



**An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán**
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 2003

MANUAL FOR PREPARING A LANGUAGE SCHEME

Original Version: October 2017

Updated: March 2021

www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-tourism-culture-arts-gaeltacht-sport-and-media/

Contents

1. Foreword	3
2. The Official Languages Act 2003.....	3
2.1. General Information on the Official Languages Act.....	3
2.2. Summary of Main Provisions of the Official Languages Act	3
2.3. Amendments to the Official Languages Act 2003.....	5
3. Preparing your Language Scheme – A Step by Step Guide	6
3.1. Step 1: Notice of Intention to Prepare a Draft Scheme	6
3.2. Step 2: Collating Public Submissions & Assessing the Potential Demand for Services ...	6
3.3. Step 3: Developing Your Language Scheme.....	6
4. Useful Sources of Information.....	7
5. Sample Advertisements.....	7
5.1. Sample Notice for use in Newspapers & other Suitable Publications	7
5.2. Sample notice for the website of the public body.....	8
6. Sample Commitments	9
6.1. Oral Communication – Sample Commitments	9
6.2. Publications - Sample Commitments	11
6.3. Media - Sample Commitments.....	12
6.4. Information Technology - Sample Commitments.....	13
6.5. The Gaeltacht - Sample Commitments	15
6.6. Other Means To Improve Irish Language Capability - Sample Commitments.....	15
7. Designation of Posts requiring Irish Language Competency.....	17
8. Additional Support.....	17

1. Foreword

This manual has been prepared by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to assist public bodies with the preparation of language schemes under the [Official Languages Act 2003](#). It should be read in conjunction with previously published detailed guidelines that are available on the Department's website [here](#).

2. The Official Languages Act 2003

2.1. GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

The [Official Languages Act 2003](#) provides a statutory framework for improvements in the delivery of public services through Irish over time so that the State's obligations can be met in a coherent manner which is commensurate with available resources.

The Act provides for the preparation by public bodies of statutory schemes detailing the services which 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 currently provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

Language schemes remain in force for a period of 3 years or until a new scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, whichever is the later.

The [Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga](#) was established under the Act in 2004. The primary functions of the Office are to monitor compliance by public bodies with the provisions of the Act and to take appropriate measures to ensure such compliance.

2.2. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROVISIONS OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

The principal provisions of the Act are as follows:

- a) The making of regulations by the Minister for Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, to give full effect to the Act (**Section 4**).

- b) The right to use the Irish language before either House of the Oireachtas or any of its committees **(Section 6)**.
- c) The printing and publishing in each of the official languages simultaneously of any Act of the Oireachtas as soon as may be after its enactment. This does not, however, prohibit the publication on the internet of an Act of the Oireachtas in one official language only, prior to its printing and publication in both official languages **(Section 7, as amended by the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011)**.
- d) The right to be heard and to use Irish in court proceedings **(Section 8)**.
- e) The duty of public bodies to ensure that the Irish language, or both Irish and English, are used on stationery, signage, advertisements and in oral announcements, in accordance with regulations made by the Minister **(Section 9(1))**.
- f) The duty of public bodies to reply in Irish, either in writing or electronically, to correspondence received in Irish **(Section 9(2))**.
- g) The duty of public bodies to ensure that communications, in writing or by electronic mail, for the purpose of furnishing information to the public, shall be given in Irish or in Irish and in English **(Section 9(3))**.
- h) The duty of public bodies to publish certain documents in Irish and in English simultaneously **(Section 10)**.
- i) The duty of public bodies to prepare a scheme detailing the services that they will provide:
- in Irish only,
 - in English only, and
 - in both Irish and English
- and the measures they will take to ensure that any service not currently available through Irish will be so provided **(Section 11)**.
- j) The duty of public bodies to ensure that:
- an adequate number of staff are competent in the Irish language **(Section 13(2)(c))**
 - particular Irish language requirements associated with the provision of services in Gaeltacht areas are met **(Section 13(2)(d))**

- the Irish language becomes the working language in its offices in the Gaeltacht not later than such date as may be determined by it with the consent of the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media **(Section 13(2)(e))**.
- k) The establishment of the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga to monitor and ensure compliance with the Act, to investigate complaints and give advice to the public and public bodies **(Section 20)**.
- l) Official placenames in the Gaeltacht will be in Irish only and equal status will be given to the Irish and English versions of placenames in the rest of the country **(Part 5)**.
- m) The assigning of general responsibility to the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in regard to the delivery of State services through Irish **(Sections 4, 5, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17)**.

2.3. AMENDMENTS TO THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 2003

The Official Languages Act was amended by the following Acts, each of which can be accessed through the following links below.

- Section 62 of the [Civil Law \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Act 2011](#) amended section 7 of the Official Languages Act 2003 to allow the publication of any Act of the Oireachtas on the internet in one official language, before it is printed simultaneously in both official languages.
- Section 48 of the [Environment \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Act 2011](#) amended the Placenames Order (Gaeltacht Districts) 2004 made under the Official Languages Act and provides that “*Daingean Uí Chúis*” in Irish and “*Dingle*” in English are now the official placenames, rather than “*An Daingean*”.
- Section 23 of the [Ombudsman \(Amendment\) Act 2012](#) amended section 36 of the Official Languages Act 2003 by substituting “reviewable agency (within the meaning of that Act)” for “Department of State or other person specified in Part I of the First Schedule to that Act”.

3. Preparing your Language Scheme – A Step by Step Guide

The step by step guide below has been designed to facilitate the preparation of language schemes by public bodies. It should be read in conjunction with previously published detailed guidelines that are available on the Department’s website [here](#). A template is also available on the Department’s website for use by public bodies when preparing their language schemes, available [here](#).

3.1. STEP 1: NOTICE OF INTENTION TO PREPARE A DRAFT SCHEME

- The first step in devising a language scheme is to publish a notice of intention to prepare a draft scheme under the Official Languages Act 2003. Guidance is provided under point 2.2 ‘*Notice of Intention to prepare a draft scheme*’, page 8 of the Guidelines.
- It is suggested, as a minimum, that an Irish language advertisement should be circulated to a suitable publication such as the Irish language news site, Tuairisc.ie. Staff should also be made aware of the intention to draft a language scheme through normal channels of communication, e.g. email, intranet, Facebook, website, etc. A minimum of one month for receipt of submissions is recommended.
- Sample Irish and English advertisements for publication purposes are shown under [Chapter 5](#). For cost effectiveness, it is acceptable to place the short version of the English advertisement in an English language newspaper. A detailed advert in Irish and English for website publication is also provided.

3.2. STEP 2: COLLATING PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS & ASSESSING THE POTENTIAL DEMAND FOR SERVICES

- Guidance is provided under point 2.3 (page 9) of the Guidelines, available [here](#).
- All submissions received should be considered as part of the process of preparing the language scheme.

3.3. STEP 3: DEVELOPING YOUR LANGUAGE SCHEME

- The language scheme commitments should contain SMART targets, i.e. specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely targets.
- The particular Irish language requirements associated with the provision of services in Gaeltacht areas should be prioritised.
- [Chapter 6](#) contains a range of suggested commitments which public bodies may wish to select for the language scheme, as appropriate.

Public bodies are welcome to offer additional commitments in their schemes. It is important to note that nothing in a scheme shall be construed as prohibiting a public body from implementing further measures to promote the status of the Irish language.

4. Useful Sources of Information

- The **Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga’s** website is available [here](#). This website is a useful resource for information about the functions and work of the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga and for accessing schemes that have been confirmed by the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.
- Information concerning the provision of **Irish language training and proficiency testing for the civil service** under the terms of a Service Level Agreement between the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, available [here](#).
- Other useful information in relation to the Official Languages Act can also be found on **the Department’s website** [here](#) and a template for use by public bodies when preparing their language schemes, available [here](#).

5. Sample Advertisements

5.1. SAMPLE NOTICE FOR USE IN NEWSPAPERS & OTHER SUITABLE PUBLICATIONS

The following advert may be used for inclusion in newspapers and/or for circulation to other suitable publications such as the Irish language news site, Tuairisc.ie.

<p>OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 2003</p> <p>PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON A DRAFT SCHEME BY</p> <p>[Insert NAME OF BODY]</p> <p>For further information and to make a submission, please see our website at www.xxx.ie</p>	<p>ACHT NA dTEANGACHA OIFIGIÚLA 2003</p> <p>COMHAIRLIÚCHÁN POIBLÍ AR DHRÉACHTSCÉIM TEANGA DE CHUID</p> <p>[cuir isteach AINM AN CHOMHLACHTA]</p> <p>Chun aighneacht a dhéanamh agus tuilleadh eolais a fháil, féach ar ár láithreán gréasáin www.xxx.ie</p>
--	---

5.2. SAMPLE NOTICE FOR THE WEBSITE OF THE PUBLIC BODY

<p style="text-align: center;">REQUEST FOR SUBMISSIONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 2003</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PREPARATION OF A DRAFT LANGUAGE SCHEME BY (insert NAME OF BODY)</p> <p>The (insert name of body) proposes to draft a language scheme in accordance with the Official Languages Act 2003. The primary objective of the Act is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. (Insert name of body) invites submissions in relation to the preparation of the draft scheme from any interested parties.</p> <p>You may return submissions to:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(insert email address)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(insert name of public body)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(insert address of public body)</p> <p>By 5.00 p.m. on (insert date)</p> <p>Submissions received may be placed on www.xxx.ie</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">AIGHNEACHTAÍ Á LORG</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ACHT NA dTEANGACHA OIFIGIÚLA 2003</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DRÉACHTSCÉIM Á HULLMHÚ AG AN (AINM AN CHOMHLACHTA)</p> <p>Tá sé i gceist ag (ainm an chomhlachta) scéim a dhréachtú de réir Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003. Is é bunchuspóir an Achta ná a chinntiú go mbeidh fáil níos mó ar sheirbhísí poiblí trí Ghaeilge agus go mbeidh siad ar chaighdeán níos airde. Tá aighneachtaí maidir le hullmhú na dréachtscéime á lorg ag (ainm an chomhlachta) ó aon pháirtithe leasmhara.</p> <p>Ba chóir aighneachtaí a sheoladh chuig:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Seoladh ríomhphoist)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Ainm an chomhlachta)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Seoladh an chomhlachta)</p> <p>Roimh 5.00 i.n. (cuir isteach an dáta)</p> <p>Is féidir go mbeidh fáil go poiblí ar aighneachtaí ag www.xxx.ie</p>
--	--

6. Sample Commitments

Please select the appropriate commitment(s) from each of the sections below. This is not an exhaustive list. It is expected that a higher level of commitment will be given in second and subsequent schemes. Commitments given in previous schemes should be incorporated into the draft scheme.

Important: Please note that mandatory requirements are included in the [template](#) for your convenience.

More information on the Regulations is available in the Coimisinéir Teanga’s Guidebook [here](#).

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
6.1. ORAL COMMUNICATION – SAMPLE COMMITMENTS	
<p>Reception</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reception staff will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish / will be able to deal with the public in Irish / will be proficient in Irish. • Customers will be greeted firstly in Irish and then in English. • Customers will be greeted bilingually. • The names of the members of staff who are able to communicate in Irish will be advertised in the various sections of the office of the public body and at reception. • Seeking services in Irish at reception will not cause any undue delay. Arrangements are in place to put members of the public in touch speedily with the relevant official(s) responsible for providing the service required through Irish. • A service through the medium of Irish will be available from the following sections: (to be specified). • The choice of language of the customer will be established and he/she will be directed to the appropriate official. If the official is unavailable, the following options will be offered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ calling back when an Irish speaker is available; ○ conducting business through another member of staff providing a translation service; or ○ continuing to conduct business in English.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
<p>Face to face / counter service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will ensure that at least one member of staff is competent to deal effectively with members of the public through the medium of Irish. • Counter service provided through English will also be provided through Irish. • An up-to-date list of staff members who can provide a service through Irish will be made available.
<p>Switchboard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switchboard staff will give the name of the public body in Irish. • Switchboard staff will give the name of the public body in Irish and English. • Switchboard staff will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish and will then be able to transfer the call to another member of staff who can speak Irish. • Switchboard staff will be provided with an up to date list of staff members who can provide a service through Irish. • Standard guidelines will be developed to deal with callers who wish to speak Irish and they will be distributed to the various sections of the office. • A telephone service through the medium of Irish will be available from the following sections: (to be specified). • The names of the members of staff who are able to communicate in Irish will be advertised in the various sections of the office and at reception. • Suitable arrangements are in place so that switchboard staff can put members of the public in touch, without delay, with the office or officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available. • The switchboard staff will be able to give a comprehensive service to anyone who requires services through Irish. • We will ensure that services through Irish will be provided by each section that deals with the public.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service through Irish will be on a par with the service provided through English. Members of staff, who are willing to provide a bilingual service, will have bilingual voicemail messages.
Telephone communications with the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff will be provided with guidance on handling telephone calls from Irish speaking members of the general public. Customers will be greeted firstly in Irish and then in English. Bilingual staff will make customers aware that they are willing to conduct business in Irish, if required.
Pre-recorded messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff will have their pre-recorded personal telephone greetings in bilingual format.
Live announcements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> xx % of live announcements will be bilingual. All live announcements will be bilingual.
6.2. PUBLICATIONS - SAMPLE COMMITMENTS	
Application Forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be a bilingual or Irish version of the most commonly used application forms available (list to be specified). All new application forms will be available bilingually within the same cover. All new application forms will be available in Irish or bilingually. Every application form will be published as a single document with Irish and English side by side. In exceptional circumstances, forms will be published in one language only but a statement will be included in the English version of the form, stating that an Irish version of the form is also available. The Irish version of application forms will be made available in the same outlets as the English version.
Information Leaflets / Brochures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A bilingual or Irish version of the information leaflets and brochures most commonly used will be available (list to be specified).

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • xx% of information leaflets and brochures will be available in Irish or bilingually. The selection criteria will be based on public demand. • xx% of new information leaflets and brochures will be available bilingually. The selection criteria will be based on public demand. • Every information leaflet and brochure, will be available bilingually or in Irish. • Every new information leaflet and brochure, will be available bilingually or in Irish.
<p>Publications / Guidelines</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • xx% of publications, guidelines, etc. will be available in Irish or bilingually. The selection criteria will be based on public demand. • All publications, guidelines, etc. will be available bilingually or in Irish.
<p>6.3. MEDIA - SAMPLE COMMITMENTS</p>	
<p>Press Releases</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • xx% of press releases will be issued bilingually. The objective should be to issue this material simultaneously. • xx% of press releases will be issued bilingually to the Irish language media. The objective should be to issue this material simultaneously. • All press releases will be issued bilingually. The objective should be to issue this material simultaneously. • All press releases pertaining to the Gaeltacht or Irish language issues will be issued simultaneously in Irish or bilingually.
<p>Media Spokespersons / Social Media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will provide and/or upskill a member of staff to liaise with the Irish language media. • An Irish speaking spokesperson/s will be available for interviews with the Irish language media.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A current list of Irish speaking spokespersons will be provided to the media. This list will be kept up to date. • There will be a statement on every advertisement welcoming the use of the Irish language. • All the material which is uploaded on social media will be bilingual.
Speeches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will include xx% of Irish content in English speeches.
6.4. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY - SAMPLE COMMITMENTS	
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will publish a dedicated email address for queries in Irish on the website(s) of the public body. • Standard email messages such as disclaimers, will be bilingual.
Websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The static material on the home page and the specified main pages on the public body's website will be available in Irish. • The static material on the home page of any new websites will be available bilingually. • The static material on the home page of any current secondary websites will be available bilingually. • A system will be devised and implemented in order to ensure that the Irish version of material on the website corresponds with the English version. • There will be a navigational link from a page in the English version of the website to the relevant page in the Irish version. • The static material on the website and any other secondary website of the public body will be available bilingually. • The static material on any new websites will be available bilingually. • The static material on any current secondary websites will be available bilingually.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Irish language page will be developed on the intranet and will include basic guidance regarding the provision of Irish language services and the availability of Irish language resources. • Irish language pages will be developed on the website of the public body and will be kept up to date. • Every website will be made fully available in Irish. • Every new website will be made fully available bilingually. • All material for any current secondary website will be available bilingually.
Computer Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All current computer systems will be Irish language compatible. • Any new computer system being installed will be fully capable of handling the Irish language. • Any new printing facilities will be fully capable of handling the Irish language. • The public body will continue to actively use technology to improve the provision of bilingual services. • The Official Languages Act section of the public body's intranet will be expanded as a support and resource for staff.
Interactive Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be an agreed policy regarding online and interactive services that will be available on a bilingual basis. • Any online and interactive services that the public body itself develops will be made available bilingually. • Any online and interactive services that are developed by external companies will be fully available on a bilingual basis, in accordance with technical availability. • Every online and interactive service will be made available on a bilingual basis. • Every new online and interactive service will be made available on a bilingual basis.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All access pages in relation to online and interactive services will be fully available bilingually.
6.5. THE GAELTACHT - SAMPLE COMMITMENTS	
An Ghaeltacht	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Irish language will be the working language in every office situated in the Gaeltacht by 20xx. Every member of staff that deals with the Gaeltacht will be competent in Irish by 20xx. Every member of staff that deals with or works in the Gaeltacht will be competent in Irish by 20xx. Correspondence with the Gaeltacht community will be in Irish only or bilingual. A system will be put in place to ensure that correspondence with members of the Gaeltacht community will be in Irish only, if they so require.
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where required, meetings held in the Gaeltacht will be conducted in Irish with simultaneous translation to English provided, as appropriate. Contributions in Irish or English will be welcome at public meetings organised by or on behalf of the public body. Meetings organised by the public body that deal with Irish language issues will be held in Irish or bilingually, as appropriate.
6.6. OTHER MEANS TO IMPROVE IRISH LANGUAGE CAPABILITY - SAMPLE COMMITMENTS	
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities to develop the Irish language competence of staff will be provided. Appropriate arrangements will be made for the provision of Irish language training and proficiency testing certification for staff in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> support staff in maintaining and developing their proficiency in the Irish language,

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ enhance the capacity of staff to meet their Irish language obligations in the conduct of their duties, and ○ provide an accredited proficiency testing regime for staff. ● Staff will be made aware of language resources such as www.tearma.ie, www.focloir.ie, www.teanglann.ie and www.abair.ie as well as WinGléacht, the electronic version of the Ó Dónaill Irish-English dictionary.
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New staff will be provided with an induction pack containing a copy of our agreed scheme.
Language Promotion Activities / Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Our internal library will ensure that books and other materials in Irish are available as a resource to staff to improve their competence in the Irish language. ● Staff will be encouraged to participate in cultural language activities. ● Staff will be aware of the concept of the proactive agreement - proactively offering services in Irish to the public . ● Access to information on language resources will be facilitated.

7. Designation of Posts requiring Irish Language Competency

Public bodies should identify any posts / areas of work requiring functional bilinguals and include these in their language schemes. In this context, and having regard to the implementation of the [Gaeltacht Act 2012](#), public bodies are requested to pay particular attention to posts that are located in, or serving, Gaeltacht areas and to have regard to commitments made as part of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Workforce Planning Process.

An accreditation standard for designated posts is currently the subject of discussion between the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Public Appointments Service and further information in regard to accredited standards for designated posts will be communicated to public bodies at a later date.

8. Additional Support

The following officers from the Official Languages Act section of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media can provide further support and assistance.

Name	Email	Phone
Diarmaid Ó Mórdha	✉ Diarmaid.OMordha@tcagsm.gov.ie	☎ 074 95 36804 ☎ 087 2251204