

Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Irish Language Scheme

2012 – 2015

under section 11 of the

Official Languages Act 2003

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Chapter 1: Background

1.1 Introduction

This is the first Irish Language Scheme prepared by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht under section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 (“the Act”).

Section 11 of that Act provides for the preparation by public bodies of a statutory scheme detailing the services which they will provide

- through the medium of Irish;
- through the medium of English; and
- through the medium of Irish and English

and the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

1.2 Approach to development of Scheme

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was established on 2 June 2011, on foot of the reorganisation of Government Departments announced by the Taoiseach in March 2011. It brings together functions from the former Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

In view of this reorganisation, this Scheme has been developed to set out a standard approach across the new Department to fulfilling obligations in relation to the Irish language, taking into account what is practical and achievable over the coming three years.

Specifically, this Scheme takes account of the Department's mandate in relation to supporting the promotion of the Irish language nationwide. This includes support for the Irish language in the Gaeltacht which is the primary source of the living language. In this regard, the Scheme takes account of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*, which has the primary aim of increasing the use and knowledge of the language.

In terms of the specific approach to the development of this Scheme, a notice was published in December 2011 under section 13 of the Official Languages Act 2003 inviting representations from interested parties. Four submissions were received in total and can be viewed on the Department's website: www.ahg.gov.ie. The Scheme has been informed by these submissions, as well as the views received from staff during the Departmental consultation period. The Department would like to thank all those who took the time to engage with this important process.

1.3 Other Irish Language Initiatives

While not coming directly within the scope of the Language Scheme, the Department will continue to work with partners in making available supports to assist public bodies in meeting their obligations under the Official Languages Act. Initiatives developed in partnership with other agencies – e.g. Foras na Gaeilge and Fiontar, DCU – in recent years have included:

- a Quality Assurance System for Translators and Editors;
- online databases of terminology and placenames – www.focal.ie and www.logainm.ie;
- Irish language translation memory resources;
- a glossary of signage and other terms available at www.gaeilge.ie;
- a database of EU and legal terminology in Irish; and
- a helpline for queries on all aspects of the Irish language – www.freagra.net.

1.4 Commencement date of Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and has effect from 1 May 2012. It will remain in force for a period of 3 years from this date or until a new Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister pursuant to section 15 of the Official Languages Act, whichever is the earlier.

Chapter 2 Overview of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

2.1 Mission and Goals

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was established in June 2011 and its mission, as reflected in its *Statement of Strategy 2011-2014*, is:

To promote and protect Ireland's heritage and culture, to develop cultural tourism, to advance the use of the Irish language, and to support the sustainable development of the islands.

The new Department oversees and has policy responsibility for the conservation, preservation, protection, development and presentation of Ireland's heritage and culture. The Department also seeks to promote the Irish language, to support the Gaeltacht and to assist the sustainable development of island communities. The key functions under its remit include:

- Arts, Culture, Film and Music, as well as oversight of Ireland's cultural institutions;
- Ireland's Built and Natural Heritage;
- the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands; and
- North/South Co-operation insofar as it relates to Waterways Ireland, An Foras Teanga and the wider functions of the Department.

2.2 Departmental Organisational Structure

The Department has its principal offices in Dublin, Na Forbacha, Co. Galway, Killarney and Wexford, while staff are also based in National Parks and other regional locations throughout the country. An up-to-date organisation chart and further information in relation to the Department's functional areas can be found on the Department's website: www.ahg.gov.ie.

2.3 Departmental Customers

The Department interacts with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including members of the Government, public representatives and other Government Departments, Offices and agencies. We are also actively involved in supporting North/South co-operation and engaging with key stakeholders on both the EU and international stage. In addition, we interact with a wide range of parties from outside the public service, including both groups and individual members of the public who use our services and have an interest in our activities.

We value these relationships and remain conscious of the need to ensure that the contributions we make add value and meet the needs of the individuals, groups and communities we serve. We are committed to maintaining and improving delivery of a high standard of service to our customers in the current challenging environment.

The quality customer service standards adopted by the Department in relation to the delivery of services to our customers will also apply to those services that the Department has committed to deliver in the Irish language under this Scheme.

Chapter 3 Commitments to Service Delivery in Irish

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is committed to providing quality services in Irish and/or bilingually to its customers. This chapter sets out the measures which we will take over the next three years to ensure a high provision of service in Irish and/or bilingually to all of our customers.

3.1 Services that the Department provides bilingually

Departmental services provided by the Gaeltacht and Irish language divisions are provided in Irish only or on a bilingual basis. These include:

- Gaeltacht policy and schemes division;
- Irish language policy and schemes division;
- Údarás na Gaeltachta division;
- An Foras Teanga division;
- Islands division; and
- Placenames Branch.

Currently, a number of other line divisions within the Department are in a position and will continue to provide services in the official language of the customer's choosing.

These include:

- Minister's Office;
- Minister of State's Office;
- Secretary General's Office;
- Press Office;
- HR Division;
- Corporate Governance Division;
- EU Unit;
- Internal Audit Unit; and
- Finance Unit.

By the end of this scheme, the Department will have upskilled its staff working in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) divisions of the Department so that staff will be in a position to provide a service in Irish to the public on a regional basis. The Department will ensure that a member of staff of the Department continues to be available to provide a service in Irish to the public on NPWS issues. In addition, where particular demand for services in specific NPWS regions is evidenced, enhanced support (in the form of Irish language training, etc.) will be facilitated. By the end of this scheme, the Department will also train staff in the Arts division so that those staff will be in a position to provide a service to the public in Irish.

The Department's corporate publications – its Statements of Strategy, Annual Reports and Customer Charters – will be made available in Irish and English, as will all application forms, information leaflets and posters. Moreover, the Department's stationary, signage and pre-recorded telephone announcements will be in Irish and English.

3.2 Means of communicating with the Public / Information to the Public

3.2.1 *Customer Service*

The Department will prepare a new Customer Service Action Plan (CSAP) and Customer Charter for the period 2012 onwards. The new Charter will continue to reflect the principles of Quality Customer Service and thus ensure that people who wish to conduct their business in Irish are facilitated. Both documents will also endeavour to raise the profile of the Irish language in the Department by giving more prominence to the Irish language text. In addition, a short leaflet, setting out the services available in Irish, will be made available at our reception desks and on our website and will be used as a means of promoting awareness of specific services available.

3.2.2 Departmental Websites and Computer Systems

Website & IT

- (a) From 1 January 2013, the Department's website will be bilingual and information put on the website, including information leaflets and brochures that are produced in Irish or bilingually, will be made available on the Irish version of the website at the same time as the English version. This will not apply to specialised internal instruction manuals or documents of a technical, scientific and specialist nature.
- (b) The Department does not currently provide online interactive services. Any new online interactive services (i.e. services which enable members of the public to make applications, receive benefits or make payments) developed over the course of this Scheme will be made available simultaneously in Irish and English.
- (c) In the event that the Department develops additional websites for specific policy objectives, these will be developed in bilingual form. The Department will work progressively towards making static content at other websites developed previously, and for which it now has responsibility, available in Irish, with the exception of specialised internal instruction manuals or documents of a technical, scientific and specialist nature.
- (d) Any new software and computer systems developed by the Department, which require information in relation to members of the public to be inputted, for example names and addresses, will be Irish language compliant. The Department will also seek to ensure that, where necessary, any existing systems will be made similarly compliant. Where shared software and computer systems are in use by the Department, the

Department will endeavour to develop Irish language compliant systems, in consultation with the service provider.

3.2.3 *Speeches*

Speeches or statements, given by Ministers in the Oireachtas or elsewhere, as well as speeches made by senior officials will continue to be made available in the language(s) in which they are delivered.

3.2.4 *Correspondence*

In addition to fulfilling its legal obligation to reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish, the Department will initiate correspondence in Irish with those who are known to prefer correspondence in Irish.

3.2.5 *Email Messages*

Standard messages on the Department's email, such as disclaimers of responsibility, will be in both Irish and English. Individual staff members will be encouraged to use the non-system generated part of the 'out of office' replies in both Irish and in English.

3.2.6 *Official Invitations*

The Department will ensure that invitations to official functions hosted by the Minister or Minister of State are printed bilingually.

3.2.7 *Information Leaflets / Application Forms / Posters*

Brochures & Information Leaflets

The Department will continue to produce material of this nature in a fully bilingual format, with the exception of specialised internal instruction manuals or documents of a technical, scientific and specialist nature, which will be available in English only.

Application Forms

The Department will continue to make application forms available in Irish and English for the schemes and programmes it delivers. It will also roll out a programme aimed at ensuring that intermediary bodies, which deliver programmes and schemes on behalf of the Department, also make relevant application forms available bilingually.

Publications

The Department will provide bilingual versions of core publications (major policy statements, strategies, etc.), with the exception of specialised internal instruction manuals or documents of a technical, scientific and specialist nature, which will be available in English only. Where the length of any bilingual publication would reduce its effectiveness or involve excessive additional cost, separate Irish and English language versions may be provided. In this regard, each will contain a statement that a version is available in the other language.

3.2.8 *Oral announcements / Telephone communications with the public*

In line with the principles of Quality Customer Service, the Department will ensure that receptionists and switchboard operators, who are the first point of contact with the public, at offices for which it is responsible:

- will give the name of the Department in Irish and English; and
- are familiar with basic greetings in Irish.

The Department will ensure also that arrangements are in place to put members of the public in touch speedily with whatever office or officer is responsible for offering the service requested through Irish.

All staff will be made aware of staff members available to provide a full service in Irish.

Pre-recorded announcements will give the name of the Department in Irish first.

Individual staff members will be encouraged to provide voicemail messages bilingually, where possible.

3.2.9 *Press Releases*

All press releases (other than speeches which have been issued as, or attached to, press releases) pertaining to the Gaeltacht and/or Irish language related matters will be issued and posted to the Department's website bilingually. In relation to all other press releases, the Department will issue 30% of these bilingually from the commencement of the Scheme and this will increase on an incremental basis to 60% over the lifetime of the Scheme.

3.2.10 *Public Meetings Policy*

In the case of public meetings dealing with Irish language issues generally, such meetings may be conducted either through Irish or conducted through Irish with simultaneous translation to English provided, as considered appropriate.

3.2.11 Offices located in Gaeltacht areas

Irish is and will continue to be the working language of the Department's offices located in Na Forbacha and Gaoth Dobhair.

3.2.12 Service to Gaeltacht areas

The Department will provide a service through Irish to members of the public in Gaeltacht areas. Over the course of this Scheme, the Department will seek to upskill staff working in our parks and nature reserves in or close to Gaeltacht areas. Where demand for educational services (e.g. tours in Irish), are requested in Gaeltacht areas by members of the public, the Department will provide same where sufficient notice is given.

3.2.13 Gaeltacht Placenames

The official placenames of Gaeltacht areas will be used by the Department. Official Irish language versions of placenames, both inside and outside the Gaeltacht, are available online to public bodies and to the public generally on the website developed with funding from the Department at www.logainm.ie.

Chapter 4: Improving the Department's Irish Language Capability

4.1: Recruitment and Placement

In order that the Department has an adequate number of staff with proficiency in the Irish language in compliance with the provisions of the Official Languages Act, the following actions will be pursued over the lifetime of the Scheme:

- As part of its recruitment policy, the Department, in co-operation with the Public Appointments Service, will continue to publicly advertise competitions for staff to work through Irish (especially in the Gaeltacht and/or serving Gaeltacht communities), when suitable people are not available through general entry level competitions.
- Appropriate placement of staff with such proficiency will continue to be implemented throughout the Department, in particular in Gaeltacht offices, or in offices that service Gaeltacht areas.
- Departmental interviews will be held in Irish only, where Irish is a particular requirement for the post in question.

The foregoing is, of course, subject to wider Government policy on recruitment and deployment of staff in the public service.

4.2 Training & Development

The Department is currently developing a Training and Development Strategy 2012-2014, which will reflect our ongoing commitment to provide appropriate training and development for all staff, in both official languages, to meet the evolving needs of our customers and to develop the full potential of staff during their careers in this Department.

The Training Unit will:

- Assess Irish language courses and courses delivered through Irish on a regular basis to ascertain how effectively they meet the Department's goals. In addition, the Training Unit will liaise with line divisions over the lifetime of the Scheme and, where appropriate, develop new Irish language classes focused on the business and customer needs of the various units across the Department.
- Undertake a further inventory of supply and demand for Irish language services across all sections of the Department in 2013.
- Continue to include language awareness as part of both Induction and Customer Service training courses so that staff:
 - understand why the Department implements a bilingual policy;
 - understand the context and background to the policy; and
 - are fully informed about how the policy will affect their work.
- The Department will continue to facilitate staff attending Irish language classes during office hours.

4.3 *Language resources*

The Department will continue to provide all staff with easy access to information and language resources, e.g. dictionaries, both in hard copy, where requested, and in electronic format, advice on written Irish and lists of common phrases, etc. The use of online resources such as spellcheckers and www.focal.ie will be actively promoted.

4.4 *Translation Services*

The Department will advise staff on the procedures and best practices to be followed in the engagement of translation services.

4.5 *Promotion of Irish Language Events / Seachtain na Gaeilge*

The Department is committed to promoting cultural initiatives which support and encourage the use of the Irish language. The Department will continue to support activities organised during *Seachtain na Gaeilge*. The Department will also explore opportunities to encourage the development of Irish language skills among staff through other informal activities.

Chapter 5: Monitoring & Revision

The Department's Management Advisory Committee (MAC) will keep the effective operation of the Scheme under review, while ongoing monitoring and annual assessment of the implementation of the Scheme will be undertaken by the Corporate Governance Division in the Department. Annual reports on the results of these assessments will be presented to MAC.

Each section of the Department will be required to reflect the commitments of this Irish Language Scheme in the Annual Business Plan for that section. The day-to-day monitoring function will be carried out primarily by line managers in each of the sections who are responsible for the implementation of the Scheme within their own areas.

An annual review of the progress made with regard to the implementation of the Scheme will be undertaken. In order to assess this progress, information will be collected annually on:

- policies or initiatives that have promoted the use of Irish;
- materials published in whole or in part in Irish;
- the incidence and nature of any complaints and suggestions relating to the provision of services in Irish by the Department;
- progress against each of the commitments set out in the Scheme; and
- the level of demand for services through Irish.

The Department will continue to consider such additional measures as may be necessary to improve the level of service provided by it in light of demand and arising from the annual reviews.

Chapter 6 Publicising of Scheme

Staff have been informed of their responsibilities in respect of the Official Languages Act 2003 and detailed guidance and instructions have been made available to all staff. Staff will continue to be made aware of their responsibilities under the Scheme through a variety of means e.g.

- Office Notices; and
- Inclusion of information on the Department's Irish language commitments in the Induction and Customer Service training courses.

Through both formal and informal mechanisms, the Department will continue to remain active in the promotion of the Irish language across the Department. It will do this by issuing corporate communications, in both official languages. It will also encourage and support the use of Irish amongst staff in the conduct of their work and interactions with each other.

The contents of this Scheme, along with its commitments and provisions, will be made available to the general public by means of:-

- circulation to appropriate agencies and public bodies;
- prominence on the Department's website;
- prominence in the Department's Quality Customer Charter and Quality Customer Service Action Plan; and
- a short leaflet setting out services available in Irish to be made available at reception desks.

In addition to these measures, the Department will take every opportunity in its day-to-day interactions with customers to promote and publicise the services it provides through Irish. Such measures will include:

- directly informing customers on a proactive basis of the option of dealing with the Department through Irish, for example, by the display of notices at reception areas indicating the Irish language services that are available and also by prominently listing these on the Department's website;
- including footnotes on selected guidelines, leaflets, and applications forms explaining that these documents are also available in Irish (in cases where bilingual printed material is not produced under a single cover); and
- including notes in publications and advertisements that the Department provides services through Irish and, accordingly, welcomes customers who wish to deal with it in Irish, according to the commitments in its agreed Scheme.

A copy of this Scheme has been forwarded to the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga.