



**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES
ACT 2003
LANGUAGE SCHEME
2018 - 2021**

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Chapter 1 Background

1.1 Introduction

This Scheme was prepared under section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 (the Act). The Standards in Public Office Commission (Standards Commission) was requested by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to draft a scheme.

Section 11 of the Act provides for the preparation by public bodies of a statutory scheme detailing the services 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 public body through Irish will be so provided within an agreed time-frame.

In accordance with section 14(3) of the Act, language schemes remain in force for a period of 3 years or until such time as a new scheme is confirmed by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, whichever is the later.

1.2 Guidelines for preparation of a scheme

This scheme was drawn up in accordance with Guidelines under Section 12 of the Act prepared by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The Standards Commission published notices under section 13 of the Act inviting interested parties to make submissions in relation to the preparation of the draft scheme. We appreciate contributions received.

The Standards Commission is guided by the principle that the provision of Irish language services should be based on:

- the underlying level of demand for specific services in the Irish language;
- the importance of a proactive approach to the provision of such services;
- the resources, including human and financial resources, and
- the capacity of the body concerned to develop or access the necessary language capability.

This scheme has been formulated with the intention of ensuring that all relevant obligations under the Official Languages Act by the Standards Commission will be fully addressed on an incremental basis, through this and future schemes.

1.3 Background

This scheme aims to consolidate and build on the Standards Commission delivery of services in the Irish language.

The preparation of the scheme was overseen by the Standards Commission and responsibility for its monitoring and review will rest with the Commission Secretary.

The Standards Commission is committed to providing the full range of services through Irish and all documents published on its websites will be in both the Irish and English language. Areas for future enhancement of the service provided by the Standards Commission are identified in the scheme.

1.4 Commencement date of the scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It commences with effect from **01 October 2018** 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

2.1 Overview of the Standards Commission

The Standards Commission is an independent body established in December 2001 by the Standards in Public Office Act 2001. It has six members and is chaired by a former Judge of the High Court, Mr Justice Daniel O’Keeffe. It has supervisory roles under five separate pieces of legislation:

- the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995, as amended by the Standards in Public Office Act 2001, (the Ethics Acts);
- Part 15 of the Local Government Act 2001;
- the Electoral Act 1997, as amended, (the Electoral Acts);
- the Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Amendment) Act 2014, (the Parliamentary Activities Allowance Act);
- the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015.

2.2 The functions of the Standards Commission

The Standards Commission supervises the disclosure of interests by certain politicians and senior public servants; oversees compliance with tax clearance requirements by all national politicians and senior public servants and investigates complaints about national and local politicians and public servants under ethics legislation. It also supervises the disclosure of political donations and election expenditure by national politicians and political parties under the electoral legislation as well as reviewing annual statements of accounts furnished by political parties. In addition, it supervises the expenditure of state funding received by political parties under the electoral and parliamentary activities allowance legislation. Finally, the Standards Commission maintains the register of lobbying, oversees the implementation of the register, monitors compliance, provides guidance and assistance and, where necessary, will investigate and pursue breaches of legal requirements.

2.3 Customers

The Standards Commission interacts with a large number of stakeholders, including members of the Government, public representatives, Government Departments, other offices and agencies, journalists and members of the public generally.

2.4 Websites

The Commission operates two websites. www.lobbying.ie is exclusively used to maintain the register of lobbying and related matters. www.sipo.ie is for all the other work of the Commission.

Chapter 3 Commitment to provide service in Irish

3.1 Language in which current services are provided

The working language of the Standards Commission is almost exclusively English, reflecting the demands of our customers. The policy of the Standards Commission has always been to provide service in Irish to customers, where Irish is the client's language of choice, within existing resources, to the greatest extent possible. Such services extend to telephone or face to face communication and correspondence in the Irish language is responded to in Irish. Annual reports are published in both official languages. Irish or bilingual versions of some, but not all, publications of interest to the public have been made available in hard copy and on our websites. Where the skill or resource is not available within the organisation, the Standards Commission calls on external support, specifically in relation to translation services.

3.2 Statutory obligations and commitments

The Standards Commission is committed to a progressive improvement of the Irish language service offered to its clients and to publicise the availability of such services.

3.3 Means of Communication with the public/information to the public

3.3.1 Reception/Telephone Services

The Standards Commission offers a service in Irish as follows:

- first response/greeting service - from the commencement of this scheme Reception staff in the Secretariat of the Standards Commission will greet customer firstly in Irish and then in English and will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish. Appropriate training will be provided;
- staff will route callers requesting an Irish or bilingual service to staff competent to provide this;
- staff identified as competent and willing to provide a service through Irish will leave a bilingual version of their voice mail answers.

The reception of the Office of the Ombudsman is the reception area that will deal with any personal callers to the Standards Commission. The Office of the Ombudsman is committed to providing a service through Irish to all personal callers to the office and to contact the Standards Commission if/when a personal caller wishes to speak to a staff member of the Secretariat of the Standards Commission.

3.3.2 Face to face

Face to face contacts take place at present on a casual drop-in basis (referred to above) or on the basis of an appointment made.

The Standards Commission will continue to provide the following service:

- Appointments - a client who requires a service in Irish, and who requests a meeting to discuss his or her case, will be facilitated in meeting a staff member who is competent in Irish.
- Casual/Drop-in - a client will have access to an Irish speaker if one is available in the Secretariat of the Standards Commission at the time. Otherwise we will offer contact details and an appointment with an Irish speaker.

3.3.3 Correspondence and emails

The Standards Commission will send all mass communications in both official languages. In addition to fulfilling its legal obligation to reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish, the Standards Commission will initiate any further correspondence in Irish where the person has expressed their preference to do so.

3.3.4 Publications

- Publications, including leaflets, guides and forms are, and will continue to be published bilingually or in both official languages on our websites and where necessary in hard copy.
- In addition to the Annual Reports, other periodic or special reports published by the Standards Commission will be published bilingually.
- Investigation Reports under section 23 of the Ethics in Public Act, as amended, will be published in the language used in the course of the hearing.

3.3.5 Press Releases

We will issue all press releases in both official languages, other than in exceptional cases involving statements made at short notice, and where the translation of the material within the timescale required is not possible.

3.3.6 Electronic communication

The Official Languages Act 2003 (section 9(3)) requires public bodies to ensure that where they are communicating for the purposes of providing information to the general public or to a class of the general public - in writing or by electronic mail - the communication shall be in the Irish language only or in the Irish and English languages.

The Standards Commission is conscious of the importance of electronic communication. In that context the following will be undertaken.

- Where any new website is being planned, provision of the website in both Irish and English will be central to the planning and procurement process. All new web pages will be in both official languages except in the case of investigations reports as noted above.
- On line services are and will continue to be provided in both languages.

- Most publications predating this Scheme, which are available in the English form only, need to have the English versions updated. When revised English versions of these documents have been provided they will be translated to Irish immediately and published. The aim is to have all such documents revised within two years and Irish versions of these provided immediately thereafter.
- Where a document is published on the websites (e.g. annual report) for which there is a requirement under the Official Languages Act to have a published version in Irish, the Irish version will be published on the websites at the same time as the English version.
- In the context of proposals to make the Standards Commission more accessible to our clients, where on-line services are being provided, they will be provided simultaneously in both languages.
- The Standards Commission is obliged in accordance with section 8 of the Freedom of Information Act 2014, to prepare and publish a scheme relating to the publication of information available concerning its work.
- A link to the Irish version of the relevant legislation, where available, will be posted on the current websites from the commencement of the Scheme.

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 Standards Commission in Irish first. Individual staff members will be encouraged to provide voicemail messages bilingually, where possible.

3.3.7 Investigations

Investigation hearings will be conducted through English but the use of Irish will be facilitated where required. Where it is requested that an investigation hearing is conducted in Irish, it will be conducted with simultaneous translation provided, as considered appropriate.

3.3.8 Media interviews

A spokesperson for the organisation will be available to the media to provide an Irish service, if advance notice is provided.

3.3.9 Twitter

Twitter communications will be in English only unless it is in response to a twitter message in Irish in which case the response will be in Irish only.

Chapter 4 Developing capacity for provision of services

4.1 Developing Staff Competence

4.1.1 Resources

Under a shared services arrangement, the Office of the Ombudsman is responsible for the allocation of staff resources to the Standards Commission. The Office is aware of the challenges of recruiting, training and retaining staff who are competent in Irish. The successful delivery of existing and enhanced services in Irish is dependent crucially on the ability and willingness of staff to provide this.

4.1.2 Commitment

The Standards Commission will seek to build on its Irish capacity through a suite of mechanisms such as recruitment, training and retention policies. The Commission will continue to ensure that staff appreciate the thrust of the Act, understand the immediate legal requirements and the commitment to deliver a progressively enhanced service and see the service as an integral part of the commitment to quality client service.

The Standards Commission will encourage staff to use their existing competence in Irish; we will train and support staff so that existing competence can be improved and we will provide the appropriate administrative supports required to ensure that the identified standards/actions can be met.

- Language Awareness Training - Training policy within the organisation will continue to promote an informed and positive attitude towards the right of the client to a service in Irish. This will be effected through appropriate induction training, to be reinforced through regular training.
- Staff who have some Irish language competence will be encouraged to use and build on their existing skills.
- Staff competence will be developed through language training courses to be provided externally or internally as appropriate. Staff will continue to be encouraged to attend language training courses during or outside office hours.
- Training needs will be identified in the course of the Performance Management Development System and the Training Officer will incorporate those needs into individual and generic training programmes as appropriate in the light of the priorities and resources.
- Irish language templates of frequently used letters/documents are available and will be updated as the need arises to encourage staff to participate in providing service in Irish.
- Staff will be directed to sources and services that support the provision of Irish language services, including relevant websites and the list of translators available to the Commission who have been selected through a competitive tendering process.

- Staff will be encouraged to participate in the once a week meeting where Irish is used in an informal setting in an effort to extend their competence.

4.2 Assessing Demand

In order to accurately assess the demand for services in Irish, the Standards Commission will continue to monitor existing procedures for recording enquiries, complaints and requests made in Irish.

Chapter 5 Monitoring and revision

The Standards Commission will keep the operation of the scheme under review. A formal system for monitoring requests for services through Irish will be available and recorded in our Annual Report.

The day to day operation of the scheme together with ongoing monitoring of the level of demand will be the responsibility of the Standards Commission Secretariat.

Chapter 6 Publicising of agreed scheme

The provisions of the scheme will be brought to the attention of the public by means of the following:

- The scheme itself and subsequent updates on the delivery of commitments on particular services will be reported upon in the Annual Reports which are published on the Standards Commission's websites.
- A press release will be issued to mark the scheme's publication and availability
- The scheme will be circulated to those who made a submission as part of the consultation process, to Irish Language organisations, and relevant public bodies.
- The Standards Commission will post notices as appropriate on the websites and on publications, drawing attention to the availability of services in Irish.

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