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ANNUAL REPORT 2021: AN COIMISINÉIR TEANGA

20% increase in complaints received by An Coimisinéir Teanga in 2021. One in 5 complaints related to a lack of services through Irish during the pandemic.

An Coimisinéir Teanga Rónán Ó Domhnaill has said that many people who contacted his office last year expressed serious disappointment that state services through Irish were often marginalised during the pandemic. One third of Covid-19 complaints concerned interactive services, such as booking a PCR Test or a vaccine appointment online, not being available in the first official language of the State.

Mr Ó Domhnaill said: *“A total of 123 complaints were received this year related to the health crisis. Many of those complaints could not be investigated due to a lack of provision in legislation requiring satisfactory service through Irish. The matter highlights again the importance on giving effect to the provisions in new Official Languages Act which came into law late last year.”*

Rónán Ó Domhnaill added: *“My Office will be undertaking a substantial information and public awareness campaign later this year to emphasise the importance of the new legislative provisions to both the public and public bodies. If the various provisions of the new Act are properly implemented, the public shall benefit from the availability of a wider range of services through Irish than heretofore.”*

Some of the main provisions in the new Act include:

- An objective that by 2030 20% of new recruits to the public service and Civil Service be proficient in Irish
- A provision requiring public bodies to ensure that at least 20% of their annual advertising is in Irish
- A provision to ensure communications with a public body on social media are answered in the same language.

The monitoring function of An Coimisinéir Teanga continued last year and is highlighted in the annual report. The monitoring included following-up on recommendations in previous investigations relating to public bodies such as the Department of Education, the Educational Research Centre and RTÉ. An Coimisinéir Teanga looks forward in due course to utilising a new function in the revised Official Languages Act which will enable him to monitor any enactments relating to the use of the Irish language, not just the Official Languages Act as is at present.

Five formal investigations were concluded by the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga in 2021. One investigation found that Meath County Council breached the Meath County Development Plan by not ensuring the linguistic heritage of the Gaeltacht there was protected when determining planning applications in Ráth Chairn.

Two other investigations related to Dún-Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and their failure to appoint an Irish-language officer and their failure to ensure that a newsletter distributed throughout the area was available in Irish also.

A total of 727 complaints were made to the Office last year – a 20% increase on 2020. 27% of complaints came from Dublin, with a further 27% from Gaeltacht regions – a 4% increase on 2020.

MORE INFORMATION:

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