



## Response to press query

### Use of the síneadh fada in names

The síneadh fada in an individual's name is an integral part of that name – there is a world of difference in meaning between 'Sean' and Seán', for instance, or between Orla and Órla. My Office has received a number of complaints in relation to this matter over the years.

There is no provision, however, in the official languages legislation, for the use of the síneadh fada in a person's name, whether it be in correspondence, computer databases or online application forms or in the production of id cards or travelcards such as the Leap Card. It is only where a public body provides a commitment in a language scheme, agreed with the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, to having computer systems that are compatible with using the 'síneadh fada', that a statutory basis exists. The National Transport Authority agreed a language scheme with the Minister in 2016, but the commitment therein refers only to the use of síneadh fada in their word processing systems.

My Office researched the matter thoroughly during an investigation carried out on the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in 2015, on the rollout of Eircode. This investigation centred on the use of official placenames but the issue of the use of a 'síneadh fada' in a person's name and address also came to the fore. A summary of the investigation, which investigated the use of a person's name and address in their choice of official language, including the use of the síneadh fada, can be accessed through the following link:

[https://www.coimisineir.ie/userfiles/files/Department\\_of\\_Communications\\_Energy\\_and\\_Natural\\_Resources\\_2015.pdf](https://www.coimisineir.ie/userfiles/files/Department_of_Communications_Energy_and_Natural_Resources_2015.pdf)

This was the issue on which my Office received the most complaints in its history. Indeed, when I first started receiving complaints on the rollout of Eircode I was prompted to issue a statement to the effect that *"If a person's birth certificate is in Irish, and they never use the English version of their names at any stage of their lives – then surely it follows that that is the version that should be used by the State? It should be a citizen's basic right to use the Irish version of their name if they so wish."*

In short the investigation found that although there was no provision in the Official Languages Act in respect of the right to use one's name in Irish, there could possibly, however, be a breach of Data Protection Legislation if a public body registered an incorrect version of an individual's name for official purposes. This, however, is a matter for the Data Protection Commissioner to investigate.

My Office had raised the question of this vacuum in the legislation with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and with Oireachtas Committees on a number of occasions. Revised Heads of Bill to amend the Official Languages Act published in 2017 contain a provision to place the use of a 'síneadh fada' in a person's name and address on a statutory footing. The Heads of Bill can be accessed at <https://www.chq.gov.ie/app/uploads/2015/07/official-language-amendment-bill-2017-general-scheme-and-draft-heads-of-bill.pdf> and I include the relevant reference below:

**Head 8 New section: Duty of public bodies regarding names, addresses and official forms in the Irish language**

*Provide for:*

- *All public bodies to facilitate the use by persons of the Irish language or English language version, whichever they so wish, of their names and addresses when communicating with public bodies.*
- *The use of titles before an individual's name to be optional. This provision covers printed and electronic interactions with a public body.*
- *The inclusion of an optional line to cater for individuals who have a "local name" which distinguishes them from other individuals bearing the same name in the locality.*

We very much welcome this provision but have also recommended that a statutory provision be made to allow for the recognition of a person's name in their chosen official language.

The Department had intended to publish the full text of the bill in the spring, and to bring the legislation to the Houses of the Oireachtas. Minister Kyne stated in the Dáil during the week, however, that the legislation was being pushed back due to the Brexit legislation being prioritised, and that it would be published in the summer term.

I should point out that a number of public bodies already facilitate the use of the síneadh fada in a person's name - for instance the Passport Office and the Public Services Card.

There were difficulties previously in respect of the use of a síneadh fada on the internet – specifically in domain names or e-mail addresses. These issues have now been resolved and my Office, for example, has commenced using the domain name with the síneadh fada – [www.coimisinéir.ie](http://www.coimisinéir.ie).

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