



Official Languages Act 2003 Language Scheme 2019-2022

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Chapter 1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This is the Department of Rural and Community Development's first Language Scheme which will be in effect for the period of 2019-2022 and has been prepared in accordance with the Guidelines outlined under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003.

1.2 Preparation and Content of the Scheme

The Department of Rural and Community Development is guided by the principle that the provision of Irish language services should be based on a range of factors, including the following:

- the level of demand for such services;
- the importance of a proactive approach to the provision of services in the Irish language;
- the resources, including human and financial resources, and the capacity of the Department to develop or access the necessary language capability to provide these services

This Scheme has been formulated with the intention of ensuring that all relevant obligations under the Official Languages Act relating to the Department of Rural and Community Development are being fully addressed on an incremental basis, through this and future schemes. The time and effort put in by all concerned in this process is acknowledged and appreciated.

1.3 Commencement date of the Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It commences with effect from 08 March 2019 and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years or until a new scheme has been confirmed, whichever is the later.

Chapter 2 Overview of the Department of Rural and Community Development

2.1 Mission Statement

The Department's mission is:

To promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland

Our vision is that all communities will have the opportunity to grow and develop economically and socially. To help bring this about, the Department will work across Government to:

- Create the conditions to support increased economic opportunities and local employment in all areas of the country
- Deliver schemes and programmes that support the revitalisation of towns and villages
- Improve access to services and social networks that ensure a high quality of life
- Enable communities disadvantaged by location or social issues to reach their full potential now and in the future
- Support all communities to be able to have a voice in shaping their own futures and addressing their common goals

2.2 Aims and Objectives

The Department of Rural and Community Development aims to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.

The Department's main offices are located in Ballina and Dublin. The main telephone numbers and other contact details for the Department are available on the Department's website <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-rural-and-community-development/>.

Detailed information on the activities of each functional area and unit of the Department is available on the Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-rural-and-community-development/>

2.3 Our vision

Our vision is that all communities will have the opportunity to grow and develop economically and socially. To help bring this about, the Department will work across Government to:

- Create the conditions to support increased economic opportunities and local employment in all areas of the country
- Deliver schemes and programmes that support the revitalisation of towns and villages
- Improve access to services and social networks that ensure a high quality of life
- Enable communities disadvantaged by location or social issues to reach their full potential now and in the future
- Support all communities to be able to have a voice in shaping their own futures and addressing their common goals

2.4 Co-ordination of rural and community policy

Rural and community development is a Government priority that involves work being undertaken by a large number of Departments and State agencies. The co-ordination of responses across Departments to the needs of rural Ireland and local communities and the development of policy designed to further the economic and social advancement of these areas of society will be a key function of our Department. This will be done through collaboration with our Government colleagues at all levels, up to and including Cabinet Committees and through Ministerial engagement, with the objective of ensuring that Government policy takes a holistic approach that considers all communities, regardless of location or demographics.

Chapter 3 Summary of Irish Language Services for 2019-2022

3.1 Details of Services provided in English only, or bilingually

The Department is committed to providing the best quality services possible in both official languages to its customers. Due to the nature of the role of the Department and its functions, it generally does not have a high level of contact with, or provide services to, members of the public on an individual basis. Accordingly, the Department provides its main services primarily through English. However, arrangements will continue throughout this Scheme to ensure that the facility for provision of Irish language services to the public remain in place.

3.2 Customers

The Department's customer base reflects the wide range of sectors and activities which fall within its remit. The Department is committed to delivering quality services to all of its customers in accordance with the 12 Principles of Quality Customer Service. In accordance with regulations made pursuant to the provisions of section 9(1) of the Official Languages Act 2003, the Department will continue to comply with its statutory obligations. The Department's Customer Charter and Action Plan will include our commitments in relation to the provision of services through Irish.

3.3 Correspondence

In accordance with section 9 (2) of the Act, all written correspondence (letters and email) will continue to be responded to in the language in which it was received. The Department will maintain a log of all Irish correspondence received through Irish for monitoring of demand and to record organisations with a preference for communication in Irish as outlined. Standard messages on the Department's e-mail system, such as disclaimers of responsibility, will continue to be both in English and Irish as per the Department's standardised e-mail signature.

3.4 Telephone Communication with the Public

The Department will ensure that if a member of the public wishes to conduct their business through Irish by telephone that an official in the Department will be available to provide such a service when required. We will respond in Irish to callers who wish to speak in Irish, where possible, or offer to have the call returned within one working day by a member of staff who can deal with queries in Irish. The Department has compiled a list of Irish speaking staff to assist members of the public in this regard.

In accordance with the principles of quality customer service, the Department will continue to ensure that switchboard operators and receptionists, who are the first point of contact with the public, will provide the name of the Department in both English and Irish (Irish name to be given first).

3.5 Speeches

Speeches or statements given by the Minister, in the Oireachtas or elsewhere, in addition to speeches by senior officials, will continue to be made available in the language in which they were delivered. This will include speeches which have been made in Irish.

The Department will undertake to include an Irish salutation (opening and/or closing remarks) in a number of speeches made by the Minister (and Minister of State) and which are being uploaded to the Department's website.

3.6 Stationery

Headings of stationery, including notepaper, compliment slips, fax cover sheets, file covers and other folders, labels and envelopes are provided in Irish or bilingually. Where an automated response generates from a shared email account, the footer will contain information in both the Irish and English languages.

3.7 Signage

All new signage in the Department of Rural and Community Development will be in Irish or bilingual. Where signage already in place requires updating, this will be completed over the lifetime of this Scheme, in accordance with the regulations (S.I. No.391/2008) made pursuant to the provisions of section 9(1) of the Official Languages Act 2003.

3.8 Internal Communication

- Accommodation and facilities will continue to ensure that all public notices in the Department's buildings contain text in both English and Irish;
- As new staff ID badges and business cards are replaced, the Department's name will be published in both the Irish and English language.
- New staff will be provided with an induction pack containing a copy of the Department's agreed scheme

3.9 Media Communications

The Department's Press Office will:

- Over the lifetime of the Scheme, issue 20% of its press releases in both Irish and English; (These will issue simultaneously)
- Provide that Press Office staff will be facilitated in attending Irish language courses during office hours

3.10 Official Invitations

The Department will continue to ensure that invitations to appropriate events hosted by the Minister for Rural and Community Development will be issued in both official languages.

3.11 Replies to Freedom of Information Requests

Material relating to FOI requests (other than requests for personal information) which is published on the Department's website will be published in the language in which the request was received.

3.12 Departmental website and Computer Systems

Material provided by the Department on the Gov.ie website will be available through English and Irish in relation to the general material relating to the Department and its services.

Certain material, as indicated above, e.g. speeches, publications generated by other Departments/bodies, and any material which the Department does not propose to publish bilingually, will be available in English only on the website.

- All current computer systems will be Irish language compatible.
- Any new computer system being installed will be fully capable of handling the Irish language.
- The public body will continue to actively use technology to improve the provision of bilingual services

3.13 Publications

Where the Department produces information leaflets and other materials of general public interest, these will be produced bilingually.

3.14 Service to Gaeltacht Areas

The Department will continue to provide services through Irish to members of the public in Gaeltacht areas as the need arises.

Chapter 4: Improving Language Capability

The Department is committed to ensuring that there are adequate language resources within the Department to provide the required level of Irish language service. The Human Resources Learning and Development unit will provide the opportunity for staff to develop their proficiency in the Irish language in addition to the provision of adequate language resources and specific training where appropriate.

4.1 Human Resources

In order to assess the level of Irish in the Department and publicise staff available to provide Irish language services, Human Resources and Learning Development unit will:

- On an annual basis, undertake a survey of staff available to deal in Irish with members of the public who will volunteer to provide such a service as the need arises;
- Publish on the Department's intranet site the names of officials proficient in the Irish language and their standard in both oral and written Irish;
- Promote Seachtain na Gaeilge and other Irish language events in the Department including information sessions and presentations provided in Irish;
- Engage with the Organisational Structure and provide relevant information as part of the systematic monitoring and review of the Scheme.

4.2 Training and Development

In its commitment to provide appropriate training and development for all staff, the Department will:

- Continue to be committed to making available opportunities for staff to attend accredited Irish language training courses, as resources permit, including those afforded via training provided directly to the Department;
- Promote all forms of Irish language further education through the Department's Refund of Fees Scheme, including the facilitation of staff in attending training during office hours;
- Make specific or targeted Irish language training available, as required, including to all reception staff and service officers to increase their awareness of basic greetings and knowledge of the Irish language;
- Publicise the One Learning Centre, the new shared learning centre for the civil service, which will provide a range of services for staff including those pertaining to the Irish language;
- Include a focus on the Department's Language Scheme at induction seminars in order to ensure that all new entrants are made aware of all commitments under the Scheme;
- Continue to provide staff with access to language resources including those available online and via Departmental access to various library facilities;
- Highlight the availability of all Irish language training and resources within the HR section of the Department's new intranet site;

- In addition to the availability of training, reception staff/service officers will be provided with basic greetings in Irish to assist with visitors who wish to converse in Irish.

4.3 Designated Irish Language Posts

During the period covered by this Scheme, the Department will assign an Irish Language Officer who will have responsibility for matters relating to the Official Languages Act 2003. The role of the Irish Language Officer will be to oversee implementation of the Act and Scheme in the Department.

4.4 Translation Services

The Compliance Unit will ensure that the Department has an appropriate Irish language translator in place and all Department staff will be made aware of this service.

Chapter 5: Publicising of Agreed Scheme

The contents of this scheme will be publicised by means of:

- Internal Circulation within the Department
- Press Release
- Circulation to appropriate bodies and
- Notification and publication of the scheme on the Department's website

The Department will take every opportunity in our day to day interaction with our customers to promote and publicise the services we provide in Irish through the following means:

- Directly informing customers on a pro-active basis of the option of dealing with the Department through Irish
- Prominently listing these services on our website;
- Signifying on selected guidelines, leaflets and application forms, that these documents are also available in Irish, unless presented bilingually;
- Giving equal prominence to Irish and English language materials.

A copy of this scheme has been forwarded to Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga.

Chapter 6: Monitoring and Review

The implementation of the scheme will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by the Organisational Development Unit within the Department. The Department will monitor requests for services through Irish received through its website and telephone systems.

Within the context of its responsibilities in relation to coordinating the implementation of the Department's Scéim Teanga and Customer Service Action Plan, Organisational Development Unit will provide reports once a year to the Management Board in relation to the level of demand for services in Irish experienced by the Department, the response to this demand, and the development of the Department's capability to deliver such services. The Management Board will keep the operation of the Language Scheme under review through these annual reports.