

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
Department for Infrastructure
Language Policy - Irish
2017

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Language Policy sets out the ways in which the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) should fulfil its commitment to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML). Guidance on the ECRML is available on the Department for Communities internet site at:

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/european-charter-regional-and-minority-languages>

The Language Policy is available on the DfI internet site, in both English and Irish, at:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/accessible-and-alternative-formats>

- 1.2 Linguistic diversity must be regarded as a common cultural wealth. Everyone is entitled to respect and courtesy, which extends to their language. Every effort should be made to convey this respect even if it is not possible to deal with the person in the language of his/her choice.
- 1.3 Officers should become familiar with the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages that apply to Irish and the measures the Department has decided upon to implement them, including correspondence and translations.

2. Personal Names

- 2.1 A person is legally entitled to assume any name he or she wishes – in English or in any other language. If he or she is generally known by that name, it is valid for purposes of legal identification. Unless it appears that he or she is not generally known by that name, staff must respect the wishes of anyone who wants to be known by the Irish version of their name, and should use only that name in official business. Care should be taken to avoid confusion and duplication if an individual is known by both Irish and English names. It may be useful to put a record of both versions on file.
- 2.2 If an officer believes that the person in question may also have been using an English form of their name, they might ask, *“Is this the form of your name you always use? I have to ensure that all your records are together.”*

- 2.2 If a person gives his/her name in Irish, and the officer dealing with the person has difficulty in writing or even pronouncing it, they should ask the person to help them spell it.
- 2.4 If the name includes a fada, this should present no problem. Practically all computer software packages cater for this.¹
- 2.5 In short, a person may use whatever form of their name they choose. This right should never be questioned. Every effort should be made to write and/or pronounce a person's name correctly. Don't be embarrassed to seek that person's help.

3. Face-to-Face Interviews and Meetings

- 3.1 If someone starts speaking in Irish to staff who do not speak Irish you should explain this and offer the person the choice of:
- continuing the interview/meeting in English;
 - giving written views in Irish.
- If in doubt, clarify that the language in question is Irish.
- 3.2 If a person gives advance notice that they want to speak Irish, an interpreter should generally be arranged. This can be arranged through the Equality Unit. See Section 6 for information on how to book an interpreter. An exception to the general requirement to provide an interpreter might be recruitment interviews, where necessary testing of communication skills in English could not be carried out properly unless English was the working medium.
- 3.3 If no notice is given, the person should be offered the choice of:
- drawing on the assistance of Irish speaking staff, if available;
 - making their point in English;
 - giving written views in Irish;
 - making an appointment when an interpreter is present.
- 3.4 If a meeting is arranged, double-check beforehand that the interpreter is

¹ Vowels in Irish may have long accents, a fada, similar to the *accent aigu* in French. However, unlike French, the fada, in Irish is also used in the case of capitals. When using Microsoft Word, a fada can be keyed in by pressing the *Alt Gr* key and then the vowel in question. In the case of capitals the *Shift* key should also be pressed. All such letters can also be accessed by using the *Insert –Symbol* facility.

available. Never promise a service on which you cannot deliver.

4. Telephone Calls and Voicemail

4.1 If a caller begins the conversation in Irish the officer may respond in Irish (if they speak it) or English. If the officer does not speak Irish they should explain this and offer alternatives for dealing with the call. The following form of words may be helpful:

“I am sorry I cannot answer you in Irish. But I can offer you the following options for dealing with your call. You may:

- *continue the call in English;*
- *write to us in Irish;*
- *wait while I transfer you to an Irish speaking colleague [see 4.2];*
- *transfer to the NICS voice mail where you can leave a message in Irish [see 4.3-4].”*

4.2 DfI Irish speaking officers who are willing to assist with telephone calls are:

- Garry McKenna (ext. 40673)
- Déaglán Coleman (ext. 40914)
- Brendan McNeice (ext. 41082)
- David Crabbe (ext. 40780)

They will speak to the caller and, afterwards, pass the message to the relevant business area for follow-up action.

4.3 **Procedures for use of Irish Language Voicemail:** If a caller contacts the central switchboard or an individual Department indicating that they wish to conduct their business in Irish, the official receiving the call will speak to them in Irish if they feel confident they can do so. If they cannot do so, or are unable to divert the caller to the above Irish speaking members of staff, they will divert or direct the caller to the NICS Irish language voice mail phone on extension 75252 or 02890 515 252.

The voice mail is monitored by officials in Languages Branch, Department for Communities. Messages received will be translated immediately or forwarded to an interpreter for translation.

Translated enquiries will be forwarded to the appropriate Department / official for action.

4.4 **Message on Irish voicemail facility (in Irish):**

“Welcome to the Northern Ireland Civil Service. If you would like to leave a message with us someone will come back to you as soon as possible. You can leave your message after the tone. To handle your call we need you to give us the following information:

- your name;
- your address;
- your daytime telephone number;
- the name of the person you would like to contact, if you know it;
- the name of the Department you would like to contact, if you know it; and
- The nature of your business.

We will try to get back to you as soon as possible but if your business is very urgent you are advised to contact the particular Department directly in English.”

5. **What to translate**

- 5.1 The Minister has decided that all Ministerial forewords to DfI Corporate Plans, Reports and Consultation documents should be routinely translated into Irish.
- 5.2 In addition, new and revised information leaflets, and widely used application forms etc of significant interest should also be translated into Irish. While the information leaflets and application forms etc do not necessarily need to be printed in Irish, electronic versions of the Irish translation should be made readily available as word documents / pdfs when required.
- 5.3 It would also be good practice to include a sentence in Irish in the English versions of leaflets and application forms etc of significant interest indicating that Irish translations are also available.
- 5.4 When requested, the Department will also consider providing translations of other documents, publications or executive summaries; subject to cost and value for money considerations.
- 5.5 Business Areas should also give priority to providing pro-active translations of documents into Irish when they:
 - are likely to be of particular relevance to Irish speakers

- are likely to be read and used generally; and
- will contribute to promoting, maintaining and safeguarding the Irish language.

6. Correspondence

- 6.1 The Charter obliges Departments to accept written correspondence in Irish. If it seems that, taking translation into account, it will not be possible to provide a substantive reply by the relevant deadline, an acknowledgement should be issued in the normal way, explaining that the letter is being translated and that a substantive reply will follow – example provided at Annex A.
- 6.2 Any response should issue in English and be accompanied by an unsigned version in Irish using the translation provided at Annex B. Section 6 provides advice on how to obtain a translation.

7. Logos, Signage and letterheads

- 7.1 DfI will display the Department's bi-language logo in English and Irish across all aspects of its business. The following exceptions should only be applied in very limited circumstances:
- Where there is not enough room to display the two languages the name of the Department will be given in English only; i.e. small promotional items.
 - Where the use of Irish is likely to cause upset the Department's name in English should only be used.
 - Where the logo is being used in a single language environment the name in only that language should be used.
- 7.2 In the case of DfI letterheads the two versions are displayed.

8. Advertising and Presenting Departmental Business

8.1 Advertising – Public Notices

The Minister has decided that greater use should be made of Irish in advertising and presenting departmental business. This includes the use of bilingual headings in the advertising of all public notices.

When arranging translations the actions being carried out need to be translated into Irish, and where a town or street name has an accepted version available in Irish then this language version should also be used.

8.2 Advertising – Significant Departmental Announcements

An appropriate Irish Language newspaper should be included when making important departmental announcements. This should include notices about equality issues, policy consultations, public appointments and major recruitment exercises.

9. How to Obtain Translations / Interpreters

9.1 There is a NICS wide Face to Face Interpreting & Text Translation Service which is carried out by Flex Language Service Ltd, and Step Training & Learning Ltd, who provide the service in accordance with the specification and terms and conditions of their contracts. It is envisaged that Flex, as the first ranked tender, will carry out the majority of the work required.

This contract can be used for both translations and arranging for interpreters.

All requests for translations, or interpreters, should be obtained through the Equality Unit (Gabrielle Kerr ext. 40824, or Debbie Williamson ext 40934).

9.2 The process for obtaining translations is:

- A word copy of the translation required should be forwarded to the Equality Unit.
- The Equality Unit will obtain a quote which will be forwarded to the relevant business area for approval to proceed with the translation.
- It is the responsibility of the business area to raise the purchase order once costs have been established.
- The Equality Unit will then request the translation. The translation should take two days – however this may take longer if it is a lengthy document.

9.3 The Department also has access to a free translation helpline offered by Foras na Gaeilge. This service can only be used to provide translations of short extracts rather than full documents. Full documents will be sent to Flex or STEP. Again the Equality Unit will liaise with Foras na Gaeilge, when

appropriate, to arrange translation.

10. Addresses

10.1 The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 provides that a District Council may place a version of a street name in another language alongside the English name. For up to date information on non-English street names adopted by District Councils contact the Ordnance Survey (e-mail address info@OSNlonline@finance-ni.gov.uk).

When a person has used a lawful Irish language street name, staff should use the Irish form in replying to correspondence or while processing applications. Both Irish and English versions should be noted on the official record.

10.2 Where third parties may be involved i.e. where a document may need to be scrutinised (e.g. driving licence) or publicised (e.g. planning application) the English form of the street address should be shown as well as the Irish version.

10.3 There are no restrictions on using Irish versions of other parts of an address e.g. townland, town, county, country.

10.4 When contact is being initiated, it would be in keeping with the spirit of the Charter to use both versions initially, and then continue using whichever language was used in the reply. Departments and associated bodies are encouraged to use both versions in their documents and publications.

11. Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB's)

11.1 The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages applies to Government and its 'associated bodies'. Therefore DfI NDPBs are encouraged to develop their own language policy based on this one. Sponsoring Divisions should therefore draw this policy to the attention of their NDPBs / associated bodies.

12. Enquiries and Monitoring

- 12.1 Enquiries about this guidance and further advice on requests to do business (oral or written) in Irish should be addressed to the Equality Unit (Gabrielle Kerr ext. 40824, or Debbie Williamson ext 40934).

Department for Infrastructure

Tel:
Fax:
email:

(Name)
(Department)
(Address)
(Address)
(Address)

(Date)

Dear

Thank you for your letter todated

The matter is being dealt with and a reply will issue in due course.

Yours sincerely

(NAME)
Department for Infrastructure

Annex B

An Roinn Bonneagair

Teileafón
Facs
R-phost

(ainm)
(Roinn)
(Seoladh)
(Seoladh)
(Seoladh)

(dáta)

[ainm an tseoltóra], a chara,

Go raibh maith agat as do litir chuig *[recipient's name]* dar dáta *[date of letter]*.

Táthar ag plé leis an ábhar agus éiseofar freagra in am agus i dtráth.

Is mise le meas

(ainm)
An Roinn [Bonneagair](#)

Addendum to Annex B

Months of the Year in Irish

January	-	Eanáir
February	-	Feabhra
March	-	Márta
April	-	Aibreán
May	-	Bealtaine
June	-	Meitheamh
July	-	Iúil
August	-	Lúnasa
September	-	Meán Fómhair
October	-	Deireadh Fómhair
November	-	Samhain
December	-	Nollaig

Useful link:

- <http://www.gaeilge.ie/?lang=en>