

Press Release

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A Commentary on the Language Scheme System

“The system of language schemes has failed to achieve its goal. This goal, to increase and improve State services available through the Irish language, will not be achieved unless a new system is established.” An Coimisinéir Teanga

An analysis carried out by An Coimisinéir Teanga, Rónán Ó Domhnaill, on the system of language schemes demonstrated that, at the end of last year, seven requests for the preparation of a language scheme were outstanding for a period in excess of nine years.

In a commentary on the operation of the Official Languages Act by An Coimisinéir Teanga, it was also reported that no Gaeltacht minister to date has reported any public body’s failure to prepare or agree a language scheme, although the Minister has the power to do so under the Official Languages Act.

As part of this analysis an audit was carried out of every language scheme that was confirmed in 2015 and 2016. This audit demonstrates:

- That retrograde steps were taken in more than half of the schemes that were agreed and were supposed to increase the services available in Irish
- That posts with an Irish language requirement were identified in less than one language scheme in five
- That commitments made in schemes, that were the subject of an investigation by An Coimisinéir Teanga, were set aside or reduced in two out of every three schemes subsequently confirmed

Among the recommendations made by An Coimisinéir Teanga are:

- A new recruitment policy that would ensure a minimum necessary level of staff with competence in Irish
- Common standards with regard to services in Irish that would not be based on the system of language schemes
- To forge a connection between language planning and language rights by ensuring that State employees working in or serving the Gaeltacht, are fluent in Irish

An Coimisinéir Teanga, Rónán Ó Domhnaill, said, “it is clear that the system of language schemes has failed to achieve its goal. This goal, to increase and improve State services available through the Irish language, will not be achieved unless a new system is established. I have recommended an alternative approach in this commentary; I hope it will be considered.”

Note: This is the first time the current Coimisinéir Teanga has published a commentary on the operation of the Official Languages Act and only the second time since the Office was established in 2004. A commentary is published when it is necessary to draw attention to the operation of the Act.

The commentary’s **main findings and recommendations** are enclosed. A copy of the commentary itself will be available on the website, www.coimisineir.ie .

For further information contact **Órla de Búrca** at (091) 504006, 0872307182 or eolas@coimisineir.ie