

An tÚdarás um Ard Oideachas
Higher Education Authority

Scheme under Section 11 of the Official
Languages Act 2003

2008 – 2011

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

Preparation of the Scheme

The primary objective of the Official Languages Act 2003 (“the Act”) is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. The Official Languages Act seeks to give legislative effect, insofar as the delivery of public services is concerned, to Article 8 of the Constitution as follows:

- The Irish language as the national language is the first official language
- The English language is recognised as a second official language
- Provision may, however, be made by law for the exclusive use of either of the said languages for any one or more official purposes, either throughout the State or any part thereof.

Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 provides for the preparation by a public body of a statutory scheme specifying those of its services the public body proposes to provide:

- Exclusively through the medium of the Irish language
- Exclusively through the medium of the English language, and
- Through the medium of both the Irish and English languages

and the measures the body proposes to adopt to ensure that any services that are not provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided.

In preparing the scheme, the HEA has had regard to the statutory Guidelines issued by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in accordance with the provisions of section 12 of the Official Languages Act, 2003.

Commencement date of the Scheme

The Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It shall commence on 1 June 2008 and remain in force for a period of three years from this date or until the Minister has confirmed a new Scheme pursuant to Section 15 of the Act, whichever is the earlier.

This scheme reinforces the commitment of the HEA to support the Irish language as set out in the -

a) HEA Act 1971

“In performing its functions, An tÚdarás shall bear constantly in mind the national aims of restoring the Irish language and preserving and developing the national culture and shall endeavour to promote the attainment of those aims.”¹

b) Universities Act 1997

“To promote the official languages of the State, with special regard to the preservation, promotion and use of the Irish language and the preservation and promotion of the distinctive cultures of Ireland.”²

c) HEA’s Quality Customer Service Plan 2005

“The Authority is committed to meeting its obligations under the Official Languages Act, 2003. We will in particular;

- *Reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish*
- *Publish our annual report and key policy documents in Irish and English*
- *Publish as much material as possible on our website in Irish*

¹ Higher Education Authority Act 1971, Para. 4

² Universities Act 1997, para 12

The Authority will facilitate people in the conduct of their business through the medium of Irish on request. Bilingual staff will be available to respond in Irish to correspondence or telephone enquiries. Irish Language Officer : Gerard O'Sullivan."³.

The HEA plays a central role in supporting the teaching and promotion of the use of the Irish language in higher education institutions. Through the core recurrent grant support is provided for the staffing and resourcing of the teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Irish.

Since 1998, the HEA has made available a special provision for the support of greater usage of the Irish language among staff and students. This funding has focused in particular on the

- Supporting the provision of courses taught through the medium of Irish other than the Irish language
- Supporting a greater use of Irish among staff and students
- Supporting the re-publication of out-of-print texts and other teaching materials

The HEA is also centrally involved in supporting the provision of skilled graduates to meet the recruitment needs of the EU and other agencies in the context of the decision to designate Irish as an official and working language of the Union.

The scheme adopts as a starting base, the services currently available through Irish. Areas for future enhancement of the service provided by the HEA are identified in the scheme.

The scheme has regard

- to the underlying demand for specific services in the Irish language in the context of positive provision
- The resources, including human and financial resources, and the capacity to develop and access the necessary language capability.

³ Quality Service Plan (2005), p. 15

The scheme also makes provision for an on-going assessment of the demand for services in the Irish language.

Overview of the Higher Education Authority Services

Mission

The mission of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) is to be a leader in policy development for the sector and to offer policy advice to the Minister for Education and Science which will be proactive and evidence-based. As an advocate for higher education, the HEA will promote its benefits and its needs to the widest possible public. The HEA will, through funding and other mechanisms, further the development of a higher education sector noted for high-quality teaching, learning and research; which is accountable to all stakeholders, students and their parents, staff, the wider community and Government and which contributes fully to national social and economic needs through a diversity of provision.

Functions of the HEA

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) was established under the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971 with the following general functions:

- furthering the development of higher education;
- assisting in the co-ordination of State investment in higher education and preparing proposals for such investment;
- promoting an appreciation of the value of higher education and research;
- promoting the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education;
- promoting the democratisation of the structure of higher education.

In addition, it has the following specific functions:

- advising the Minister on the need for the establishment of new institutions of higher education, on their nature and form, and on legislative measures in relation to their establishment (or in relation to existing institutions);

- maintaining a continuous review of the demand and need for higher education;
- making recommendations to the Minister on provision of student places and the balance between institutions;
- making recommendations for State financial provision for higher education and research, either in relation to current or future periods;
- instituting and conducting studies on problems of higher education and research, and publication of reports of such studies, and
- making payments to institutions of higher education out of monies provided by the Oireachtas, such amounts as may be determined by the Authority and subject to such conditions as the Authority thinks fit.

The HEA allocates recurrent and capital funds to the following institutions;

- University College, Dublin
- University College, Cork
- National University of Ireland, Galway.
- National University of Ireland, Maynooth.
- University of Dublin, Trinity College.
- University of Limerick,
- Dublin City University
- Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (funded through UL)
- St. Patrick's College Drumcondra, Dublin (funded through DCU)
- Mater Dei Institute, Dublin (funded through DCU)
- St. Angela's College, Sligo (funded through NUIG)

Institutes of Technology ⁴

- Athlone Institute of Technology
- Cork Institute of Technology
- Dublin Institute of Technology
- Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
- Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown
- Institute of Technology, Carlow

⁴ The IoTs came under the operational remit of the HEA in 2007

- Institute of Technology, Tallaght
- Institute of Technology, Tralee
- Letterkenny Institute of Technology
- Limerick Institute of Technology
- Waterford Institute of Technology

and the following designated institutions:

- National College of Art and Design
- Royal Irish Academy
- Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

The HEA manages the Programme for Research in Third level Institutions (PRTLTI), the North-South Programme for Research; and the Strategic Innovation Fund. The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education is based at the HEA and the HEA is the national agency/contact point for a range of European Union (EU) educational programmes including the Lifelong Learning Programme; Erasmus Mundus; Tempus; and the Bologna Process.

The HEA consists of 18 part-time members (at least seven members must be academic members and at least seven members must be other than academic) and a part-time Chairman who are appointed by the Government on the advice of the Minister for Education and Science.

The HEA has a full-time Executive of 70 staff.

Strategic Priorities of the HEA⁵

The mission of the HEA is characterised by three key action areas

- 1 Policy Advice Planning
- 2 Funding and Accountability
- 3 Advocacy

⁵ HEA Strategy Statement 2007-2010

A vibrant higher education and research sector is a central element in our development as a society, including economic development. It is key to the development of people and to their capacity to achieve their potential. Given the importance of higher education and research and given the HEA's developmental, advisory and funding roles, the work of the HEA has a national and international import.

Stakeholders in higher education and research include the Government, Government Departments, higher education institutions, students, staff, parents, state agencies, community sector, media, professional bodies and business and industry. The work of the HEA has an important international dimension and it works with the European Commission, with colleagues in the other member states and with a number of international organisations among them the OECD, UNESCO and Eurostat. The HEA also has a role to play in furthering the Bologna Process.

While the HEA has a broad-ranging remit, it has direct dealings with a range of Government Departments most particularly the Department of Education and Science as well as almost daily contact with the institutions outlined on pages 6-7 of this draft scheme. The total student population currently stands in excess of 170,000 (full-time and part-time)⁶ ranging in size from just under 500 students to over 20,000 with approximately 20,000 academic, administrative and support staff employed in the sector.

Consultation process

The HEA publicised the preparation of the scheme in all the national newspapers and on the website. Submissions were received from 7 individuals/organisations and are now published on the website at www.heai.ie. The HEA enjoys a close working relationship with the institutions and that ongoing dialogue ensures that the HEA is keenly aware of their interests and activities in the area of the Irish language. In addition to providing the core budget finance, the HEA has also allocated a separate sum to the Universities and Colleges of Education for the provision of a range of services in the Irish language since 1998. The total allocated in the period 1998-2006 is €9.4m.

⁶ An Overview of Applications and Acceptances to Higher Education, HEA (2006) p. 4

The HEA Executive has been briefed on the requirements of the Official Languages Act 2003 and a staff working group was convened to examine its implications and make appropriate recommendations for inclusion in this Draft Scheme.

The demand for services through Irish mainly emanates from the Universities, the media, members of the public, and a number of Government Departments and State Agencies. There is a strong interest among staff in providing services in Irish. However the present capacity to deliver a comprehensive service is limited. The level of upskilling required is being determined and an appropriate training programme will be put in place.

Factors that will impact on the Scheme

(1) Decentralisation

The HEA is scheduled to be decentralised with an office in Athlone. It is not possible at this point in time to judge whether the existing HEA Irish competencies in this area can be maintained in this situation. There is the risk that the existing Irish language base of the HEA's administrative staff will be eroded by decentralisation.

(2) Recruitment

The HEA recruits its own staff. At present, a competence in Irish is not a pre-requisite for employment with the organisation. However the HEA does indicate that knowledge of Irish is desirable.

Chapter 2

Provision of HEA Services

This chapter sets out the Irish services available to our customers/stakeholders and the planned improvements for the three years of the scheme. The HEA has since its inception endeavoured to provide a positive and supportive environment for the delivery of services through the medium of Irish.

The Executive has always contained a number of staff competent to conduct the business of the HEA in the Irish language. In matters relating to signage, letterheads and other items of stationery, the HEA has always had a bilingual policy.

The HEA has always responded in Irish to correspondence received in Irish whether by post or email.

A certain number of meetings with universities and designated institutions have been conducted in Irish where possible.

The HEA's website contains information in Irish on the activities of the organisation and is planned to expand this area over the coming period.

The HEA does not have an office in a Gaeltacht or does not offer a service that is specifically for Gaeltacht areas only.

Current Competencies

a) European Programmes

This Section is the Irish National Agency for a number of EU programmes including the Lifelong Learning Programme – Erasmus; Tempus and Erasmus Mundus as well as having an involvement in the Bologna Process. The Head of the Section is fluent in the Irish language.

b) Information and Public Affairs Section

The Section deals with the public relations and communications (including publications and website administration) requirements of the HEA. The HEA is in the process of filling the Head of Communications position and a knowledge of Irish has been specified as desirable. The Administrative Assistant in the Section is fluent in the language.

c) Policy and Planning Section

The Section deals with the preparation of policy advice and analysis for the HEA. The senior policy analyst (currently seconded to the National Office for Equity of Access) is fluent in Irish.

d) Information Technology Unit

The IT Manager has a competence in Irish.

Planned Improvements

The following improvements are planned with details given of the Irish only; Irish and English; and English services indicated.

I Reception/Telephone Service - Irish and English - Phased to the end of the scheme

The HEA will provide a bilingual reception service to be completed in three years. The HEA will ensure that by the end of the three-year period the name of the HEA is given in Irish and in English; that reception staff are familiar with the basic greetings in Irish and 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 required through Irish. Until achieved through training and/or recruitment non-Irish speaking operators will explain the situation courteously and will offer to transfer the caller to an Irish speaker.

If the/an Irish speaker able to deal with the call is not available, the person receiving the call will explain the situation courteously and ensure that an Irish speaker will return the call within one working day.

An internal directory of staff competent to handle queries in Irish will be compiled.

II Correspondence/Email – Irish and English – from the commencement of the scheme

The HEA will reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish in accordance with the provisions of section 9(2) of the Act .

III Information – Irish and English - Ongoing

The HEA issues from time to time a range of general information documents on its activities e.g. Information Leaflets on the role of the HEA; Guide to Access Initiatives; EU Programmes Initiatives. In the event of such publications, bi-lingual versions will be published within the one cover.

(i) Corporate Publications – Irish and English

As provided for under section 10 of the Act, the HEA’s Annual Reports; Strategy Statements; Audited Accounts and Financial Statements will be published simultaneously in **Irish and English** within the one cover.

(ii) Commissioned Research – English only

The HEA publishes a significant number of publications based on commissioned research/analysis/evaluations to support its policy advice-making function. It is planned that such publications will continue to be published in **English only**. Where such publications pertain to the Irish language and/or Gaeltacht regions, they will be published bilingually within the one cover.

(iii) Application forms – Irish and English

Application forms for future competitive funding programmes relating to institutional and individual calls for proposals/submissions will be made available bilingually within the one cover except where it is not practical because of the size, nature or layout of the document.

(iv) News Releases – Irish and English

News releases are currently published in English. From the commencement of the scheme, the HEA will publish 50% of its news releases in Irish per annum on our website and in hardcopy during the period of this scheme on the date of publication.

(v) Speeches - Irish and English

Speeches are currently delivered in English. The HEA will publish Irish versions of three key speeches on our website each year at the same time as the English version is delivered.

(vi) Tender documents – English only

Due to the frequently technical nature of such documents and the relatively small pool of potential suppliers, it planned to publish tender documents in English only.

(vii) Website - Irish and English

The HEA website is currently being re-designed. All static, general information and navigational tools in all sections of the website will be provided bilingually by the end of the scheme.

The following additional areas will also be made available bilingually.

- Calls for Proposals from HEIs for support under Research, Strategic Innovation; Skills and Access Initiatives
- Details of European Mobility Programmes
- News Releases – 50% of those issued
- Speeches – 3 key speeches annually

V Computer Services

The IT Unit is responsible for the provision of HEA computer services. The Unit will co-operate fully in ensuring that IT support will be available to assist the delivery of an improved Irish language service.

Subject to the availability of the appropriate software, any standard message/disclaimer on email correspondence etc will be made available in a bilingual format by July 2008.

The HEA will ensure that existing computer systems, where necessary, be made compatible in conjunction with the next suitable planned maintenance or upgrade work. Any new systems will be compatible. The HEA currently does not provide an interactive service.

Any new interactive services will be introduced bilingually.

The HEA will facilitate all staff to develop their Irish language skills over time with a view to having a person in each section who will be able to provide a bilingual one-to-one counter service initially in Irish – priority will be given to those sections which deal with the public – **Information & Public Affairs and the National Access Office**. Over the course of the scheme, the HEA will develop the Irish language skills of staff in the following other areas:

- Research Programmes
- Recurrent Grants and Industrial Relations
- Institutes of Technology Unit
- Capital Development
- Policy and Planning, and Statistics, Skills
- European Programmes
- Statistics
- Personnel and Accounts and IT Services

Customer Service in relation to the provisions outlined in the draft scheme

In line with the HEA's Quality Customer Service Plan, if a person is unhappy with a decision/action or otherwise which has been made in relation to the provision of a service or services through Irish, he/she may write to the Chief Executive who will investigate the matter. He/she will examine whether the decision made was in accordance with Official Languages Act 2003 and the HEA Draft Scheme or the generally accepted principles of equity and good administrative practice.

Chapter 3

Staff Development

At present, the HEA has three personnel who are fluent in Irish and capable of offering a full service in the language.

Over the course of the three years of the Scheme it is planned to increase this number to five with an increased competence for an additional five staff. A competence in Irish will be specified as desirable in all job recruitments. The assistance of an external Irish Language Training Consultant will be sought to advise on best practice in this area.

The Head of Administration and the Irish Language Officer will be responsible for implementing the provisions of this scheme.

Language Awareness Programme

It is planned to arrange two events per year which will be focused on increasing improved awareness of Irish and its importance for all members of staff – this could cover areas not only relating to the language but music, art, dance, drama, history and other fields. The events could take place in-house or off-site.

Formal Courses for Staff providing services through Irish to be supported by Gaeltacht study visits where appropriate

Work Area – Reception

- ✓ **Receptionist** – It is planned to arrange a specifically tailored training course that will build on the competencies of the existing receptionist and relief person.

Work Area – Information and Public Affairs

- ✓ **A Head of Communications** – an appointment has been made in this area. The appointee has a competence in the Irish language and an appropriate training programme will be put in place depending to improve his skills in this area.

The Authority will facilitate staff members who already have the capacity to provide services through Irish in developing and enhancing that capacity.

Chapter 4 Monitoring and Review

Each Section Head will monitor the operation of the scheme commitments and ensure that the commitments are being met. The Irish Language Officer will report annually to the Chief Executive on the implementation of the Scheme.

Chapter 5 Publicising the Scheme

The contents of the scheme will be publicised to the general public by:

- ❑ Publication on the HEA's website
- ❑ Notification to all higher education institutions covered by the HEA Act
- ❑ Circulation to appropriate bodies and agencies
- ❑ Circulation to other stakeholders in higher education
- ❑ Circulation to those who made submissions to the HEA
- ❑ Local and National Media

A copy of this scheme will also be forwarded to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.