

UK Government acts on Identity and Language legislation for Northern Ireland

- The Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Bill will deliver measures to promote and respect Northern Ireland's diverse national, cultural and linguistic identities.
- It will provide for the recognition and protection of the Irish language and the development of the Ulster Scots and Ulster British tradition.
- It will create two Commissioners and an Office of Identity and Cultural Expression, which will benefit everyone in Northern Ireland.

The Bill will amend the Northern Ireland Act to allow for the establishment of three new public authorities in Northern Ireland, including an Office of Identity and Cultural Expression to promote cultural pluralism and respect for diversity, alongside Commissioners on the Irish language and the Ulster Scots/Ulster British tradition.

The Irish language, which will be granted official status in Northern Ireland, will be protected by a new Commissioner, tasked with developing best practice standards for public authorities to follow.

These standards, which will be subject to approval, will help to facilitate interaction between Irish-speaking service users and public bodies.

A further commissioner will work to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots and Ulster British tradition, and will promote Ulster Scots services provided by public authorities.

Following Executive failure to progress the legislation through the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland committed to bringing the legislation through Parliament, which will be delivered today.

In addition to the legislation, the UK Government has also announced the delivery of two of its own New Decade, New Approach commitments.

The Government is officially giving recognition to Ulster Scots as a National Minority under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, a status already accorded to Irish, Welsh and Scots, and since 2014, Cornish, among others.

The Government will also provide £4 million to An Ciste Infheistíochta Gaeilge, the Irish Language Investment Fund.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis said:

“The introduction of this Bill represents a significant milestone, not just in the continued delivery of New Decade, New Approach, but in laying down a new cultural framework for the people of Northern Ireland.

“This legislation is carefully balanced, as negotiated by all parties, to ensure everyone in Northern Ireland benefits.

“Not only will the legislation faithfully deliver on the measures within New Decade, New Approach, it will also, importantly, ensure the principles of respect and tolerance, as stated in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, continue to be realised.”