

Way

FEDERATION OF IRISH SOCIETIES

CONFERENCE ON YOUTH AFFAIRS

ENTITLED

"THE WAY AHEAD"

VENUE: THE INVERNESS COURT HOTEL, LONDON

DATE: 21ST NOVEMBER, 1981

TIME: ARRIVAL 10.30 A.M FOR 11.00 A.M

AN INVITATION TO RESPOND

- The Federation enjoys a membership estimated at 100,000.
- Three years of discussion and debate has resulted in an unreserved commitment to a Youth Movement within the Federation.
- There is encouragement, goodwill and enthusiasm for making Youth Affairs a primary objective of the Federation.
- We have a policy statement on Youth Affairs.

We are now happy to accept this challenge and to set about translating aspirations into reality.

You are invited, therefore, to attend our First Conference on Youth Affairs, to discuss that reality so that we can work together to achieve it.

It is our hope and expectation that every affiliated Society will be represented at this Conference.

A detailed Programme will be sent to each applicant.

The main objectives of the Conference are:

1. To explore and appreciate the implications of the Federations policy statement on Youth Affairs - a copy of which is enclosed.
2. To plan an action programme in the light of that policy.
3. To discuss the future development of the movement.

It will therefore be primarily a working Conference with practical outcomes.

Each applicant is invited to submit (see Application Form) items which s/he would like the Conference to discuss.

Aer Lingus has agreed to generously support and subsidise this Conference. Mr. Pat Casserly has offered hotel accommodation at a greatly reduced rate. We express our sincere thanks to both.

Please now respond by completing the attached application form.

I look forward to meeting you at the Conference.

Jim McGrath
Officer for Youth Affairs

FEDERATION OF IRISH SOCIETIES

CONFERENCE ON YOUTH AFFAIRS

AT

THE INVERNESS COURT HOTEL, LONDON

ON

21ST NOVEMBER, 1981

Application Form

NAME OF YOUR SOCIETY: **IRISH IN BRITAIN**

PART I

I have been appointed the Officer for Youth Affairs of the above Society and I wish to attend the Conference

SURNAME: FIRST NAME(S):

ADDRESS:

Also attending the above Conference will be one member of our Youth Group; that person is:

SURNAME: FIRST NAME(S):

ADDRESS:

PART II

An Officer for Youth Affairs has not been appointed by our Society but we would like an adult representative to attend the Conference

SURNAME: FIRST NAME(S):

ADDRESS:

We would also like one member of our Youth Group to attend:

SURNAME: FIRST NAME(S):

ADDRESS:

* Conference fee includes cost of lunch and evening meal

PART III

Apart from the above or additional to the above, the following people would like to attend the Conference:

Please supply names and addresses:

.....

.....

.....

.....

CONFERENCE FEE

For Applicants in Part I and Part II the Conference Attendance fee is £4.50 each.

For those listed in Part III the Conference Attendance fee is £6.50 each.

Please find enclosed cheque/postal order payable to The Federation of Irish Societies to the amount of £

CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS: FRIDAY, 6TH NOVEMBER 1981

ITEMS I WOULD LIKE CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS (bearing in mind the purpose of this Conference):-

PLEASE return this completed application form to:
Jim McGrath

FEDERATION OF IRISH SOCIETIES

FROM: JIM McGRATH, OFFICER FOR YOUTH AFFAIRS

"IRISH STUDIES IN BRITAIN"

Ivan Gibbons, Editor of the above Journal says:

"Irish Studies in Britain was published last March and by any standards has proved successful in that nearly all copies of the first issue were sold out. I think this shows that there is great interest in and demand for such a publication.

However, as you can appreciate, this is a risky business and we have only just broke even on this issue. To ensure regular issues (the next one is in October) we have to rely entirely on the few advertisers we can attract.

I wonder would the Federation help ..."

As Officer for Youth Affairs the answer to Ivan must be "Yes" for the sake of the young people of the Irish Community in Britain. "Irish Studies in Britain" will help members to become aware of resources available towards implementing education programmes within affiliated Societies. It is also a very useful and powerful means of influencing the education system in this country to provide an informed and unbiased Irish dimension to their educational curricula in Schools, Colleges and Institutes of Higher Education.

Therefore we would suggest:-

1. That each Society might place a permanent order for one or more copies of "Irish Studies in Britain" to be available to its members.
2. That each local Society might purchase a limited number of copies for distribution to Headmasters of Schools and Principals of Colleges within its catchment area

OR you may indeed have much more supportive ideas when you discuss this issue in your Committee.

"IRISH STUDIES IN LONDON"

This is a directory of evening classes in Irish history, language, literature, music, dancing etc. This is published every August. This publication must be of interest even to members not living in the London area.

For further information please contact:-

Mr. Ivan Gibbons

(Phone:)

Federation of Irish Societies

YOUTH AFFAIRS

Copyright: Federation of Irish Societies, 1981

Edited by Jim McGrath, Officer for Youth Affairs

The Federation wishes to acknowledge its debt to Aer Lingus in the presentation of this policy document and in preparations for the inaugural youth seminar.

Copies may be obtained by writing to:

Officer for Youth Affairs
Federation of Irish Societies

Price: 50p (incl P & P)

1981

With the reduction of emigration from Ireland, and the decrease of the number of native-born Irish in this country, responsibility for the Irish community's survival in Britain will pass to those of the second generation. The Federation of Irish Societies is committed to a policy of promoting a positive sense of Ireland amongst the youth of the Irish community in Britain - encouraging a commitment to, and involvement in, the affairs of that community for the safe keeping and sharing of its unique heritage. To implement its policy statement on youth, of January 1981, the Federation agreed a basic support structure and has appointed an Officer with responsibility for Youth Affairs.

A Question Of Identity

There is evidence that complete assimilation into the host community, with a total loss of Irish identity, is all too easy.

There were many reasons - historical, social, economic, political, and geographical - why the Irish in Britain lacked the motivation to set up powerful political and social institutions to achieve ethnic identity and to promote and represent the interests of its members.

The growth of Irish societies and the establishment of the Federation since the war is an expression of intent to halt the progressive absorption of the many Irish in Britain. All efforts are of value but the problem calls for a greater degree of co-operation between the Federation, affiliated Societies and all other bodies in pursuing our common aim. There should be no loss of cultural heritage and identity in the pursuit of integration and the love of both countries.

Youth

The Federation's clear priority is to ensure that persuasive opportunities are created for young people to find a positive sense of Irish identity.

It is recognised that the family can be the most powerful and influential social unit to ensure the transfer of Irish cultural heritage and identity. It is equally recognised by the Federation and its affiliated Societies that the efforts of the home can be supplemented by appropriate associational, cultural and educational programmes.

The pursuit of "all things Irish" should not be selfishly achieved in isolation by young members of the Irish community but should be shared in association with young people in Britain and other ethnic groups in this country.

Youth Groups in Affiliated Societies

The Federation sees an immediate need for the formation of youth groups within affiliated Societies. These should be properly constituted within the existing framework of each Society and each should be encouraged to appoint an Officer for Youth Affairs. This Officer will be an adult with an interest in working with young people and who has skills, sensitivity and attitudes to work effectively.

Young people should be provided with opportunities to participate in and contribute to the affairs and decision-making of their parent Society.

The potential for "discomfort" in this process is obvious. Most Societies were founded as a meeting place for Irish people living in a culture that was often alien to them. An Irish youth policy should not be seen merely as a last ditch attempt to keep things the way they have always been. Young people are bound to want change. Their cultural preferences and outlook will be different to those of the first generation.

Change is inevitable but the Federation finds refreshing evidence that it will be a change of emphasis rather than direction. Encouragement of positive change - giving our youngsters a real sense of expression and participation in Society affairs - will see the survival of our community with its original aim intact, rather than its degeneration into mere social clubs.

As far as possible, youth groups should be self organising, self supporting, self financing and able to meet the needs of their members. Parent Societies should play a supportive, rather than controlling, role.

Youth Within The Federation

A natural development following the formation of youth groups within affiliated Societies would be the creation of a National Youth Movement, promoted by the Federation.

To initiate, facilitate and develop this movement the Federation has appointed an Officer for Youth Affairs. This Officer will enjoy the support of representatives from each affiliated Society; from Regional representation; and from a Standing Sub-Committee of the Federation on Youth Affairs.

Such a movement will provide a national platform for youth to voice their representative opinions..... a means of helping youth identify and provide for their social, cultural, sporting and personal needs..... a channel for associating with other groups regionally, nationally and internationally..... and practical opportunities for education through participation in Federations affairs.

Association

The foundation of any youth movement is its basic unit at local level. The life and energy of our youth movement will be dependent on and measured by the vitality of youth groups with affiliated Societies.

It is desirable for various reasons that young people associate beyond their local environment. The Federation will encourage and promote opportunities for regional and national association. It will also seek international links, especially with young people in Ireland.

Education

To help young people living in Britain to gain an informed and balanced understanding of "all things Irish" and to learn to appreciate Irish culture and heritage, it is essential that emphasis be continually placed on the educational bias of all activities and programmes.

Programmes that are primarily educational, whether resourced by the state or by Irish Societies, should be presented so that young people will find them attractive, relevant and enjoyable.

The span of opportunity, the methods of presentation and the vast variety of relevant subjects makes this field of education most exciting and is waiting to be fully exploited.

Training

Influencing the lives of young people is a responsible and privileged trust. It is essential that adults who wish to be involved in working with young people receive initial and on-going training and support. Opportunities for such training can in many instances be negotiated locally but the Federation shall sponsor events at regional and national level.

Structure

The minimum of structure is proposed to initiate a Youth Movement within the Federation. Apart from the appointment of a National Officer for Youth Affairs there will also be the appointment of a Standing Sub-Committee based on regional representation.

The function of this group will be to initiate, promote, co-ordinate, develop and encourage all aspects of work with young people within the Federation and its affiliated Societies. It will be concerned with all age groups up to the age of twenty-five but will focus its attention primarily on the 14-25 age range. Young people between the ages of 14 and 18 tend to formulate their own independent views of life and may come under pressures to conform exclusively with their non-Irish contemporaries.

We have deliberately included the 18-25 age range because their talents are often not utilised in the management of Society affairs. We consider that the Irish community has need of their fresh and sometimes critical approach to the "establishment".

Conclusion

This outline report can only be a beginning. It must seek out those who share our conviction that the Irish community in Britain holds an inheritance which is timeless and beyond price. If it is not to be lost, this sense of Ireland must be accepted as a living tradition by our youngsters. The Federation of Irish Societies has taken its first step in this direction.