



**Language Scheme 2012 – 2015**  
**Houses of the Oireachtas Service**



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Background

#### 1.1 Introduction

This Scheme was prepared under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service (hereafter referred to as “HOS”). Section 11 of this 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
- through the medium of Irish and English

and the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

#### 1.2 Guidelines for Preparation of a Scheme

Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003 provides for the preparation of guidelines by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and their issue to public bodies to assist in the preparation of draft Schemes. This Scheme has been drawn up with due regard for those guidelines.

HOS has published a notice, in both Irish and English, under Section 13 of the Official Languages Act 2003, inviting representations from any interested parties in relation to the preparation of the Draft Scheme. A notice has also issued to members of the Houses and to all the staff of HOS seeking submissions. These representations and submissions have been taken into consideration in the drafting of the Scheme.

#### 1.3 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 body of the Scheme. The Scheme also includes a commitment to assess on an on-going basis the level and nature of demand for services through Irish and to ensure that HOS continues to meet this demand in a planned, coherent and accessible fashion. HOS will continue to gauge the type and level of demand for its services in the Irish language by carrying out an annual audit of the type and level of queries/requests for services through Irish in a given period. Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the Scheme will rest with the Office of the Clerk-Assistant and Director for House Services and the Chief Translator.

#### **1.4 Commencement Date of the Scheme**

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The Scheme will come into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2012 and will remain in force for a period of 3 years from that date or until a new Scheme has been confirmed by the said Minister pursuant to Section 14 of the Official Languages Act 2003, whichever is the earlier.

## Chapter 2

### Overview of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service

#### 2.1 Customers of HOS

The following four groups are identified as customers of HOS in the Oireachtas Customer Charter:

- Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas;
- Members of the Public;
- Political Staff working in the Houses of the Oireachtas;
- Staff of HOS.

#### 2.2 Mission Statement

Our mission is as follows:

*We will serve the democratic interests of our main stakeholders, the Irish people, by serving parliament through:*

- *enabling the Houses, their Committees and their Members to do their parliamentary business; and*
- *meeting Members needs as public representatives in the context of parliamentary business.*

#### 2.3 Principles

In delivering on our mission statement, we are guided by the following core principles:

- Respect for the democratic process;
- Member-centred service;
- Best practice in management.

#### 2.4 Administration

Under section 4 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act 2003, responsibility for the running of the Houses of the Oireachtas lies with the Oireachtas Commission, an 11-member independent statutory body. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service is the office of the public service staffed by civil servants of the State employed by the Commission to assist it in carrying out its role on a day-to-day basis.

## 2.5 Objectives

The Commission's Strategic Plan 2010-2012 contains key commitments to be delivered over the period of the Plan. These commitments are being delivered on by the four Directorates that make up the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. There are three main strategies in the Plan: Improving Services to Parliament; Improving Services to Members; and Enhancing Service Capability.

## 2.6 Commitment to the Provision of Services through Irish

The central objective of the Official Languages Act 2003 is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. Prior to the drafting of this Scheme, HOS has already stated its commitment to the use of the Irish language within the Oireachtas. The Customer Charter of the Houses of the Oireachtas which is available in both Irish and English on the service website [www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie), states as follows:

*The Houses of the Oireachtas Service is committed to promoting the use of Irish within the Oireachtas and with those who contact, visit or conduct business with HOS. We recognise the importance of enabling you to engage with us in either official language and we will take the necessary steps to facilitate this. We are also committed to ensuring that the service we provide is of an equally high standard regardless of whether you choose to communicate with us in Irish and/or in English.*

*HOS will:*

- *Respond and interact with you in Irish and/or in English as you choose;*
- *Provide our stationery, information booklets and signage in bilingual format;*
- *Provide our guided tours in Irish, in English or in bilingual format;*
- *Continually review the provision of technology that facilitates the use of Irish in an office environment.*

## 2.7 Organisation Chart

The following Organisation Chart details the various sections which comprise the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.

Secretary General and Clerk of the Dáil			Office of the Commission and Secretary General
House Services	Committees, Information & Communications	Seanad, Library & Research Service	Corporate & Members Services
Bills Journal and Questions Office	Committee Secretariat	Seanad operations	Members Services
Debates	Broadcasting and Public Information [including FOI]	Library and Research Service	Human Resources (Personnel, Training, Procurement, Printing)
Rannóg an Aistriúcháin	Communications Unit/ eConsultation and other initiatives to promote democracy	Interparliamentary Relations	Finance / Management Information
Superintendent of the Houses			ICT
			Parliamentary Legal Advisor

Not all of the units/offices within the four directorates listed above deal directly with the public. In the next Chapter, the Scheme sets out the current language situation as regards each of these units/ offices and the extent of their interaction with members of the Houses and with the public.

## Chapter 3

### Overview of Services Provided and the Extent of Service Availability in Irish at Present

#### 3.1 Bills Office

The Bills Office deals with the processing and consideration of legislation, including tabling of amendments. It also processes appeals relating to the registration of political parties and of nominating bodies to Seanad electoral panels. Where a Bill is bilingual, all amendments to the Bill are published bilingually. The brief for the Chair - which contains the question to be put on each section of the Bill, and each amendment - contains all such questions to be put bilingually. The Bills Office has responsibility for issuing writs for Dáil general and by-elections. These writs are issued in Irish and in English. Following the end of each calendar year, the Bills Office also prepares a bilingual list of the short titles of all Bills passed during the previous year.

#### 3.2 Journal Office

The Journal Office is responsible for the Order Paper of the Dáil, the Journal of Proceedings of the Dáil, and Standing Orders and Parliamentary Procedure for the Dáil. Standing Order 18 of the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann 2007 state that the Order Paper, the Journal of Proceedings of the Seanad/Dáil and all other appropriate documents shall be issued in the Irish and English languages. **The Journal Office has minimal contact with the general public.**

#### 3.3 Questions Office

The Questions Office has responsibility for processing Parliamentary Questions. Forms for submitting Parliamentary Questions are available bilingually and Questions for both written and oral response are answered in the language of the original Question.

#### 3.4 eDemocracy Unit

eDemocracy can be defined as the use of Internet and information and communications technology (ICT) to support the democratic process. The eDemocracy programme is concerned with ensuring that all public service information is available on-line through the Web for Members and the public at the same time as, or faster than, it is delivered through traditional channels.

Significant progress on the on-line delivery of services has been made since 1996, when the first Oireachtas website was launched. The website now includes the full text of both current and historical Dáil and Seanad debates and of current Committee debates. These are available in the language used by participants during the actual debate. Bills and Acts of the Oireachtas and information pertaining to sittings of the Houses are also available. Acts of the Oireachtas are available in English and in Irish, if translated. There is limited availability of other content in Irish. Searches may be conducted on the site for material in Irish or in English.

### 3.5 Debates Office

The Debates Office is responsible for producing the Official Report of the Dáil, Seanad and committees and publishing it in hard copy and on the Oireachtas website. It is also responsible for maintaining the historical debates of the Oireachtas from the foundation of the State. The Official Report of all debates of the Dáil, Seanad and committees is published in the language used by Deputies and Senators on the floor of the Chamber or committee room. Witnesses appearing before committees are also reported in the language used, be it Irish or English.

### 3.6 Rannóg an Aistriúcháin

Rannóg an Aistriúcháin provides official translations of Acts of the Oireachtas, Standing Orders of the Houses, Order Papers, Proceedings of the Houses and official correspondence of Members of the Houses. The Acts of the Oireachtas are the primary source of law in Ireland apart from the Constitution. Since 14 July 2006, there is a statutory obligation to publish Acts of the Oireachtas simultaneously in both official languages as soon as possible after their enactment, as set out in section 7 of the Official Languages Act 2003. In accordance with section 3(2)(a) of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (Amendment) Act 2006, the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission has a duty to provide translation services for Acts of the Oireachtas from one official language to the other official language. A simultaneous translation (interpretation) service is provided during sittings of the Dáil and of the Seanad and, if requested, during Committee meetings. Rannóg an Aistriúcháin also assists other units and offices within HOS. The Rannóg also provides a correspondence translation service to Members of the Houses. Since its first publication in 1958, Rannóg an Aistriúcháin has responsibility for managing and publishing the Official Standard Grammar for Irish (An Caighdeán Oifigiúil).

### 3.7 Seanad Office

The Seanad Office is responsible for the Order Paper, the Journal of Proceedings, Standing Orders and Parliamentary Procedure of the Seanad. Standing Order 17 of the Standing Orders of Seanad Éireann 2007 states that the Order Paper, the Journal of Proceedings of the Seanad and all other appropriate documents shall be issued in the Irish and English languages.

The Seanad Office processes the Registration of nominating bodies to the Seanad Electoral panels and all matters relating to the Seanad General Election and Bye-Elections. Clients of the Seanad Office include Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, staff of Members of the Oireachtas, Government Departments and members of the public. Queries generally relate to matters of Parliamentary procedure or Seanad electoral matters.

### 3.8 Superintendent's Section

The Superintendent's Section coordinates the visitor programme for Leinster House. **Over 75,000 visitors visit Leinster House each year and** approximately 2,000 tours of the Houses are conducted annually. At present tours can be arranged in either official language upon request. All visitor material is available in both official languages.

### **3.9 Committee Secretariat**

A person appearing before the Houses of the Oireachtas and/or before committees, sub-committees or joint committees of the Oireachtas has the right to conduct his/her business in Irish or in English. This right is facilitated at all such official debates. Where a parliamentary committee sits in formal session outside the parliamentary precincts of Leinster House, interpretation services are provided at such meeting(s) to facilitate contributions by Irish speakers.

When the Joint Committee on Environment, Transport, Culture and the Gaeltacht or the Select Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht conducts a meeting (in whole or in part) relating to matters concerning the Gaeltacht and/or the Irish language, that session of the meeting and the official minutes are completed in Irish. All correspondence received in Irish is recorded and responded to in Irish. The Clerk to this Joint Committee is assigned, inter alia, on the basis of being proficient both in written and spoken Irish.

It is standard practice for the details on the front cover of every report published by an Oireachtas committee (viz. name of committee, title of report and date of publication) to be in Irish as well as English. Also, where Committees have a statutory role in nominating candidates for membership of boards of State Bodies to the relevant Minister, application forms, advertising and associated documents for the nomination process are currently made available in both Irish and English.

### **3.10 Broadcasting and Information Section**

The Broadcasting and Information Section has responsibility for the televising of all proceedings of the Houses of the Oireachtas and their Committees and also for Freedom of Information requests from the public.

In regard to subtitles and captions used in the Broadcasting/televising systems –

1. The only subtitles done by the Oireachtas Broadcasting Unit (OBU) are the budget speech and these are in English only.
2. The OBU captions (which can be seen on the internal television network) cover all aspects of business in the Houses throughout a sitting day. These captions are in English only, unless specific arrangements are made.

### **3.11 Communications Unit**

Public engagement is a key strategic commitment in the Strategic Plan of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission 2010-2012. The aim of the Communications Strategy is to improve public understanding of and interest in the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas and its members. Consequently, the Communications Unit is the unit within the Service which has the most interaction with the public. The Communications Strategy is based on three actions: Press and Public Relations Services, Education Outreach and Marketing and Information.

### 1. Press and Public Relations Services

As a point of contact for the public and media, thousands of calls and emails are handled on an annual basis. Currently, a limited number of press releases are issued through Irish.

### 2. Education Outreach

Educational material and DVDs for the Education Outreach programme are available in both official languages and there are fluent Irish speakers among the outreach officers who deliver the programme.

### 3. Marketing and Information.

As part of its marketing and information strategy, HOS organises a Family Day and a Culture Night in the Leinster House complex. A marketing event is also held at the National Ploughing Championships. All promotional material for these events is available in both official languages.

### **3.12 Seirbhís Leabharlainne agus Taighde an Oireachtais / Library & Research Service**

The Library & Research Service (L&RS) delivers information and research services which support the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas. The primary users are Members of both Houses and their staff, Committees of the Houses and staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. The L&RS is responsible for managing all procedures relating to the laying of documents before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The form for submitting documents laid is available in both official languages.

### **3.13 Human Resources and Finance**

Human Resources Section and the Finance Unit provide services solely for Members of the Houses and for Staff of HOS. There is limited availability of forms and administrative documentation for staff through Irish. However, any staff members who choose to correspond with the Personnel Unit through Irish are facilitated.

### **3.14 Office of the Parliamentary Legal Advisor**

The principal function of the Office of the Parliamentary Legal Advisor is to give legal advice to Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas. Communication with the public is limited.

### **3.15 Members Services**

Members Services made expense claims forms available to Members in Irish and will do so again now that a new system is in place and the forms have been developed. Also, Members Services published the current Customer Charters and Customer Action Plan in Irish and will do so again for the next iteration of both due this year.

### **3.16 Office of the Commission and the Secretary General (OCSG)**

The staff of the Office of the Commission and Secretary General (OCSG) supports the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission and the Secretary General of the Service. The Commission's Strategic Plan (three

yearly) and its Annual Report, prepared pursuant to sections 6 and 16 of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act 2003, are published in bilingual format.

### **3.17 Office of the Clerk of the Dáil**

The staff of the Office of the Clerk of the Dáil support the Clerk in fulfilling his procedural functions in the Dáil and in fulfilling his *ex-officio* Clerk of the Dáil statutory duties.

## Chapter 4

### Enhancing the Availability of Services in Irish

#### 4.1 General Commitment to Irish Language Service Development

HOS is committed to encouraging the development of Irish language skills across all areas of HOS to facilitate the progressive development of a quality customer service in Irish to meet the demand for such services. However, there are areas (for example press releases) where improvements can be made. While the provision of written communications in bilingual format is primarily a cost and time issue, the development of Irish language skills by staff to facilitate day-to-day interpersonal service delivery is considered to be significantly more difficult.

Any commitment, therefore, to increasing the availability of services provided to Members and staff through Irish will take considerable time and effort. This would require an increase in the relatively small core group of staff with sufficient Irish language capability and confidence to deliver Irish language services on an interpersonal level. The ability of HOS to achieve the aims set out in this Scheme will be influenced by the issues raised above and determined by (a) prior demands on the resources of Rannóg an Aistriúcháin and (b) staff with the requisite Irish language skills in other areas.

#### 4.2 General Means of Communication with the Public

##### 4.2.1 Correspondence

In addition to continuing to fulfill its legal obligation to reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish, HOS undertakes the following commitments:

- HOS will initiate correspondence in Irish with those who are known to prefer correspondence in Irish. Staff will be instructed to maintain a record of such persons or bodies with a view to fulfilling this commitment (from commencement of the Scheme);
- a standard message will be incorporated in the e-mail system, welcoming correspondence in Irish (within 3 months of commencement of Scheme);
- the official placenames of Gaeltacht areas, as declared by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, will be used by HOS in communications with the general public, except where these may differ from the addresses on correspondence received by HOS, and those on file (from commencement of the Scheme);
- the Oireachtas Communications Unit will ensure that all letters issuing to schools as part of the Outreach programme will be published in both languages (within 6 months of commencement of Scheme).

#### 4.2.2 Stationery

As regards stationery:

- a specific reference to the use of the Irish language being welcome will be incorporated into new stationery e.g. ‘Cuirfear fáilte roimh chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge’ (as soon as new stationery is required, designed and acquired following commencement of the Scheme).

#### 4.2.3 Information Leaflets/Application Forms/Posters

HOS produces a number of leaflets, posters and application forms for members of the general public. The following commitments are given by HOS in relation to the provision of such material in Irish:

- Our general policy will be to provide any new such documents in bilingual format **within the same cover**. Should it occur, for operational reasons, that such documents cannot be made available within the same cover, they will still be made available bilingually. **If separate versions are produced, it will be ensured that the Irish language version is as readily accessible as the English version;**
- in addition, HOS will commence the process of progressively translating all such existing material, which is still being used, with a view to providing such material in bilingual format. On a case by case basis, decisions will be made as to whether these materials will be provided within the one cover (by end of year 2 of the Scheme);

#### 4.2.4 Press Releases

A high volume of press releases are issued annually by the Houses of the Oireachtas. For example, in the 6 month period from January 2012 to June 2012, over 400 press releases (approximately 67 press releases per month) issued. Currently, only a very limited number of these press releases are available in Irish. HOS undertakes under this Scheme:

- to ensure that at least 5% of all new press releases issued will be available in both official languages by the end of the period of this Scheme.

#### 4.2.5 Oral announcements/Telephone communications with the public

The following commitments are being made in relation to the provision of oral announcements and telephone communications through Irish:

- HOS switchboard Operators will answer the phone by referring to the name of HOS or of the unit/office in Irish and English (from commencement of the Scheme);

- HOS will ensure that switchboard staff are familiar with basic greetings in Irish;
- switchboard staff will be provided with a list of staff members who can provide a service through Irish (from commencement of the Scheme);
- 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 (within 6 months of commencement of the Scheme);
- staff will be provided with guidance on handling telephone calls from Irish speaking members of the general public (within 6 months of commencement of the Scheme);
- all pre-recorded announcements in lifts will be bilingual (within 3 months of commencement of the Scheme);
- members and staff will be encouraged to have their pre-recorded telephone greetings in bilingual format (within 3 months of commencement of the Scheme);
- Library & Research Service will make all voicemail messages on the telephones at the L&RS central enquiry desk available in both official languages (within 3 months of commencement of the Scheme).

#### **4.2.6 Bilingual Counter Service**

During the life cycle of this Scheme, the usher team will be facilitated in learning the Irish language with the aim of improving our capacity to provide a bilingual counter service.

#### **4.2.7 Website**

The website of HOS has recently been redesigned. While the new website can host Irish language content, it is relatively sparsely populated in that regard. It is proposed that the new website of HOS, subject to any qualifications which may appear elsewhere in this document, will host a far greater amount of bilingual content than is currently available. In particular:

- an Irish language version of the main headings of the various pages on the site (within 6 months of the publication of the Scheme) and the website will be populated with a bilingual version of all static material which appears on the site (by end of the Scheme).

#### **4.2.8 Computer Systems and Interactive Services**

E-mail for the Service is based on the Lotus Notes platform. This application provides for a spellcheck facility which is available in the English language. HOS undertakes:

- that the ICT Unit will assess the technical possibilities in relation to making an Irish language spellcheck dictionary available within Lotus Notes. This assessment will be completed within the first six months of the Scheme;
- that all computer systems in HOS are and shall be fully capable of handling the Irish language; and
- that any interactive services which may become available in the future will be introduced

bilingually in both languages (no interactive services are available at the moment).

#### **4.2.9 Signage**

The following commitments are made in this Scheme in relation to signage:

- a notice will issue to all sections of HOS informing them of the requirement under this Scheme to display all signs and notices intended for the general public bilingually (immediately);
- the Oireachtas Broadcasting Unit will examine the feasibility of displaying on-screen captions in Irish when a Committee is holding a hearing in Irish (voting captions are solely in Irish at present) (within first three months of Scheme).

#### **4.2.10 Encouraging the Use of Irish**

HOS is committed to promoting use of the Irish language and undertakes to implement the following measures in this regard:

- visitors will be informed as a matter of course when arranging tours of Leinster House that tours can be conducted through English or Irish or bilingually (immediately);
- letters will be sent in bilingual format to each secondary school in relation to the Education Outreach programme stating expressly that the programme can be taught through Irish (immediately);
- HOS will also seek to arrange activities through Irish for Family Day and for Culture Night (before end of year one of Scheme).
- Members Services will make claims forms available to Members in Irish.

### **4.3 Improving the Irish language capability of HOS**

The following commitments and priorities have been identified with a view to achieving the objective of improving the Irish language capability of HOS and providing a sound basis for future developments:

- HOS will carry out an update audit to identify those members of staff who wish to be actively involved in offering, and have the necessary Irish language capabilities to offer, services through Irish (by commencement of the Scheme);
- lists of staff who will be available to provide services through Irish will be made available to the switchboard operators and Reception staff in HOS. Staff in HOS will also have access to HOS list (from commencement of the Scheme). Effort will be made to place staff with Irish language proficiency throughout HOS (by end of the Scheme).

#### **4.3.1 Training & Development**

Based on the results of the staff audit, the following actions will be taken:

- training needs identified within the context of the Oireachtas Training and Development Strategy

will be addressed (by end of year 1 of Scheme);

- staff will be encouraged to participate in Irish language training (by end of year 1 of the Scheme);
- 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 (no later than 3 months after the commencement of the Scheme);
- all staff will have easy access to information and language resources, e.g. guidelines, policies, placenames, dictionaries, tapes, etc. (within 3 months of commencement of the Scheme);
- 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 (before end year 1 of Scheme);
- the organisation of Irish conversation social events (ciorcail chomhrá) will be supported through the HOS Partnership structure.

#### **4.3.2 Third Parties**

HOS will ensure that:

- third parties working for HOS will be made aware of the Scheme, where relevant, and will be encouraged to reflect the spirit of the Scheme in the services being provided by them (within 3 months of the commencement of the Scheme).

## Chapter 5

### 5.1 Monitoring and Revision

The effective operation of the Scheme will be kept under review by the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) within HOS, through the Office of the Clerk-Assistant and Director for House Services and the Chief Translator. The day-to-day monitoring function will be carried out primarily by section heads who will be responsible for the implementation of the Scheme within their own areas. Quarterly reports on compliance will be made by section heads to the Chief Translator.

## Chapter 6

### 6.1 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;
- Placement in a prominent position on HOS Website.

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