



Karen Bradley
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

18th March 2019

Dear Secretary of State

We are writing to you to urge you to re-visit the commitment made in 2006 in the St Andrews' Agreement which stated: "The Government will introduce an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland and the work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish Language."

Two subsequent government-led public consultations in 2007¹ showed overwhelming support for legislation, with the majority of respondents favouring the rights-based proposals drafted by the NGO, POBAL.² A further public consultation in 2015 once more endorsed the legislation and the POBAL model. However, the Northern Ireland Executive failed to agree on the introduction of the legislation which would have brought protections for the Irish language into the line with those that already exist for the Welsh in Wales and Gaelic in Scotland.

The political parties in Northern Ireland have been unable to come to agreement on a range of matters and the devolved institutions remain suspended. The Secretary of State has recognised that this situation has created a democratic vacuum and has already acted through Westminster legislation to address decision-making in Northern Ireland.

We believe that, given that there are no functioning devolved institutions currently operating in NI, the Secretary of State has an opportunity and indeed, a responsibility to address the issue of Irish language legislation sooner rather than later. We urge you to reflect upon the commitment made in the 2006 St Andrews' Agreement and as a matter of urgency revisit this issue with the political parties in Northern Ireland. Whilst we are mindful and respectful of the devolution settlement in Northern Ireland the possibility of legislation being enacted at Westminster in the absence of a functioning administration at Stormont should be part of these proposed all-party and cross community discussions.

Ultimately, we wish to again highlight our support to the principle of introducing an Irish language Act in keeping with the commitment made in 2006. This would bring the protection for one of the primary indigenous languages of these islands into line with Welsh in Wales and Gaelic in Scotland. As a last resort, it's our view that a failure to progress this matter within the context of the devolution settlement should result in legislation being enacted here at Westminster.

Yours

Conor McGinn MP

Guto Bebb MP

David TC Davies MP

Angus MacNeil MP

Liz Saville Roberts MP

¹ 2007 Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Summary of Responses, March 2007

² POBAL, Acht na T  Gaeilge Eisi int II/ The Irish Language Act Issue II,
<http://pobal.org/uploads/images/Acht%20na%20Gaeilge%202012.pdf>