

RÁITEAS TOSAIGH AG AN UASAL DAVID CAGNEY, PRÍOMHOIFIGEACH ACHMHAINNÍ DAONNA DON STÁTSEIRBHÍS, AN ROINN CAITEACHAIS PHOIBLÍ AGUS ATHCHÓIRITHE (RCPA) CHUIG AN gCOMHCHOISTE MAIDIR LEIS AN nGAEILGE, AN GHAELTACHT AGUS POBAL NA GAEILGE
21 IÚIL 2021 ag 12.30 i.n.

Ba mhaith liom mo buíochas a ghabháil leis an gCathaoirleach agus le Comhaltaí an Chomhchoiste as an gcuireadh chun a bheidh i bhur láthair inniu.

Is mise Príomhoifigeach Acmhainní Daonna na Státseirbhíse sa Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe. Fad is atá mé anseo os bhur gcomhair inniu, iarraim ar na baill a thabhairt faoi ndeara nach bhfuilim ach ag labhairt faoi hábhair a fheidhmíonn go ginearálta leis an Státseirbhís.

I mo theannta inniu tá mo chomhghleacaithe, an tUasal Rob O'Toole, Príomhoifigeach ó Rannán Beartais Acmhainní Daonna na Státseirbhíse Roinn Caiteachas Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe chomh maith leis an Dr. Aodhán Mac Cormaic, Stiúrthóir na Gaeilge sa Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus na Meán – tá an bheirt acu ag obair lena chéile chun an Plean Gníomhaíochta 5 Bliana a chur chun cinn faoin Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge atá ag an Rialtas.

Cé go bhfuil Gaeilge agam agus tá iarracht á dhéanamh chun feabhas a chur ar mo chuid Gaeilge ar bhonn leanúnach, chun cinntiú go bhfuil mé in ann m'aird ina n-iomlán a dhíriú ar cheisteanna na baill, ba mhaith liom cuireadh a thabhairt do mo chomhghleacaí Eva Ní Shuilleabháin (atá ag obair i mo Roinn) chun an chuid eile do mo ráiteas tosaigh a léamh chun a chur sa taifead.

Soláthair seirbhísí Gaeilge ó Roinn Caiteachas, Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe agus na gníomhaireachtaí atá go díreach faoina sainchúram

Is ar an gcomhlacht seirbhíse poiblí agus dá Máthair-Ranna Rialtais faoi seach atá an dualgas ar sholáthar seirbhísí poiblí do chomhlachtaí poiblí.

I gcás mo Roinn fhéin, is iad na príomh custaiméirí ná an tAire, an tAire Stáit, an Rialtas, an tOireachtas, chomh maith le Ranna Rialtais eile. De bharr cineál a gcuid feidhmeanna agus obair An Roinn ní bhíonn ardleibhéil teagmhála le, nó seirbhísí á chur ar fáil agus a sholáthar go díreach, le baill aonair don phobal i gcoitinne.

Tá an Roinn Caiteachas Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe tiomanta chun a chuid dhualgaisí á chomhlíonadh faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003 agus, go háirithe, na dualgais a leagtar amach i Scéim Teangacha Oifigiúla na Roinne, atá ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne agus atá á uasdátú i láthair na huaire.

Tá an Roinn tiomanta gach iarracht a dhéanamh faoin bPlean Gníomhaíochta um Sheirbhís do Chustaiméirí agus Cairt Chustaiméirí na Roinne chun cúram a dhéanamh dár gcustaiméirí ar mhian leo a ngnó a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge.

I m'aighneacht scríofa a chur chuig an gCoiste, leag mé béim ar an tslí a sholáthraíonn comhlachtaí atá faoi scáth na Roinne Caiteachas Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe a sheirbhísí Gaeilge dá gcustaiméirí. Is iad sin ná an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí, an Oifig Náisiúnta um Sheirbhísí Comhroinnte agus Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí.

Líon de na státseirbhísigh agus na seirbhísigh poiblí atá dátheangach sa Ghaeilge agus sa Bhéarla

Níl comhaireamh ceart ag an Roinn Caiteachas Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe ar líon na státseirbhísigh poiblí atá líofa i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla.

Mar a dhein mé tagairt dó i m'aighneacht scríofa chuig an gCoiste, d'fhoilsigh An Coimisinéir Teanga tuarascáil i 2019 ina leagfar amach torthaí iniúchadh cuimsitheach ar líon na státseirbhísigh a bhfuil cumas labhairt an Gaeilge acu. Is iad seo a leanas na torthaí:

- tugadh le fios go bhfuil líon na státseirbhísigh a luaidh go bhfuil líofacht acu sa Gaeilge íseal – b'ionann 2.62% de dhaonra iomlán na státseirbhísigh a rinneadh iniúchadh orthu
- tháinig sé chun solais nach raibh ach 0.4% do na postanna sa Státseirbhís luaite le bheith ag lorg líofacht sa Ghaeilge.

Níl aon chúis agam a chreidiúint go mbeadh an-difríocht ó na figiúirí seo dá méadófaí an méid a úsáidtear sa sampla.

Léiríonn torthaí an iniúchadh seo scála an chomh-dhúshlán atá romhainn amach chun seirbhísí dhátheangacha a bheith ar fáil ar fud na státseirbhíse agus an sprioc a bhaint amach go mbeidh 20% d'earcaigh nua in ann a gcuid oibre a dhéanamh trí Gaeilge faoi 2030 mar atá leagtha amach i mBille na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Leasú).

Daoine dátheangach feidhmiúla a earcú don Státseirbhís

Tá an earcaíocht go léir bunaithe ar éileamh agus tugann an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí faoi chomórtais thar ceann na státseirbhíse chun painéil a chur ar bun ónar féidir postanna a líonadh de réir mar a thagann folúntaisí i Ranna nó Oifigí Rialtais.

Tá bealaí éagsúla ann chun gur féidir cainteoirí Gaeilge a earcú chuig poist sa státseirbhís. Maidir le grád seirbhíse ghinearálta neamh-speisialtóra, is iad seo na bealaí:

- comórtas tiomnaithe Ghaeilge, **nó**
- comórtas neamh-dhátheangacha (is féidir le hiarrthóirí dhátheangach spéis a léiriú in aon post ag grád áirithe); **nó**
- an dá bhealach atá luaite ansan

Faoi na rialacha seo bheadh seans níos fearr ag daoine dátheangacha poist a fháil sa Státseirbhís agus ardú céime a thabhairt dóibh ina dhiaidh sin. Beidh siad in ann dul in iomaíocht i níos mó comórtais i gcomparáid le duine nach bhfuil feidhmiúil sa dá theanga.

Is féidir le fostaithe buann, a éiríonn leo ina dtréimhse phromhaidh, iarratas a chur isteach chun aistriú chuig ról nó áit eile nuair a bheidh siad incháilithe faoin Scéim Soghluaisteachta na Státseirbhíse. Is féidir leo aistriú chuig nó amach as ról dhátheangacha.

Na Treoraithe earcaíochta is déanaí do chainteoirí Gaeilge

I m'aighneacht scríofa a chur chuig an gCoiste, chuir mé an t-eolas is déanaí faoi ghníomhaíocht earcaíochta Gaeilge na státseirbhíse ó 2017 go dtí seo ar fáil. Is iad seo a leanas na príomhtreoraithe:

- I rith an tréimhse chuaigh níos lú ná 1% do ceapacháin na Státseirbhíse go postanna ina raibh Gaeilge ag baint leo.
- Tá iarratais ó chainteoirí Gaeilge do buan-poistean dátheangacha mar Oifig Cléireachais agus Oifig Feidhmiúcháin, a bhfuil freagrachtaí lárnacha orthu as seachadadh seirbhíse ag oifig Státseirbhíse, an-íseal i gcomparáid le comórtais neamh-dhátheangacha.

Éileamh iomaíoch ar Éireannaigh dhátheangach feidhmiúla ó Institiúidí an Aontais Eorpaigh

Faoin mbliain 2022 beidh an Ghaeilge mar theanga oibre oifigiúil iomlán an Aontais Eorpaigh agus cuirtear fáilte roimis seo.

Ciallaíonn sé sin, áfach, faoi láthair go bhfuil iomaíocht dhíreach ann idir Státseirbhís na hÉireann agus na Seirbhísí Aistriúcháin in Institiúidí an Aontais Eorpaigh maidir leis an líon bheag do na hoibrí oilte dhátheangacha atá ann faoi láthair go háirithe ó bhunaíodh an Aonad Aistriúcháin Gaeilge an Aontais Eorpaigh i mBaile Átha Troim, Contae na Mí, le déanaí.

Ní comhtharlú ar bith é go bhfuil an Dr. Mac Cormaic in éineacht linn inniu. Cuirfidh an taithí atá gnóthaithe ag an Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus na Meán i bhforbairt agus ag cur straitéisí i bhfeidhm atá dírithe ar deireadh a chur le maolú na hEorpa, in iúl dúinn faoi cad a dhéanaimid sna blianta amach romhainn.

Don gcéad uair riamh, i nuacht atá thar a bheidh dearfach don Roinn – ina bhfuil forbairt na Gaeilge mar an príomhfhreagracht acu - beidh ról lárnach acu maidir le eolas a thabhairt do bheartas earcaíochta na seirbhíse poiblí.

Má tháimid chun an sprioc go mbeidh 20% d'earcaigh nua in ann a gcuid oibre a dhéanamh trí Gaeilge a bhaint amach faoi 2030, beidh orainn cur chuige trasna an rialtas ar fad có-oibriú iliomad páirtithe leasmhara. Is tionscadal fadtéarmach é sin agus tá go leor dúshlán ann agus beidh cur chuige praiticiúil comhordaithe ag teastáil uaidh sa tréimhse suas go dtí 2030.

Uasoiliúint do Státseirbhísigh atá líofacht sa Gaeilge ag obair sna Ranna difriúla cheana fhéin

Tá an Bille reatha atá faoi bhráid Thithe an Oireachtais dírithe go príomha ar earcaíocht sa státseirbhís sa todhchaí. Ní mór dúinn gan dearmad a dhéanamh ar an 40,000 nó mar sin státseirbhíseach atá aginn cheana féin.

Tá cursaí Idirmheánacha agus Ardchúrsaí Gaeilge ar fáil do gach státseirbhíseach trí OneLearning, an tIonad Seirbhísí Comhroinnte Foghlama agus Forbartha don státseirbhís, atá lonnaithe i Roinn Caiteachas Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe . Leanann siad ar aghaidh ag obair le Gaelchultúr chun sraith cúrsaí Gaeilge a chur ar fáil ar líne. Is é an rún atá ag na cúrsaí sin ná tacú le baill foirne a n-inniúlacht sa Ghaeilge a fhorbairt agus, ar bhonn tábhachtach, cur le cumas na Státseirbhíse seirbhísí a sholáthar trí mheán na Gaeilge don phobal.

Mar a shonraítear i m'aighneacht tá 1,291 státseirbhísigh cláraithe ar chúrsa oiliúna Gaeilge ó 2018 i leith. Tá 307 cláirithe i mbliana.

Tá OneLearning ag forbairt a chéad ghlúin eile de chúrsaí oiliúna faoi láthair. Áirítear leis seo béim leanúnach ar oiliúint sa Ghaeilge a sholáthar agus pleananna chun cúrsa Gaeilge do thosaitheoirí a thabhairt isteach.

Mar fhocal scoir

Tá bóthar fada le taisteal chun an sprioc earcaíochta dúshlánach a bhaint amach go mbeidh 20% d'earcaigh nua in ann a gcuid oibre a dhéanamh trí Gaeilge faoi 2030.

Leis an spriocbhliain do 2030 mar pháirt don Bhille nearthaite, ba cheart an sprioc earcaíochta a bhaint amach, agus tagairt shainiúla do na gealltanais seo i Straitéis Athnuachana na Státseirbhíse 2030 a seoladh i mí na Bealtaine 2021, cinnteofar go mbeidh an státseirbhís ar fad ar bord lena chinntiú go ndéanfar an iarracht is fearr na spriocanna seo a bhaint amach.

Is féidir le bhail na Choiste a bheith cinnte go n-oibreoidh oifigigh ó mo Roinn agus ón tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí go réamhghníomhach mar bhall den Choiste Comhairleach atá le bunú ag an Aire Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus na Meáin nuair a bheidh an Bille reatha atá faoi bhráid Thithe an Oireachtais cuireadh i bhfeidhm.

Gabhaim buíochas libh arís as cuireadh a thabhairt liom teacht os comhair an Choiste inniu agus táim ag tnúth le bheith i rannpháirtíocht libh amach anseo.

OPENING STATEMENT BY MR DAVID CAGNEY, CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURE AND REFORM TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IRISH LANGUAGE, GAELTACHT AND THE IRISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

21 JULY 2021 at 12.30pm

I thank the Chairperson and Members of the Committee for the invitation to appear before you today.

I am the Chief Human Resources Officer for the Civil Service in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). During the course of my appearance before you today, I would ask members to please note that I can only speak to matters applying more generally to the civil service.

I am joined here today by my colleagues Mr Rob O'Toole, Principal Officer from DPER's Civil Service HR Policy Division as well as Dr Aodhán Mac Cormaic, Director of Irish in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media – both of whom work closely together in progressing the current 5 Year Action Plan under the Government's 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language.

While I have some conversational Irish that I seek to continuously improve, to ensure that I can direct my full attention to members' questions, I wish to invite my colleague Ms Eva Ní Shuilleabháin (who works in my Division) to read the remainder of my opening statement into the record.

Provision of Irish Language services by DPER and agencies directly under its remit

The provision of public services by public bodies is a matter for each public service body and their respective parent Government Department.

In the case of my own Department, DPER's principal customers are the Minister and Minister of State, the Government and the Oireachtas, as well as other Government Departments. Given the nature of its functions and work, the Department does not have a high level of direct contact with, or provide schemes and services directly to, individual members of the general public.

DPER is committed to meeting its obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003 and, in particular, the commitments outlined in the Department's Official Languages Scheme, which is available on the Department's website and is in the process of being renewed. The Department's Customer Service Action Plan and Customer Charter also commits to making every effort to accommodate our customers who wish to conduct their business through Irish.

In my written submission to the Committee, I have highlighted how bodies directly under the aegis of DPER, such as the Public Appointments Service, the National Shared Services Office and the OPW, provide Irish language services to their customers.

Number of bilingual civil servants and public servants

The number of public servants that are proficient in both Irish and English is not recorded by DPER.

As referenced in my written submission to the Committee, An Coimisinéir Teanga published a report in 2019 that set out the results of a comprehensive audit that he completed on the number of civil servants with competence in Irish. The results of the audit:

- indicated that the number of civil servants declaring themselves to be competent in Irish was low - equating to only 2.62% of the total civil servant population audited
- highlighted that only 0.4% of civil service posts audited were designated as positions having an Irish Language proficiency requirement.

I have no reason to believe that these figures would vary significantly had the sampling size been increased.

This audit illustrates the scale of the collective challenge ahead of us to improve the delivery of bilingual services across the civil service and to achieve the target of 20% of new recruits being competent in Irish by 2030 as set out in the Official Languages (Amendment) Bill.

Recruitment of functional bilinguals to the Civil Service

All recruitment is demand led and the Public Appointments Service undertakes competitions on behalf of the civil service to establish panels that may be drawn upon as vacancies arise in Government Departments or Offices.

There are a number of ways by which Irish speakers may be recruited to civil service posts. For non-specialist general service grades, this may be by way of:

- a dedicated Irish language competition, **or**
- a non-bilingual competition (by which a bilingual candidate can express an interest in any posts at a particular grade); **or**
- both of the above

The opportunity of functional bilinguals being successfully recruited to the civil service in the first instance, and being subsequently promoted, is improved by virtue of their being eligible to compete in more competitions compared with a peer who is not a functional bilingual.

Permanent hires that subsequently pass their probationary period may apply for transfer to another role or location once eligible under the Civil Service Mobility Scheme. This includes transferring to or from bilingual roles.

Recent Irish language recruitment trends

In my written submission to the Committee, I provided an update on civil service Irish language recruitment activity from 2017 to date. The key trends are:

- just under 1% of all civil service appointments over the period were to Irish language positions
- applications by Irish speakers for bilingual permanent Clerical Officer and Executive Officer roles, which have core responsibilities for service delivery by Civil Service offices, remain extremely low when compared with non-bilingual competitions.

Competing demand for functional Irish bilinguals by EU Institutions

Irish becomes a full official working language of the EU from 2022 and this to be welcomed. It does, however, mean that there is now direct competition for a current small pool of skilled bilingual staff between the Irish civil service and the translation services in the EU institutions - especially given that an EU Irish Translation Unit has recently been established in Trim, County Meath.

It is no coincidence that we are accompanied by Dr. Mac Cormaic today. The experience gained by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in developing and implementing strategies aimed at ending the European derogation will inform a lot of what we do in the years ahead. For the first time ever, the Department - whose core responsibility is the development of the Irish language - will have a central role in informing public service recruitment policy.

If we are going to achieve the 20% recruitment target by 2030, we are going to have to implement a cross-government approach with buy-in from a myriad of stakeholders. This will be a long term-project with many challenges which will require a coordinated hands-on approach in the period up to 2030.

Upskilling of language proficiency for existing Civil servants

The current Bill before the Houses is principally focused on future hires to the civil service. We must not forget about our existing 40,000 or so civil servants.

Intermediate and Advanced Irish language training courses are available to all civil servants via OneLearning, which is the Learning and Development Shared Services Centre for the civil service, that is based in DPER. The provision of these courses aims to support staff to develop their competence in the Irish language and, importantly, to increase the capacity of the Civil Service to provide services through the medium of Irish to the public.

As detailed in my submission 1,291 civil servants have enrolled on an Irish language training course since 2018. 307 enrolments have taken place this year alone.

OneLearning is presently developing its next generation of training courses. This includes a continued focus on the provision of Irish language training and plans for the introduction of a beginners' Irish language course.

In conclusion

There is a long journey to be travelled to reach the challenging recruitment target of 20% that new hires to the civil service by 2030 will be bilingual.

The inclusion in the strengthened Bill of a reference date of 2030 by which the recruitment target should have been achieved, coupled with specific reference to these commitments in the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy that was launched in May 2021, will ensure collective buy-in across the civil service to ensure that best endeavours are made to meet these targets.

Members of the Committee can be assured that officials from my Department and the Public Appointments Service will proactively work as members of the Advisory Committee that is to be established by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media once the current Bill before the Houses has been enacted.

Thank you again for inviting me to appear before the Committee today and I look forward to engaging with you.