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ANNUAL REPORT 2020: AN COIMISINÉIR TEANGA

One in every five complaints made to Language Commissioner last year were Covid-related.

20% of all complaints raised by An Coimisinéir Teanga with public bodies during 2020 pertained to Covid-19. The majority of these cases concerned various means of communication with the public in English only, including information booklets, websites and advertising. Many of the complaints could not be formally investigated due to a lack of provision for Irish language services in the Official Languages Act, according to An Coimisinéir Teanga, Rónán Ó Domhnaill.

Mr Ó Domhnaill said: *“The figures released in the annual report highlight that the more urgent and more important the service or information that the State is providing, the less likely it is that information will be provided in Irish. Many complainants who contacted my Office felt Irish speakers were being marginalised by the State at a time when bringing the public together in common purpose was required. The huge challenges facing the State in a time of Covid should not be underestimated but there should be no conflict between the grave national actions underway and obligations regarding language rights.”*

Rónán Ó Domhnaill added: *“The complaints we received last year demonstrate yet again that the Official Languages Act needs to be strengthened to ensure a greater level of service through Irish from the State. It is hoped that a revised Official Languages Bill will begin to do just that when enacted.”*

Four formal investigations were concluded by the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga in 2020, two of which were Covid-related.

An investigation found that the Department of Education breached the Education Act when it decided to provide an online portal to enable students register for calculated grades in the Leaving Cert in English only.

Another investigation found that Galway City Council breached the Official Languages Act when erecting a large number of signs in English only which were in relation to Covid.

A total of 604 complaints were made to the Office last year – a 14% reduction on 2019. 33% of complaints came from Dublin, with a further 23% from Gaeltacht regions.

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