



**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 2003
LANGUAGE SCHEME
2017 - 2020**

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

The Official Languages Act 2003 provides for the preparation by public bodies of a language scheme 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.

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 Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, whichever is the later.

1.2 Preparation and Content of the Scheme

In the preparation of this scheme, due regard has been given to the Guidelines issued by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. In addition, there has been a comprehensive process of consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office 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, and
- the resources, including human and financial resources, and the capacity of the OCO to develop or access the necessary language capability.

This scheme complements the principles of Quality Customer Service and our Customer Charter. It has been formulated with the intention of ensuring that all relevant obligations under the Official Languages Act by the Ombudsman for Children's Office will be fully addressed on an incremental basis, through this and future schemes.

1.3 Commencement date of the Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It commences with effect from 09 January 2017 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 of the Ombudsman for Children’s Office

The Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO) is an independent office. The OCO was set up under a law called the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002.

2.1 Role and Remit

Under this law, the Ombudsman for Children has two main roles:

1. to deal with complaints made by or for children and young people about the actions of public organisations.
2. to promote the rights and welfare of children and young people under 18 years old living in Ireland.

The OCO’s work to promote children’s rights and welfare includes:

- finding out what children and young people are concerned about and highlighting their opinions to the Government and other people who make decisions that affect them;
- supporting people, including children and young people, to find out about children’s rights and how those rights can be respected, protected and made real;
- giving advice to the Government and others to help make sure laws and plans affecting children and young people respect children’s rights;
- encouraging public organisations to work in ways that promote children and young people’s rights and welfare; and
- carrying out or commissioning research to get a better understanding of issues that are important in children and young people’s lives.

More information about the OCO’s work is on our website, www.oco.ie.

OCO’s Vision

We want to see an Ireland where all children and young people are actively heard and respected so that they experience safe, fulfilling and happy everyday lives.

We will use our independence and powers to the fullest extent to bring this about.

OCO’s Values

These are the things that drive us as a team and make us who we are:

Compassionate – we care about children and young people and want to see their lives improved.

Independent – our independence is important so we can say the things that need to be said and hold public organisations to account.

Accessible – we are open to listening to children and young people and the adults who care and work with them.

Authoritative – when we speak out on behalf of children and young people we do so in a confident way informed by our research and backed up by the law that created the OCO.

Innovative – we are creative thinkers and are interested in promoting new ways of working with and for children and young people.

Transparent – we want everything we do to be open and easily understood so we can be held to account for the work we do.

This means that as a team we are committed to providing a high quality professional service and will, at all times treat you politely, respectfully and with dignity.

2.2 Main Functions

The Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 (as amended) sets out the Office’s core functions:

- To receive, examine and investigate complaints made by or on behalf of children and young people,
- To undertake research regarding children’s rights and welfare, and to provide independent advice on legislative and public policy developments affecting children and young people.
- To promote children’s rights and welfare by providing an independent voice on behalf of all children and young people in Ireland and affording children and young people opportunities to be heard in relation to issues that affect and concern them.

2.3 Key Services

- Independent complaints handling
- Education and Participation
- Legislation and Policy

2.4 Customers and Stakeholders

The Ombudsman for Children can examine complaints about Government departments, schools, and public bodies providing services or making decisions about children and families or organisations providing services on behalf of the State. Complaints to the OCO can be made directly by children (anyone under the age of 18) about something that affects them.

Adults can also bring complaints on behalf of children and young people. Parents or extended families often bring complaints to the Office on behalf of their children but professionals such as teachers and youth workers can bring complaints too. Other stakeholders include Government departments, local and regional

authorities, health agencies, public and voluntary hospitals, educational bodies, other state bodies and public service agencies.

Chapter 3: Details of services currently being provided in English only or bilingually

Details of services currently being provided in English only or bilingually in Irish and English; **including services in Gaeltacht areas.**

Current Provision of Services		
Services	In English only	Bilingually, in English and Irish
Advice to Government on legislation affecting children	Yes	
Submissions in relation to public policy proposals affecting children	Yes	
Special Reports to the Oireachtas	Yes	
Reports to UN bodies	Yes	
Publish research on matters relating to the rights and welfare of children	Yes	
Consultations with children and young people	Yes	
Deliver rights education workshops for children and young people	Yes	
It's Your Rights website		Most site content is currently in English. Some core content is also available in Irish
Provision of educational materials for primary and secondary schools		Yes Educational materials published to facilitate teaching and learning on children's rights in primary and post-primary schools are all made available in English and Irish
Corporate Services	Yes	
Complaints Freephone line	Yes	
Walk-in complaints	Yes	
Acknowledgement and response to complaints		Yes
Signposting to appropriate organisations		Yes
Examination of complaints		Yes
Investigation of complaints	Yes	
Meeting complainants and		Yes

reviewable bodies		
Provision of investigation statements to relevant parties		Yes if requested
Outreach to stakeholders	Yes	

Chapter 4: Enhancing the provision of Irish Language Services

The provisions shaded in grey in the table below are mandatory requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003.

Means of communication with the public		Commitment	
Recorded Oral Announcements	Recorded Oral Announcements	<p>The following recorded oral announcements will be in Irish or bilingual:</p> <p>(a) Recorded oral announcements provided on the telephone when the offices of the public body are closed;</p> <p>(b) Recorded oral announcements transmitted by a public address system;</p> <p>(c) Recorded oral announcements created and transmitted by means of a computerised messaging system or a computerised telephone answering system.</p> <p>This provision relates to 'recorded' announcements rather than 'live announcements'.</p> <p>Where a Placenames Order is in force, a public body is required to use the Irish language version of the place name specified in that Order in recorded oral announcements made by it or on its behalf.</p>	Mandatory
Written Communication	Letters and Electronic Mail	All written communication will be responded to in the official language in which it was received.	Mandatory

	Stationery	Headings of stationery, including notepaper, compliment slips; fax cover sheets, file covers and other folders, labels and envelopes are provided in Irish or bilingually.	Mandatory
Signage	Signage	All signage placed by the Ombudsman for Children's Office or on its behalf must be in Irish or bilingually, in accordance with the regulations (S.I. No.391/2008).	Mandatory
Publications	Publications	Documents setting out public policy proposals, audited accounts or financial statements, annual reports and strategy statements will be published simultaneously in Irish and English. In addition to the Annual Reports, reports published by the Ombudsman under section 6 (7) of the Ombudsman Act 1980 will continue to be published bilingually.	Mandatory
	Circulars/Mailshots	Where the Ombudsman for Children's Office communicates in writing or by electronic mail with the general public or a class of the general public for the purpose of furnishing information to the public or the class, the body shall ensure that the communication is in the Irish language or in the English and Irish languages.	Mandatory
An Ghaeltacht	Gaeltacht Placenames	The official placenames of Gaeltacht areas will be used by the public body in accordance with the legislation.	Mandatory

The Ombudsman for Children's Office will also undertake the following lists of actions under each service.

Means of communication with the public		Commitment	Timeline By end Yr 1/ Yr 2 / Yr 3
Oral / Written Communication	Reception	Reception staff will be familiar with and use basic greetings in Irish.	End Year 1

		An up to date list of staff members who can provide a service through Irish will be made available.	End Year 2
	Face to Face/Counter Service	Staff members will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish.	End Year 1
	Switchboard	Reception staff will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish and will be able to transfer the call to another member of staff who can speak Irish. All staff members will be provided with a list of staff members who can provide a service through Irish.	End of Year 3
	Telephone communications with the public	Staff members will be provided with guidance on handling telephone calls from Irish speaking members of the general public. The majority of staff members will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish.	End Year 1
	Recorded Oral Announcements	See above	
	Live announcements	See above	
	Information Leaflets/ Brochures	Most commonly used information booklets will be available both in Irish and English and any other information as required based on public demand.	End Year 1
	Application Forms	Complaints forms are available on-line in Irish and English.	End Year 1
	Managing complaints and investigations	A complainant who requires a service in Irish, and who requests a meeting to discuss their case will be facilitated in this regard. A staff member competent to conduct the case in Irish will be assigned where it is received in Irish and this is appropriate.	End of Year 3
	School Workshops and visits from young people	Where required, rights education workshops for children and young people will be partially conducted in Irish.	End Year 3

Media	Press Releases	10 % of press releases will be available bi-lingual and will be released simultaneously. All press releases pertaining specifically to the Gaeltacht or Irish language issues will be issued bilingually.	End Year 1 End Year 1
	Media Spokespersons	We will up skill a member of staff to liaise with the Irish Language media when requested.	End Year 3
	Speeches	Speeches will be made available in the language or languages in which they have been given.	End Year 1
	Other	10% of twitter messages will be bi-lingual	End Year 2
Information Technology	Email	Standard email messages such as disclaimers will be bilingual We will publish a dedicated email address for queries in Irish on our website	End Year 1
	Websites	The static material, which is the material on the website that doesn't change, will be available bi-lingually	End of Year 1
	Computer Systems	Any new computer systems installed will be fully capable of handling the Irish Language.	End Year 2
	Interactive Services	A link to the Irish version of the Ombudsman for Children Acts and to the Freedom of Information Acts will be posted on the current website	End Year 1
Gaeltacht	Meetings	Where requested, meetings held in the Gaeltacht relating to examinations/investigations will be held in Irish with translation to English facilitated.	End Year 2

Chapter 5: Improving Language Capability

5.1 Recruitment

The recruitment of staff with the appropriate level of competence in the Irish language in each area of work of Ombudsman for Children’s Office will be the primary means of optimising the availability of services through Irish. Our recruitment policy, which is subject to the framework of agreed national recruitment procedures, will have regard to the need to improve Irish language capability on an incremental basis.

All new staff will be provided with an induction pack containing a copy of our agreed scheme in order to ensure that they are made aware of our commitments under the legislation.

5.2 Training and Development

The Ombudsman for Children’s Office, is committed to making available opportunities for staff to attend appropriately accredited Irish language training courses, as resources permit. All staff will be advised of facilities/opportunities to improve their competency in Irish.

		Commitment	Timeline By end Yr 1/ Yr 2 / Yr 3
Improving Irish Language Capability	Recruitment	New staff members will be provided with an induction pack which includes a copy of the OCO Language Scheme	End Year 1
	Training	Training needs analysis will be completed to identify any training requirements of staff teams to achieve the goals of this scheme.	End Year 1
		Opportunities to develop the Irish language competence of staff, such as information about courses which staff have an option to attend, will be provided to enhance the capacity of staff in the use of the Irish language.	End Year 2
		Staff will be made aware of language resources as téarma.ie, teanglann.ie, fóclóir.ie	End Year 1
		Staff members will be invited to volunteer to participate in providing the service in Irish on an on-going basis.	

	Participation in language promotion activities /Provision of resources	Our library will be resourced to support staff members to improve their competence in Irish.	End Year 1
		Access to information on language resources will be facilitated.	End Year 1
	Designated Irish Language Posts	Having regard to Government policy for enhanced provision of services in Irish, the Office will, by the end of year one of the scheme, identify any posts for which Irish language competency is an essential requirement. Every effort will be made to fulfil these requirements by the end of this scheme having regard to recruitment, promotion and training policies, as appropriate. This will enable this Office to plan and prioritise the incremental improvement of services in Irish in a more strategic manner.	End Year 1

Chapter 6: Monitoring and Review

The implementation of the scheme will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by the Management team comprising Senior Management in the Office.

A formal system for monitoring requests for services through Irish will be available and recorded as per our current system.

Chapter 7: Publicising of Agreed Scheme

This scheme will be publicised both internally and externally, through a press release initially. A bilingual version of the scheme will be made available on our website and circulated to all staff and appropriate agencies. Other means to publicise the scheme may also be used.

In addition, we will take every opportunity in our day to day interaction with customers to promote and publicise the services we provide in Irish through the following means:

- directly informing customers on a proactive basis of the option of conducting business with us through Irish, for example, by the display of notices at reception areas indicating the Irish language services that are available;
- prominently listing these services on our website;
- signifying on selected guidelines, leaflets and application forms that these documents are also available in Irish, unless presented bilingually;
- giving equal prominence to Irish and English language materials.

A copy of the agreed scheme will be forwarded to the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga.

The **English** language version of this scheme is the official version.