

## **Correspondence with public bodies**

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## **1. What is required where public bodies receive letters and/or emails in Irish?**

Under section 9(2) of the Act, where a person writes to a public body in Irish, by email or by letter, that person is entitled to receive a reply in Irish. On this basis, public bodies have a duty to ensure that they have a system in place to deal with correspondence in Irish. The service in Irish should not be of a lower standard than the service in English. This duty under the Act only applies where the person has initiated the correspondence with the public body. It does not apply where the public body has initiated the correspondence.

However, where a public body has confirmed a language scheme and where commitments have been given in the language scheme regarding correspondence in Irish with people who have registered for that purpose with the public body, the public body must fulfil that statutory commitment and correspond with those people in Irish. This statutory commitment applies irrespective of whether the person or the public body initiated the correspondence due to the fact that the person has registered with the public body for correspondence in Irish.

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**2. What is required where public bodies use automated replies to emails, e.g. *Out of Office* messages?**

Under section 9(2) of the Act, where a person writes to a public body in Irish, that person is entitled to receive a reply in Irish. If an automated message is used by a public body where email correspondence is expected to be received in Irish as well as in English, a bilingual *Out of Office* message should be used. A standard *Out of Office* reply in Irish which can be easily amended could be prepared in advance using numerals for the dates in question.

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**3. What is required where public bodies use email signatures containing contact details and/or legal disclaimers?**

The provision of information as part of the footers of emails does not come under either the direct provisions of the Act or the Regulations. Therefore, there is no obligation on public bodies under either the Act or under the Regulations to provide this information bilingually or in Irish only.

However, where a public body has confirmed a language scheme and where commitments have been given in the language scheme regarding the information which is part of the footer of the email, the public body must fulfil that statutory commitment and publish the email signature containing the public body's contact details and the legal disclaimer bilingually or in Irish only in accordance with its scheme.

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#### **4. Can I register with a public body to receive correspondence in Irish?**

It depends. There is no general provision provided under the Act but you can register with a public body to receive correspondence in Irish where a public body has confirmed a language scheme and where commitments have been given in the language scheme regarding correspondence in Irish with people who have registered for that purpose with the public body.

If you are registered with a public body to receive correspondence in Irish, that public body has a duty under the Official Languages Act to correspond with you in Irish. This statutory commitment applies irrespective of whether you or the public body initiated the correspondence due to the fact that you have registered with the public body for correspondence in Irish.

Copies of the language schemes agreed to date can be found at [www.coimisineir.ie/schemes](http://www.coimisineir.ie/schemes).

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