

**Department of Education and Skills
Irish Language Scheme 2013-2016
under the Official Languages Act 2003**

April 2013

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Chapter 1: Development of the Second Irish Language Scheme

1.1 Introduction

This is the second Irish Language Scheme prepared by the Department of Education and Skills under the Official Languages Act 2003 (the Act). This Scheme has been prepared pursuant to section 15 of the Act.

The Act provides that language schemes prepared by public bodies should provide the details of the services which it proposes to 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 in order to provide services through Irish.

1.2 Preparation of the New Scheme

This Scheme has been developed in accordance with the guidelines for the preparation of draft schemes which were previously prepared under section 12 of the Act.

In accordance with section 13 of the Act, as part of the process of developing this Scheme, the Department published a notice in the national print media in March 2010, inviting submissions from interested parties. This Scheme has been informed by the submissions received and also takes account of the views and suggestions expressed by Departmental staff during a review of the progress made in relation to the implementation of the Department's first scheme.

The Department would like to extend its thanks to all those who contributed to this process.

1.3 Irish Language Scheme 2013-2016

The commitments which were made in the Department's first scheme to improve the level of its services through Irish have been delivered. These commitments focused on improving the level of our customer services through Irish and included the development of procedural arrangements to ensure that Irish versions of relevant forms and publications are available, increasing the amount of material in Irish on the website and developing the capacity within the Department for the provision of services through Irish. Since the commencement of the first scheme, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has introduced a number of measures to improve its services through the Irish language, general Departmental procedures have been put in place to facilitate the assignment and re-deployment of staff, who are competent in Irish, to sections where the provision of a service through Irish is most needed where possible, an Irish translation service has been put in place and a further survey of the level of Irish language skills of the staff of the Department was carried out. The Staff Training and Development Unit supported the improvement of Irish language competence within the Department through a range of initiatives including the provision of targeted Irish language training. The Inspectorate of the Department provides a bilingual inspection service to all recognised schools at primary level including those in the Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools and produces its publications bilingually in Irish and English.

This second Irish Language Scheme builds on and consolidates the commitments made in the first scheme. The objective of this second Scheme is to continue to deliver on the commitments set out in the first scheme and build on the progress achieved across the Department over the preceding period. Most importantly, the commitments in this Scheme have been made in the context of what is practical and achievable over the coming three years given the current constraints on human and financial resources.

The focus and priority of this Scheme is to ensure that the Department provides the best service possible, in both official languages, to the general public over the period

of the Scheme, taking account of the principles of quality customer service and in the context of available resources. The scheme includes a commitment to assess on an ongoing basis the level of demand for services through Irish so that the Department continues to strive to meet demand in a planned, coherent and accessible way.

This Scheme has been developed within the policy context of the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2013. It takes account of the particular mandate that the Department has in terms of supporting the extension and growth in the use of the Irish language in the education system.

1.4 Commencement Date of the Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The scheme is commenced with effect from **22 April 2013** and shall 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 Act.

Chapter 2: Overview of the Department of Education and Skills

2.1 Our Mission

Our mission is to enable learners to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's economic, social and cultural development.

2.2 Our Mandate

The Department's role is to support the educational success of each learner and to drive improvements in the overall performance of the education and training sector. We must also ensure that we deliver our day-to-day services efficiently and effectively.

The Department carries out a wide range of activities at all levels of the education and training system. This includes policy development; providing funding, services and support for education providers; planning for and providing our education and training infrastructure and enhancing the sector through co-operation on a North-South basis and through involvement in the activities of the European Union (EU) and other international agencies.

The Department has also been mandated with a specific role in relation to redress for former residents of residential industrial institutions and a number of related bodies operate under the aegis of the Department including the Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB).

Given the importance of education and training in the social and economic development of our country, the Department's mandate requires its involvement in a significant amount of cross-departmental and cross-sectoral work delivering on a range of policies led by other Departments. Our current economic difficulties have brought into sharp focus the direct impact which education and training can have on individual opportunity and also in driving economic growth by helping to secure jobs

and investment. In this context, the education and training sectors have a particularly important role to play in tackling unemployment by ensuring that all levels of our education and training system are equipping students with the necessary skills and are providing appropriate re-skilling and up-skilling opportunities for jobseekers.

2.3 Our High Level Goals

We aim to ensure that the Department and the wider education and training sector provide a high quality service which delivers value for money for the taxpayer. Our overarching goal is to improve the quality of teaching and learning at all levels of the education and training sector and improve learning outcomes over time. In support of this we have identified the following high level goals:

1. Provide a quality inclusive school and early years education system, with improved learning outcomes
2. Provide opportunities for upskilling and reskilling that meet the needs of individuals and the labour market
3. Provide high quality learning, research and innovation opportunities in the higher education sector
4. Plan and provide appropriate infrastructure for learning environments

2.4 Departmental Customers

The Department is committed to delivering quality services to all of its customers, consistent with the service commitments contained in its Customer Charter 2013-2016 and in its Customer Service Action Plan 2013-2016. Both of these documents can be accessed at www.education.ie.

The Department's Customer Charter includes the following commitments in relation to the provision of services through Irish:

- We will comply with the requirements of the Official Languages Act, 2003.
- We will reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish.
- We will respond in Irish to callers who wish to speak in Irish, where possible, or offer to have the call returned within **1 working day** by a member of staff who can deal with queries in Irish
- We will publish corporate publications in Irish and English.

The Department's largest customer bases for services in Irish are the primary and post-primary school sectors and in particular schools where instruction is carried out through the medium of Irish.

2.5 About the Department

The Department's main offices are located in Athlone, Tullamore and Dublin. The main telephone numbers and other contact details for the Department are available on the Department's website www.education.ie . The Department provides a range of services to schools, teachers, learners and the general public. Detailed information on the activities of each functional area and unit of the Department is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie and in the Department's Manual under Section 15 of the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 & 2003 which can be viewed via the following link <http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/FOI/Section-15-Manual-under-the-Freedom-of-Information-Acts-1997-2003.pdf>. Detailed information in relation to customer services can be found in the Department's Customer Service Action Plan.

Chapter 3: Summary of Irish Language Services and Improvements Planned for 2013-2016

The Department is committed to providing the best quality services possible in both official languages to its customers. This Chapter sets out the measures and actions, which the Department will undertake over the next three years in order to consolidate and build on the progress that was made on the development of its bilingual services over the period of the first scheme.

The actions planned in the Department's Customer Service Action Plan 2013–2016 and its Customer Charter 2013-2016 will support the implementation of the language service improvements planned in this Scheme.

3.1 Means of Communication with the Public and Schools

The following Departmental communications will continue to be made available in both English and Irish:

- Circulars for primary schools
- Information leaflets and brochures for primary schools
- Non-technical documents circulated to primary schools
- Application forms relating to primary administration services
- Application forms for primary and post- primary payroll services
- Application forms for teaching and non-teaching staff at primary level
- All corporate publications – e.g Annual Report, Statement of Strategy
- Press releases which announce new schemes or policy changes
- All new appropriate static information posted on the Department's website. (see page 9 also)

Specialised internal instruction manuals or documents of a technical nature produced for other public bodies or in support of the planning and provision of

school accommodation, will be available in **English only** as appropriate.

Where appropriate, the commitments in relation to the translation of documents relating to primary level will be extended to similar documents relating to post-primary level.

The Department will ensure that where application forms and information leaflets are provided as separate Irish and English language versions, equal prominence is given to both versions and the Irish language version will be as readily accessible as the English language version.

We will continue to respond in Irish to all written correspondence received in Irish.

Staff will be reminded to use the official Placenames of Gaeltacht areas, as declared by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when issuing correspondence.

3.2 Press Releases

We will continue to issue Irish versions of press releases which announce new schemes or policy changes.¹

3.3 Web Site and Information Technology (I.T.)

The Department will ensure that all appropriate web pages contained within the main structure of the site will be bilingual; this does not necessarily include documents or other sites linked to these pages.² Where Irish versions of information leaflets, brochures, corporate publications, application forms and circulars are produced simultaneously they will be made available on the Department's website,

¹ Please note, this does not mean we will issue Irish press releases simultaneously with their English versions

² In some cases it is not appropriate to have an Irish language page – e.g. Speeches, Press Releases, or schemes targeted at particular customer groups, English Language Assistant Scheme, Foreign Language Assistant Scheme, technical guidance information for building professionals.

however, in cases where both versions are not available simultaneously we will publish both versions as soon as they become available.

Since the commencement of the first scheme, five new IT systems which are bilingual have been implemented. These are

- An On-Line Claims Systems which enables schools to record teacher absences and make claims for substitution,
- A Returns service, which enables post primary schools to upload and download electronic files online.
- An Inventory of School Accommodation which is a facility for schools to provide information about their accommodation.
- An Online Census Returns system
- Primary literacy / numeracy data returns application

It is the Department's aim that any new interactive systems being introduced during the course of the Scheme will be introduced simultaneously in both Irish and English.

The static content of any new public websites managed directly by the Department introduced during the course of this scheme will be bilingual.³

³ The Department interprets static content as the following persistent elements of the website:

- The framework elements of the home page
- The framework elements of the landing pages
- Zonal titles
- Website Branding
- Top Action Bar
- Side Bar
- Persona Tabs

The commitment applies to public websites and content managed directly by the Department – this commitment is not made on behalf of websites managed by agencies under the aegis of the Department or any websites fully or part funded by Department.

In accordance with the commitment in the first scheme, the Department will ensure that as individual existing computer systems come to the end of their life cycle and have to be replaced, they will be replaced by systems which are capable of handling the Irish language. For the duration of this Scheme it will be ensured that the names and addresses of members of the public in Irish will be inputted to any new software and computer system developed by the Department, or on its behalf.

3.4 Telephone communications with the public

In accordance with the commitments made in the first scheme, a dedicated telephone number for queries in Irish (01) 8896780 was put in place on a pilot basis. The purpose of this service is to provide an Irish language first point of contact for Irish language speakers. The on-going provision of this service is dependent on the availability of staff who can provide this service in Irish.

As receptionist/switchboard operators are the first points of contact with the public, the Department will ensure that all receptionists/switchboard staff

- Will give the name of the Department in both Irish and English,

and

- Are at least familiar with the basic greetings in Irish,

Arrangements are in place so that switchboard operators and other Departmental staff can refer customers with queries in Irish to staff who can respond to queries in Irish. The Department has implemented a procedure whereby staff of the Department who are willing to provide a telephone service through Irish are easily identifiable.

A one to one telephone service through Irish is and will continue to be available from the Teacher Education Section, subject to relevant personnel being available.

3.5 Inspectorate Services

3.5.1 Inspection, Evaluation and Quality Assurance

The Inspectorate of the Department has a major role in contributing to and supporting policy development. A core function of the Inspectorate under the Education Act, 1998, is to assure quality in the education system, through its school and system evaluation and other inspection activities. Inspectors assess and advise on the implementation of legislation and Department regulations and report on compliance issues generally. The Inspectorate operates an inspection and evaluation programme, including school, teacher and subject inspection, programme evaluation, thematic inspection and Whole School Evaluation. They advise schools, teachers and parents on all aspects of educational provision within the Inspectorate's remit.

3.5.2 Inspectorate Services through Irish

The Inspectorate provides a bilingual inspection service to all recognised schools at primary level including schools in the Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools. While Irish is generally the medium of communication in the Gaeltacht and all-Irish settings, the language used by the Inspectorate at any particular time will be influenced by local preference. At post-primary level, the Inspectorate provides a service in the inspection of the Irish language. Where there is capacity, inspectors will provide a service through Irish in all subject areas for post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht or all-Irish schools. The English language is used when inspecting the subject English.

Bilingual Inspection Service for schools

To continue to enhance the provision of a bilingual inspection service, and as resources permit, the Department, through the Public Appointments Service, will appoint inspectors at the recruitment grade level who will continue, and indeed enhance, the delivery of service through Irish. The Department will continue to include proficiency in Irish among the criteria used in the selection and

appointments processes to the Inspectorate at recruitment grade level with a view to:

- Enhancing the capacity of the Inspectorate to deliver an inspection service through Irish
- Requiring a more exacting standard of Irish for deployment in Gaeltacht areas and interaction with all-Irish schools
- Ensuring that proficiency in a particular subject area will remain the chief consideration in the selection of inspectors at post-primary, while also awarding a competitive edge to candidates who can function in both official languages.

The Inspectorate will continue to identify contacts for Irish services among post-primary inspectors for all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools. The Inspectorate will continue to support the Department's provision of services through Irish for all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools. In addition, the Inspectorate will continue to develop the capacity of its staff to evaluate schools in the Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools by ensuring that appropriate professional development opportunities are provided on a regular basis.

3.5.3 Inspectorate Publications

Reports arising from inspections in English-medium schools will be published in English, while reports or sections of these reports that deal with the teaching of Irish will continue to be published in both Irish and in English. Reports arising from inspections in Irish-medium schools will continue to be published in Irish; for all evaluations conducted from 1st September 2010, reports or sections of these reports referring to the inspection of English in these schools will be published in both English and Irish.

3.6 National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides an educational psychological service to schools. It is primarily a school based service with the aim of supporting teachers and parents in meeting the needs of learners in schools.

In accordance with the commitment in the first Irish language scheme NEPS has identified staff competent in Irish for assignment to Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna. The list of staff competent in Irish has been circulated internally within the Service both regionally and locally informing their colleagues to whom individual requests for services through Irish should be directed.

In addition the Educational Research Centre (ERC) in St. Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra has developed reading and spelling tests for pupils of 11 to 12 years of age in Gaeltacht schools. This test process is now available to NEPS psychologists for application in relevant schools.

NEPS is engaged in a process of procuring standardised assessment instrument/s for literacy attainments for pupils at the upper end of post-primary. This is being examined in the context of analogous developments in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and the new Framework for Junior Cycle.

The projected timeframe is as follows:

- 2013: Development of the test instruments commissioned
- By end of 2014: The test/s will be available for use by NEPS.

3.6.1 NEPS Publications

All NEPS publications are produced in both Irish and English and pitched using appropriate language and terminology.

Chapter 4: Improving the Department's Irish Language Capability

4.1 Recruitment & Placement

Administrative staff of the Department are currently recruited by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Candidates who satisfy the Public Appointments Service that they are proficient in Irish are awarded extra marks in respect of such proficiency. Extra marks for proficiency in Irish are also awarded to candidates taking part in internal Departmental competitions for promotion. Due to the implementation of a moratorium on recruitment no recruitment is currently taking place except in exceptional circumstances.

It is important to highlight that since the creation of the first scheme there has been a significant turnover of staff in this Department primarily as a consequence of the decentralisation programme.

Since the Decentralisation Programme was announced in 2004 and up until the moratorium on recruitment was put in place, this Department has replaced staff, who leave the Department for any reason, primarily with staff from various other departments and locations who wish to decentralise to Athlone or Mullingar under the Central Applications Facility (CAF). Proficiency in Irish was not a factor in this process therefore the Department has not been in a position to maintain the cohort of staff who are proficient in Irish at the levels recorded in 2005.

The Department undertook a survey of its administrative staff to assess the level of service in Irish currently available, the level of proficiency to provide services through Irish and the level of interest in training in the language. The survey showed that there is a limited capacity to provide services through Irish by the administrative

sections in the Department. In response to the survey, less than 1.5%⁴ of the administrative staff indicated that they are proficient in Irish.

In order to assist with assigning staff with proficiency in Irish to sections which provide a service through Irish, the Department has developed a questionnaire, relating to proficiency in Irish, for completion by all newly assigned staff i.e. new entrants and staff who have transferred from other Departments or Offices. The completed questionnaires are placed on the individual's personnel file and the details from completed questionnaires are inputted by the Personnel Unit onto a database for reference.

During the course of the 2013-2016 Scheme, the Department will undertake to:

- Assign new entrants with proficiency in Irish to vacancies in sections which provide a service through Irish, where possible, and taking into account the business requirements of individual sections; and
- Redeploy staff, with the required level of proficiency to deliver services through Irish, to sections currently without such a contact person, where possible, and taking into account the business requirements of individual sections.

The foregoing is, of course, subject to wider Government policy on the recruitment and deployment of staff in the public service. It should be noted also that our opportunities for redeployment of staff are further limited by the geographical spread of our staff primarily across three separate locations i.e. Dublin, Athlone and Tullamore.

4.2 Training & Development

⁴ Proficient was defined as high competence, in addition 8.7% indicated they had a medium competency

The Department's Staff Training and Development Unit (STDU) is committed to providing appropriate training and development opportunities, including Irish Language training, for all staff to meet priority business needs.

During the course of the last scheme, the Staff Training and Development Unit (STDU) supported the improvement of Irish language competence within the Department through:

- The inclusion of awareness of the requirements of the Official Languages Act on both induction and customer service training courses
- The engagement of an external training company to provide targeted language training to meet the Department's needs. As part of this programme an assessment of each participating officer's competence in Irish was conducted.
- Financial support was made available to staff who pursued courses in their own time to develop their competence in Irish under the Department's refund of fees scheme.
- The Department continued to promote Irish language courses conducted by Gaeleagras and collaborated with Gaeleagras in the provision of in-house training.
- The Unit also purchased a supply of the CD and cassette based Irish language courses "Turas Teanga" and "Buntús Cainte", which staff may borrow and use in their own time to improve their Irish language skills.

During the course of the 2013-2016 Scheme the Department will continue to promote the language via refunding fees for recognised Irish courses and including language awareness as part of its induction and customer services courses, along with the following:

- Support the provision of appropriate and cost effective Irish language training solutions focused on the Departments' business needs.
- Provide targeted training for staff who operate or are willing to operate the dedicated telephone number for queries in Irish.
- Support the provision of Irish language courses focused on the skills necessary for members of the Department's Inspectorate who conduct evaluations in schools through the medium of Irish.

4.3 Translation Services

The Department will continue to ensure that arrangements are in place for staff to access an Irish language translation service as required. Up-to-date guidance and advice on the procedures and practices to be followed in the engagement of these services will be provided to all staff as required.

Chapter 5: Monitoring & Review

It is the responsibility of management within line sections to oversee the implementation of commitments relating to their section, while the ongoing monitoring and annual assessment of the implementation of the Scheme will be undertaken by the Corporate Services Division. The findings of a progress report will be made available to the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) each year and this reporting arrangement will be in place from the commencement of the new Scheme.

The report will review the progress made with regard to the implementation of the Scheme and in order to produce such reports, information will be collected annually on:

- The incidence and nature of any complaints or suggestions from the public relating to the provision of services through Irish by the Department
- Progress on the implementation of each of the commitments set out in the Scheme
- 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, available resources and the findings of the progress reports produced.

Each section of the Department will continue to be required to reflect any particular responsibilities which it might have in relation to compliance with the Official Languages Act 2003 and the Department's Irish Language Scheme in its annual Business Plan.

In addition, members of staff of the Department have been, and will continue to be, informed of their responsibilities in respect of the Official Languages Act 2003. Detailed guidance and instructions have been made available to those who may be required to implement specific Irish language measures.

Staff will continue to be made aware of their responsibilities under the Scheme through a variety of means such as:

- Office Notices
- The Department's Quality Customer Charter and Quality Customer Service Action Plan
- Inclusion of information regarding our Irish language commitments in the Department's Induction and Customer Service training.

Chapter 6: Publicising and Promotion of the Agreed Scheme

The contents of this Scheme, along with the commitments and the provisions of the Scheme, will be notified to the general public by means of

- Inclusion of the Scheme on the Department's website
- The Department's Quality Customer Charter and Quality Customer Service Action Plan

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, including

- Directly informing customers on a pro-active basis of the options which exist for dealing with the Department through Irish,
- Including footnotes on selected guidelines, leaflets, and application forms explaining that these documents are also available in Irish and
- Including references in publications and advertisements to the services which the Department provides through Irish

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

The English language version of this scheme is the original version.