand and I would like to see a lot more of them on the TV and I would like to see it mainstream, and it should happen. Irish is different in that the language is so different from English that it requires a different genre, but I would totally

support what Jim is saying about this very important thread of our culture being seen in the most important medium.

**Q812 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** It is interesting what you have said because I wanted to ask that of Mr Millar. When you were talking about the Ulster-Scots programmes I was wondering whether it was as much about culture as language. Is it certain events?

**Mr Millar:** I think there is a difficulty in as much as whenever BBC programmers say, “We have presented some Ulster-Scots programmes”, so the definition of what is an Ulster-Scots programme therefore becomes important. What we are saying is that strictly in terms of language issues I think it is important that we recognise there are ten and a half hours which represents 20 half-hour programmes on BBC Radio dedicated solely to people speaking Ulster-Scots and talking about Ulster-Scots issues, and that is the extent of it. I think to a certain extent there may be some massaging of figures whenever we talk about some of the other programmes. That might be a small part of the cultural element towards linking language with Ulster-Scots culture, but the hard reality of life here is that we have ten hours of Ulster-Scots language. To pick up again on the point that Aodán made, one of the great things about Ulster-Scots is that it offers an opportunity for people from both sides of our religious divide in Northern Ireland to engage in their own personal linguistic development, and I think that is sometimes an issue that is understated in this country. So I am not necessarily saying that because someone is an Ulster-Scots speaker *de facto* they are Protestant or a Unionist or whatever label you wish to ascribe to that. It covers the whole spectrum of life. It is mainly a rural condition in terms of people coming from particular backgrounds who have an understanding of the use of Ulster-Scots.

**Q813 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** But are you suggesting that some programming is called Ulster-Scots programming, which is not in your stance?

**Mr Millar:** Yes, absolutely, that is exactly what I am saying, that there is some Ulster-Scots programming which is defined as Ulster-Scots but really it is not. What we are talking about here is language programmes and language programmes for me, by definition, are Ulster-Scots speakers talking about Ulster-Scots issues.

**Mr MacIntyre:** Could I come in with a comment there? Some of the programming is what we call the animal in the cage syndrome. It is where a producer or production staff from outside the Ulster-Scots community makes a programme on Ulster-Scots or about it, but it is actually made by the outside community. We have compared it to putting an animal in a cage and poking it with a stick to see what it will do. What we really need are people from the Ulster-Scots community, trained in production, who can then make programmes for the community. I am not saying we should not use outside producers but there needs to be a balance here, and that balance does not exist at the moment.

**Q814 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** Is that something that you think is the responsibility of the BBC?

**Mr MacIntyre:** The BBC are the people who transmit the material and commission it, so they are in a position to influence it.

**Q815 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** Moving on to the case of Gaelic, Ofcom suggested that there should be an enhanced relationship between the BBC and TG4 in order to encourage more time spent. Is that the way forward, do you think?

**Mr Mac Póilin:** It is not the only way forward. There are certain elements in the service that can only be done by the BBC, for example the education service. There is also an element in that it is extremely important within this society that basically Irish broadcasting is not entirely the purview of a station that is broadcasting from another state, from a neighbouring friendly country, or state anyway.

**Q816 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** If we are talking co-productions?

**Mr Mac Póilin:** The fact that the BBC has begun to broadcast in Irish – and it is only recently, previously it has broadcast in Welsh since the 1920s, and even before there was a BBC the BBC was doing it – that impact, of a major institution within the United Kingdom broadcasting on lines that were previously excluded, has made an enormous difference to the perception of that language in society. It has led to the normalisation, acceptance of that language in society, so it is very important for us that the BBC does things on its own for that reason. Also, because basically we are licence payers here as well and we deserve a service from our licence fee as opposed to somebody else’s licence fee. I would welcome cooperation but I think that the BBC also needs to do things on its own in education and in general programming as well, just basically to show that Irish speakers are part of this society. It is a symbolic significance but it is extremely important. There are also elements and programmes and interests that the society here has – and I speak as a northerner – and we actually do not share all that much with the south. There are particularities here that people in the south might not be interested in. So TG Ceathair’s priorities and broadcasting priorities may not necessarily – and I know they do their best, but they do not live here – recognise what we as a community need as a television broadcasting service.

**Q817 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** Of course we heard earlier that there was a great pool of talent in the south; there was no lack of people to make Gaelic programmes. Is that true in the north?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** In terms of the north television production is very young. The Irish Language Broadcast Fund has been set up by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, essentially to educate, train and grow what is a very, very young sector here in the north. There is, as you have said, a larger pool in the south, which the BBC could tap into. In terms of what Aodán was saying a minute ago about co-productions with TG Ceathair, yes, the

BBC could do that, but just to emphasise the point that he made we are talking here about a normalisation of the language, and the BBC as a public sector broadcaster has a responsibility to the Irish speaking community, but it also has a responsibility to enable non-speakers of Irish to gain an insight and an understanding of the language and its attendant culture.

**Q818 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** Of course it would be broadcast by the BBC.

*Mr MacanFhailigh:* Yes.

**Q819 Lord Maxton:** But in Wales and in Scotland they have had ring fencing funding, particularly in Scotland, with Gaelic – in Eastern Wales it is a fair proportion of the population – not just from the BBC but also from STV. The new Scottish Parliament Executive has taken positive action to try and encourage it and have even made it now a second language in the sense that signing and whatnot is to be in Gaelic, and yet despite all that effort being made it is now below 60,000 people in Scotland who speak Gaelic. And the rest of us, if you like, are putting a large amount of money into preserving and keeping that 60,000 people’s language for them. I think there are some Scots who begin to doubt whether that is the wisest course to take, and that it might be better to say, “It is up to you to preserve your language, rather than for the rest of us.”

*Mr MacanFhailigh:* In terms of numbers here in Northern Ireland, in the census in 1991 there were 143,000 and somewhat; in 2001 there were 167,000 – it went up from nine per cent to 10.3 per cent. So in terms of blunt numbers, if you like, here in Northern Ireland the numbers are growing. But I think that there is another element here, and that is an element of an understanding of a culture and of a way of life, if you want to call it that. I will go back to what you said earlier, the reference you made to taking speakers of Scots and good speakers of Burns Scots and recording them. The only thing I can say for that is – Latin. It is not a

living language but it is there, it is recorded. What we have here are living, vibrant languages and if we lose those then we become poorer both linguistically and culturally. What we are seeking from the BBC is working towards the normalisation of languages. It is something that is happening all over the world; the globalisation, if you like, of English and Spanish and so on is being resisted, and I think it is very important that we take those minority languages and cherish them for what they are, because it is from those that we came.

**Q820 Lord Peston:** You have covered almost everything I was going to ask, but since you have mentioned globalisation, another thought I had in mind is that you are not the only part of the world where people are trying to preserve a language as part of preserving their culture – the Basques are ones that immediately come to mind. Do you have contact with people like the Basques and others? Do they have, for example, their own television station?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** We have, facilitated by the Bwrdd y Iaith Gymraeg, the Welsh Language Board, set up a network of official language boards including ourselves and Foras Na Gaeilge, Bord na Gaeilge in Scotland, Bwrdd y Iaith Gymraeg in Wales, the Basques, the Galicians, the Catalans, the Friesians ---

**Q821 Lord Peston:** They were the other ones I was going to ask you about.

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** The Swedish Finns, so we have a network of language boards which were set up last year, 2004.

**Q822 Lord Peston:** My question was not really that – that is the background – but what about their access when it comes to television and radio? I am interested in the Basques because of football and all that, but is there a great deal of Basque language television, as far as you know, and do they press for it?

**Mr Mac Póilin:** Basically, how long do you have? I could keep you here until this time tomorrow and we would not have finished that particular subject. The services for different minority language communities even within the European context are so various that some do better than us and some do much worse than us. That is the simple answer to that. I would like to come back to a deeper question that was raised here, which is the question of the value of minority language and their cultures within the society within the United Kingdom. It is a question of cultural ecology. The approach that I take to it is that there are civilisations within this state and within this society that have survived for the last 2000 years and they are in danger, they are weakening; they are weakening because of the enormous force of a more dominant language that is the majority language within the community. Any society that does not treasure its minorities, does not treasure the value of those civilisations, those very ancient civilisations – even if they are weak, you do not go round and count heads and say, “There are only 50,000 of you, we will not do anything else for you.” The value of that diversity, the historic diversity within the community is of enormous importance, I think, and any civilised society that ignores it and lets its minorities die without making an effort to support them, should not be called a civilised society, it is as simple as that. What has been done for Gaelic, I would support; what has been done for Welsh I would support, and basically what we are saying is it should be done here as well.

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** I would just like to make one point. What we are talking about here is a question of access, and if this was a question of disability access we would not be having this conversation that we are having today, and this is a question of access for those people.

**Q823 Chairman:** And Ulster-Scots, everything that has been said, you would probably agree with?

**Mr MacIntyre:** Absolutely, totally agree, and it is about human ecology. You have to realise that we as a race colonised every part of the earth up to the Poles – except the South Pole –

and we have done that because we have been different, and here we are in a situation where we are actually trying to edit out the difference and that difference is what made us successful as a species, and we are actually undermining ourselves as a species by not respecting that difference and encouraging it. The other thing is that it is rather silly to believe that one language, whether it is English or Spanish, can contain the sum total of human knowledge. There is no one language that can contain the sum total of human knowledge; all languages can contribute to human knowledge. If you kill off one language you are killing off a part of that human knowledge. The other point I would like to make is, we are not talking big money here to do these things. For instance, on Ulster-Scots radio station all we actually need is for Ofcom to give us a licence because we have three business models that we could follow: one would be a commercial model, one would be maybe a community voluntary model accessing existing funding bodies. So even to give us that you would be sustaining difference. And it is about will; in many cases it not about resources, it is about will.

**Q824 Lord Maxton:** Do you have your own website?

*Mr MacIntyre:* Yes.

**Q825 Lord Maxton:** Do you have voice radio on that?

*Mr MacIntyre:* We are trying to set that up.

**Q826 Lord Maxton:** That obviously is at least one way in which you can get to your communities.

*Mr Millar:* I think the interesting thing about that is you have just highlighted the strength in radio, in as much as radio is about speaking and about listening. I take very much the points that both Aodán and Ferdie have made, and also John, about language development. I think the significant difference between Ulster-Scots and Irish is that we are in the position that

maybe Irish was in 40 or 50 years ago, where Irish was seen as a lower status type of language. The role that the BBC can play with regard to supporting the sustainability of Ulster-Scots is incredibly important. If young people can tune into radio and they can hear this language that their parents speak, that they might have some notion of speaking also, and that is on radio, then that means such a significant amount to making the difference between the language sustaining or struggling through for the next number of decades.

**Q827 Lord Maxton:** A separate radio is one thing, but having part of the normal radio programmes as part of using either of the languages in that, for what are minorities, is questionable, is it not? A separate one I can fully support.

**Mr MacIntyre:** BBC Northern Ireland has to reflect the population it serves and the situation is that it is a minority but still quite a substantial minority who speak either Irish or Ulster-Scots, and it is not asking for a lot, but that they would get maybe a portion of broadcasting time. We are talking maybe an hour at the most a day out of nearly 24 hours' broadcasting time, and that these programmes are not inaccessible to the whole community. I do not speak Irish but one of the radio programmes I listen to is a music programme and the link is done in Irish, but it is the same as any other programme, it is popular music and I listen because the music selection is good. There is no reason why you could not do an Ulster-Scots programme where the links are done in Ulster-Scots.

**Q828 Chairman:** We will come back to you in a moment, and I will come back to Lord Maxton as well because he has a number of last questions, but let me ask you one question which I think is quite interesting. There is a BBC survey that found that it was the younger people in Northern Ireland who are more positive about the Irish language programming than people over 35. Is that your experience?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** If we look at it in terms of the growth of Irish-medium education and the growth of the popularity of Irish as a subject in mainstream education, for want of a better term, the growth of Irish in the last 20 years has been phenomenal. So the majority of Irish speakers in the north are younger people – and I would like to class myself as one of those! But that is the age of the majority of the population who speak Irish.

**Q829 Chairman:** Is that the same with you? Is it younger people who are showing the most interest?

**Mr MacIntyre:** The honest answer is we do not know; there is no census information.

**Q830 Lord Maxton:** You do not gather any yourselves?

**Mr MacIntyre:** We have very limited resources; we do not have the funding.

**Q831 Chairman:** What is your impression?

**Mr Millar:** One of the threatening issues is that there is some recent research being conducted at the University of Ulster at Londonderry and primary results about the use of Ulster-Scots would indicate that the age range of the people who are using Ulster-Scots is in the upper age range. That, if you like, brings a significant problem to the language because if Ulster-Scots is being used by people in the older age range then that, if you like, accelerates the difficulty that is facing Ulster-Scots. If you have a language that lives only through people who are in their 50s or their 60s then that is a very worrying sign.

**Q832 Chairman:** So you are in a rather different position in fact to those speaking the Irish language?

**Mr MacIntyre:** Part of the issue about Ulster-Scots is that because the census figures are not available this is purely speculation.

**Q833 Chairman:** It sounds as though it might be a more urgent issue, is another way of putting it.

**Mr MacIntyre:** Yes, I would say it is an extremely urgent issue.

**Lord Maxton:** I have to say I find that my sons who speak, as I say, Lanarkshire-Scots have probably three different oral languages: they have one at home with me, one at work and one in the pub at night, and they are almost different in what they say at different points. In one of them they will be fairly broad Lanarkshire and in the rest they may not be. We have covered the questions on dedicated services.

**Q834 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** Mr McIntyre, is it absolutely necessary with the future of digital switchover and lots and lots of new channels and so on that it is the BBC that supplies what you are asking for?

**Mr MacIntyre:** My answer to that would be that we need our own dedicated channel; that we cannot depend on the BBC because if you are a BBC Radio Ulster English language channel all they can do is to give some sort of token provision to reflect the diversity of our society; they cannot give us the sort of broadcasting that we need. We need our own dedicated channel.

**Q835 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** Would you be happy with that? Would that be sufficient? You are not fighting for a BBC voice, necessarily?

**Mr MacIntyre:** We have nothing at the moment. If we do not have the BBC we just have nothing.

**Mr Millar:** I wonder if I could make a contribution? Whilst I accept in the main what John is saying I think we have to recognise that the BBC is the single biggest broadcaster in this country and in Northern Ireland and also in the UK, and I think the validation of the language would be seen much more significantly from contributions from the BBC, and I think whilst it

is right and proper that in the fullness of time we seek an opportunity for our own language broadcasting medium I think that the BBC has a responsibility to its licence fee payers, but also I think it has a significant role to play in making sure that that broadcast is available throughout the whole of Northern Ireland.

**Q836 Chairman:** Let us sum up on this. Basically what you are both saying is that you are underrepresented on the BBC quite substantially and that an urgent way forward is for that representation to be increased. In fact is it fair to say that you cannot really think of any other single measure which would do more to help?

**Mr Millar:** Absolutely, and radio in particular and the way that people develop their language skills is through listening, speaking, reading and writing. So the very start of that learning process is listening and that is what radio provides.

**Q837 Chairman:** That would be your view as well?

**Mr MacanFhailigh:** In terms that we have 250 hours of radio at present annually, and given the level of development that we are at, we are working towards a normalisation of the language. As a public service broadcaster – and I said it before – the 10.3 per cent of the population is deserving of a better service than is being provided. But the BBC also has a responsibility to non-speakers, as I said earlier, to enable them to gain an understanding of the language and of the attendant culture. We are talking here about the normalisation of a language, and what Lord Maxton referred to earlier on, and Lady Bonham-Carter, to dedicated channels. We are talking here about normalisation of languages and acceptance of languages, especially in terms of Northern Ireland where there are perceptions – let us be honest about this – of languages. The perceptions that people have of languages comes from the baggage that they have in their heads regarding those languages, that is where it comes from. Language is merely a series of grunts which we have learned to interpret in one way,

and it is when the perceptions of those languages are put on them that languages start to have different meanings for people. So in terms of the normalisation of languages here I think that the BBC has a responsibility as well to provide an enhanced service for the Irish language.

**Q838 Chairman:** You have all put your case extremely well, extremely thoroughly. Is there anything that we have missed out in any way, any point that you feel you have not sufficiently emphasised? I think we have the message.

*Mr MacIntyre:* I think the one issue that maybe was not raised was broadcasting and the European Charter, how you would align the obligations of the Charter with broadcasting, and I would broadly make the point that we need to try and align those obligations.

*Mr Mac Póilin:* We have said it before and you have probably picked it up, but I would not mind saying it again, that the only way that what we are proposing can be protected within the structure is actually for it to be written into the White Paper.

**Q839 Lord Maxton:** You did say that right at the beginning.

*Mr Mac Póilin:* I did, and I just say it again!

**Chairman:** A good journalistic thing is to start your article and finish it with the same point. Thank you very much indeed, we are very grateful for your evidence; we have learnt a lot in a short space of time. If we have any points perhaps we could write to you with them. Thank you very much for coming this afternoon.