



**Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas**

Houses of the Oireachtas Service

Language Scheme

2018

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Introduction

The Official Languages Act 2003

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 bilingually.

The aim of the Official Languages Act 2003 is to ensure that services through the Irish language are available to the public and that those services are of a high standard.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service (HOS) is committed to its statutory obligations under the Act and, arising from those obligations, the first Language Scheme (which was prepared in accordance with section 11 of the Official Languages Act) was enacted in 2012. An internal review of that scheme was carried out and the results of that process helped to form this second scheme.

Submissions from the Public

A notice was published on www.tuairisc.ie and on the website of the Houses of the Oireachtas on the 15th of November 2017, in accordance with section 13 of the Act, inviting representations from any interested parties in relation to the preparation of a Draft Language Scheme under section 11 of the Act. A bilingual press release was also issued.

Submissions were received from the public and these submissions were considered in drafting the scheme. TDs and Senators were also invited to give their views and their submissions have also been included in the new Scheme.

The objective of the new Scheme is to continue with the commitments laid out in the original Scheme and to build on those commitments incrementally.

The Content of the Language Scheme

The Scheme builds on services currently available through Irish in HOS. Areas for future enhancement of the service provided by HOS through Irish are identified in the new Scheme.

Commencement Date of Scheme

This scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The scheme will commence with effect from 01 August 2018 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, whichever is the later.

Straitéis na Gaeilge

Along with providing members of the public with services through Irish, HOS is committed to cultivating a positive and welcoming atmosphere for the language generally in the Houses. In order to advance that objective, an Irish Language Strategy was developed by the Service and approved by the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission early in 2018.

The aim of the Straitéis is to facilitate Members and staff in engaging with the Irish language in a positive and rewarding manner.

In addition to the commitments under the Language Scheme, the Straitéis aims to provide opportunities for all to use and enjoy the language, regardless of their level of competency.

The Straitéis will run in parallel with, and complement, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service Language Scheme.

Straitéis na Gaeilge was launched by An Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD, on the 28th of March 2018.

Houses of the Oireachtas Service

Language Scheme 2018

Commitments

A The Houses and Members

1. An information leaflet will be made available detailing services offered in Irish to Members and their staff.
2. All committee rooms will be fitted with simultaneous translation (interpretation) technologies.
3. Members Services will make claims forms available to Members in Irish.
4. Members will receive regular reminders that a correspondence service is available to them, provided by Rannóg an Aistriúcháin.
5. All Members will be provided with an Irish language spellcheck to facilitate working through the Irish language.
6. Terminology lists for individual Government Bills will be provided to Members and the media to facilitate debates in the Houses through the medium of Irish.
7. Terminology lists for Members and the media will be provided to facilitate general debates in Irish.

B Encouraging the Use of Irish

8. An Irish language library, *Taisce na Leabhar*, will be created to assist Members and staff in improving their language reading skills. A special emphasis will be placed on books for adult learners of Irish.
9. A programme of Irish language social events will be organised for Members and staff with a primary focus on bilingual events and events for those with only the *cúpla focal*.
10. Irish language resources and Irish language conversation opportunities will be provided on the Oireachtas campus, in the form of regular events. Depending on availability of accommodation, a dedicated *Seomra na Gaeilge* may be provided aimed at providing an opportunity for Members and staff to access Irish language resources and speak the language.

C Correspondence

11. HOS will initiate correspondence in Irish with those who are known to prefer correspondence in Irish.

12. The following standard message will be incorporated on all letters and emails welcoming correspondence in Irish:
'Cuireann Seirbhís Thithe an Oireachtais fáilte roimh chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge.'
13. A specific message welcoming the use of the Irish language will be incorporated into new stationery.
14. The official placenames of Gaeltacht areas, as declared by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, will be used by HOS in communications with the general public.
15. The Oireachtas Communications Unit will ensure that all correspondence to schools as part of the Education programme will be issued in both official languages.

D Information Leaflets / Application Forms / Posters

16. Leaflets, posters and application forms will be in bilingual format within the same cover.
17. HOS will continue the process of progressively translating all such existing material, which is still being used, with a view to providing such material in bilingual format.

E Press Releases

18. At least 10% of all new press releases issued will be available in both official languages (increase of 5% from the last scheme).

F Oral Announcements / Telephone Communications

19. HOS switchboard operators will answer the phone by referring to the name of HOS or of the unit/office in Irish and English.
20. HOS will ensure that switchboard staff are familiar with basic greetings in Irish.
21. Switchboard staff will be provided with a list of staff members who can provide a service through Irish and this list will be reviewed and updated annually.
22. Suitable arrangements will be put in place so that switchboard staff can put members of the general public in touch, without delay, with whichever office or officer is responsible for offering the service required through Irish.
23. Staff will be provided with guidance on handling telephone calls from Irish speaking members of the general public.
24. All pre-recorded announcements in lifts will be bilingual.
25. Members and staff will be encouraged to have their pre-recorded telephone greetings and email signatures in bilingual format. Text for both signatures and the pre-recorded greeting will be provided. On request, a service will be provided for those who wish to have the telephone greeting recorded for them.

26. All voicemail messages on the telephones at the Library & Research Service central enquiry desk will be made available in both official languages.
27. The ICT Helpdesk voicemail will be available in both official languages.

G Website

28. All static material on the Oireachtas website will be bilingual and any updates to that material over time will be bilingual.
29. Any defective links between language versions of material on the website will be resolved as a matter of priority when brought to the attention of the Service.

H Computer Systems and Interactive Services

30. The ICT Unit will ensure full Irish language compatibility in the migration to Outlook and in all computer systems for use by Members and by staff in general in the Service.
31. Interactive services will be available bilingually. Currently, the only interactive service available is the lodging of a petition with the Petitions Committee.
32. The information screens outside the Committee Rooms in Leinster House 2000 will display messages bilingually.

I Signage

33. All sections in HOS will be reminded periodically of the requirement under the Scheme to display all signs and notices intended for the general public bilingually.
34. An audit of all signs on the Oireachtas campus will be undertaken annually and errors corrected.

J Communications Unit

35. Letters will be sent in bilingual format to all secondary schools in relation to the Education Programme. All elements of the programme can be provided through the medium of Irish.
36. Lesson Plans produced by the Education Officer will be available in both official languages.
37. HOS will arrange activities through Irish for key public engagement events such as Culture Night.

38. HOS will ensure that the Irish language is a central element in the Centenary Commemorations of the sitting of the First Dáil in January 2019 and in programme events throughout that year.
39. Link-ups with Irish language radio stations will be established through radio broadcasts from the Oireachtas, involving Members and staff.
40. HOS will examine the technical solutions for bilingual screen captioning on Oireachtas TV with a view to providing such captions, if technically possible.

K Training and Development

41. The Training Unit will issue regular updates on Irish language courses and available learning opportunities.
42. Staff will be encouraged to participate in Irish language training.
43. HOS will include language awareness as part of both induction and customer service training so as to ensure that staff understand (a) why a bilingual policy is being implemented, (b) the context and background to the policy, and (c) how the policy will affect their work.
44. All staff will have easy access via the internal Plinth network to information and language resources, e.g. guidelines, policies, placenames, dictionaries, etc.
45. A list of terms in Irish considered useful to staff in carrying out their duties through the medium of Irish will be provided to all staff in HOS and will be updated periodically.

L Superintendent's Section

46. *An Fáinne* may be worn by Ushers who are capable of, and willing to, provide services through Irish if requested.
47. HOS will work to ensure availability of tours of Leinster House in both official languages. Training will be available to Oireachtas Ushers to encourage them to improve and have confidence in their language skills.
48. The Visitor Management System in Leinster House 2000 will be fully bilingual.

M Human Resources

49. A key priority of HOS HR strategy will be to increase the number of bilingual staff in the Service with a view to supporting bilingual service provision, with an initial focus on front-line services for Members and the public.

N Official Translations of the Acts of the Oireachtas

50. The recommendations of the 2018 external Capacity Review of Rannóg an Aistriúcháin will be implemented to ensure appropriate capacity to publish official translations of the Acts of the Oireachtas.
51. All available translations of the Acts of the Oireachtas will be uploaded, updated and revised in a central repository on the web.

O Feedback and Review

52. The implementation of the Language Scheme will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and reports will be provided to the Management Board every six months by the Chief Translator and other Principal Officers with responsibilities under the Scheme.
53. Feedback on the operation of the Scheme will be sought and welcomed on a regular basis during the period of the Scheme.
54. HOS commits to assessing, on an ongoing basis, the level and nature of demand for services through Irish and to ensuring that the Service continues to meet this demand in a planned, coherent fashion.

Publicising Agreed Scheme

The contents of this Scheme along with the commitments and provisions of the Scheme will be publicised by means of:

- Press Release;
- HOS Website.

A copy of the Scheme will be forwarded to Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga. Copies of the Scheme will also be given to those people/organisations who/which forwarded submissions to HOS.