

**SCHEME OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
CHILDREN**

**UNDER SECTION 11 OF THE
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 2003**

2009-2012

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CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

Background

The Official Languages Act 2003 was signed into law on 14 July 2003. The Act is the first piece of legislation to provide a statutory framework for the delivery of services through the Irish Language.

The primary objective of the Act is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish.

Section 11 of the Act provides for the preparation of a statutory scheme by public bodies detailing the services they will provide

- through the medium of Irish,
- through the medium of English, and
- through 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 in the future (within a timeframe to be agreed - in effect, distinguishing between those services to be provided during the lifetime of the current scheme and those to be addressed in a longer timeframe).

Preparation and Consultation.

This scheme has been prepared in accordance with the *Guidelines under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003*.

The Department published a notice under Section 13 of the Act on 28 June 2006, inviting representations in relation to the preparation of the draft scheme from any interested parties. Six submissions were received from a range of Irish language organisations and from private individuals.

Members of the Department's staff were also consulted and their views and suggestions have also informed the scheme.

The Content of the Scheme

This scheme is designed to ensure that customers who wish to conduct their business through Irish can do so. It sets out the extent to which services are currently available through Irish, and identifies areas for future enhancement.

Commencement Date of the Scheme

The scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It commences with effect from 15 December 2009 and shall remain in force for a period of three years from this date or until a new scheme has been confirmed by the Minister pursuant to Section 15 of the Act, whichever is earlier.

Chapter 2 - Overview of the Department of Health and Children

The Role of the Department

Mission Statement

To improve the health and well-being of people in Ireland in a manner that promotes better health for everyone, fair access, responsive and appropriate care delivery, and high performance.

Mandate

The Minister for Health & Children is politically accountable for developing and articulating Government policy on health and personal social services, and for the overall performance of the health service. Our mandate is to support the Minister and the four Ministers of State by advising on policy development and implementation, evaluating the performance of existing policies and service delivery, preparing legislation, and working with other Government departments, the social partners and international organisations. Our functions include:

- To develop policy across the full spectrum of health and personal social services, with a focus on quality, equity, access based on need, consistency and outcomes and to support implementation of Government policy.
- To negotiate and report on the Health group of votes and analyse financial and service outturns, including value for money and adherence to governance and accountability standards.
- To ensure compliance with Government policies on public service pay and industrial relations, employment control, and modernisation.
- To undertake medium and long-term planning, including workforce planning.
- To provide a legislative and regulatory framework that helps protect the interests of service users and supports practitioners in working to the highest standards.
- To work with colleagues in other Government departments and the social partners to ensure that the aim of improving health and social well-being is advanced effectively in other parts of the public service.
- To develop and refine a system of performance evaluation which helps the Minister to assess the performance of the health system.
- To support the Minister and Ministers of State in fulfilling their parliamentary duties.
- To ensure the fullest possible involvement by Ireland in the work of the European Union (EU), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other international bodies in the area of health and children; to progress closest possible co-operation with Northern Ireland.
- To ensure we have the internal capacity, in terms of structures, people, systems, etc. to equip us to meet our objectives.

Structure of the Irish Health System.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) was established in January 2005 and is responsible for providing health and personal social services in the State within available resources. The Health Act 2004 charges the HSE with using the resources available to it in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) was established in May 2007 and is responsible for setting and monitoring standards on safety and quality of healthcare services in the public sector including the undertaking of investigations, the operation of accreditation programmes, evaluation of the clinical and cost effectiveness of health technologies and evaluating and setting standards for information on health services and the health and welfare of the population. The Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services forms part of HIQA.

The legislation establishing the HSE and HIQA specifically requires them to have regard to the policies and objectives of the Government or any Minister of the Government to the extent that those policies and objectives may affect or relate to their functions. The health system also encompasses a growing private sector and a wide range of health agencies.

The role of the Department has changed with the establishment of the HSE to a stronger policy and performance evaluation role. Central to this is ensuring that health services are delivered in accordance with Government policy. Many of the High Level Objectives of the Department as set out in its Statement of Strategy are linked to the effective organisation and delivery of services by the HSE. This underlines the need for a close and effective working relationship between the Department and the HSE. Similarly, in terms of achieving improved health outcomes for the people of Ireland, the Department is active in influencing and supporting a range of other Government departments and agencies.

Statement of Strategy

The Department's Statement of Strategy 2008-2010 sets out the high level objectives and how it proposes to deliver these objectives.

High Level Objectives

Over the period of the current Strategy, the Department has set seven High Level Objectives, as follows.

1. Policy and Corporate Support

To provide policy, performance, legislative, planning and governance support to the Minister which helps to ensure that high quality and effective health and social services are delivered within available resources and in accordance with Government policies in a way which gives people fair access to services and other supports which meet their needs.

2. Children and Families

To promote and protect the health and well-being of children and families.

3. Primary Care

To ensure the provision of a broad spectrum of integrated, locally-based accessible services as the first point of contact for people with the health system which, combined with

improvements in income, employment, education and housing, will deliver significant health improvements and reduce health disparities over the longer term.

4. Cancer Control

To reduce cancer incidence, morbidity and mortality relative to other EU countries and to support the provision of quality assured cancer services by the HSE.

5. Acute Hospitals

To ensure that patients who need acute care can access it as rapidly as possible, in the most appropriate setting at local, regional, or national level, that they receive safe care, and that the outcomes are the optimum that can be achieved for such patients.

6. Disability and Mental Health

To help people with disabilities to achieve their full potential including living as independently as possible.

To promote mental health and provide appropriate support to, and interventions for, people with mental health problems.

7. Care of Older People

To enhance the quality of life of older people and to support them in their homes and communities and, where this is not possible, to provide them with access to appropriate residential accommodation.

Organisational Structure of Department

The work of the Department extends across nine Divisions, and the Office of the Chief Medical Officer. Four of these relate to key policy and corporate support areas and link to High Level Objective 1. The remaining five relate to three cross-cutting offices, primary care, acute hospitals and cancer care, and link to the other High Level Objectives.

Customers and Stakeholders

The Department interacts with a broad spectrum of stakeholders including:

- The Health Service Executive, other Government Departments, Offices and Agencies
- Health Agencies.
- EU and international institutions
- A wide range of bodies from outside the public service including trade unions, representative bodies, community and voluntary groups and the academic and research community.

The Department has limited direct contact with the general public, and most of our contacts are with the HSE and other agencies or organisations.

Assessment of the extent to which services are already available through Irish

The Department is committed to ensuring that, where possible, customers who wish to conduct their business through Irish can do so. Staff who are competent and willing to deal with customers or clients in Irish have been identified on the internal Staff Directory.

Speeches

Speeches or statements, including those in the Houses of the Oireachtas by Ministers, or speeches by senior officials, are made available in the language in which they were delivered.

Correspondence

Correspondence is responded to in the language in which it is written in accordance with section 9(2) of the Act.

E-Mail

- A bilingual disclaimer notice has been devised and is currently appended to outgoing e-mails.

- Irish and English address to the Department's customer services desk are linked:
 - eolas@health.gov.ie and customerservices@health.gov.ie

Information Booklets/Application Forms

All information leaflets are currently available in Irish and English.

With the exception of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) the Department does not handle any applications for services from the public. Applications for services are dealt with by the HSE or other relevant bodies.

The OMCYA processes applications for childcare funding schemes. It also interacts with Local Authorities and other organisations that are supported under the programme to promote participation by children and young people in decision making. The applications for the childcare funding schemes are available in both languages.

Stationery

- '*Cuirfear fáilte roimh chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge*' is incorporated on the official stationery of the Main Department, Secretary-General, Chief Medical Officer, Minister and Ministers of State.

Telephone

- Pre-recorded telephone announcements and messages are in compliance with the provisions of regulations made by the Minister for Community, Rural and Community Affairs under section 9(1) of the Official Languages Act 2003; individual members of staff may leave messages in Irish or English or both languages.
- The Department's Green Pages Ad is bilingual.

Website and On-line Interactive Services

Approximately 50% of the static content on the Department's website is available in both Irish and English. Additionally, a number of publications have been published in both languages.

The OMCYA Website is used for on-line application and consultation processes and these are always provided in both languages. Approximately 80% of the static content on the OMCYA website is currently available in Irish.

Chapter 3 - Enhancement of bilingual services

Press Releases

Press releases are currently issued in English only. In general, the final text of a release or statement is only finalised and approved very close to issue. The Department often has to issue statements quickly in response to unforeseen events. The Department undertakes to have 10% of its Press Releases issued to the media in Irish and English in the years 2011 and 2012.

Information leaflets and other Documents

All new and existing information leaflets will continue to be made available in Irish and English.

All new and existing application forms provided by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) will continue to be made available in Irish and English.

The Department commits to making information leaflets, and the application forms provided by the OMCYA, available bilingually within the one cover, except where this is not practicable because of the size or nature of the document on renewal of stock. This commitment takes effect from the beginning of the scheme with respect to new information leaflets and application forms and on renewal of stock with respect to existing leaflets and forms.

In the case of other documents that are published in English and Irish, for example documents covered under section 10 of the Act, the Department commits to making these documents available bilingually within the one cover, except where this is not practicable because of the size or nature of the document.

Training & Development

There is an ongoing commitment to provide appropriate training and development for all staff, including language training as required, to develop the full potential of staff during their careers in this Department,

Website, Interactive Services and IT Systems

The balance of the static content on the Department's website remaining to be made bilingual will be made bilingual by the end of 2010, as will the balance of static content on the OMCYA website

Business ownership of the website has recently been taken on by the Department's Press & Communications Unit. There is a new communications strategy for the Department and bilingual content will be part of the agenda for the ongoing development of the website. Should the Department introduce any new websites during the period of the scheme, these will be introduced in bilingual format.

With the exception of the services provided by the OMCYA, there are no on-line interactive services provided by this Department. Should on-line interactive services which allow the general public to make applications or receive benefits on line be introduced by the Department in the future, they will be introduced bilingually, simultaneously, subject to the availability of the relevant software and systems.

The introduction of new Information Systems will, as far as is technically feasible and within available IT resources, provide the capability, at a minimum, to handle Irish language text. Existing Information Systems will, where necessary and as far as is technically feasible and within available IT resources, be made compatible in conjunction with the next suitable

maintenance or upgrade work. Given the major technical and resource issues that may be involved, this may be an issue to be tackled over the long-term.

In relation to making current on-line interactive services and information systems compatible with the Irish language, this is an issue that the Department will address as soon as resources and pressures on other work in the IT area allow. Again, the Department may be dependent on the availability of appropriate systems and resources at central level.

Reception/Switchboard

Receptionists/switchboard operators are the first points of contact with the public. The policy of the Department of Health and Children is to ensure that standard Quality Customer Service (QCS) practice applies in this area, so that at the commencement of the scheme:

- Reception/switchboard staff are able to give the name of the public body in Irish.
- They are at least familiar with the basic greetings in Irish.
- Suitable arrangements are in place so that they can put members of the public in touch, without delay, with the office or officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available.

As stated above the Department has limited direct contact with the general public. The Department does not currently provide a one to one counter service and there are no plans to introduce such a service in the foreseeable future. However, during the course of this scheme, the Department will examine the feasibility of providing a bilingual service from one or more of its Units as part of its second or subsequent language schemes.

Chapter 4 - Monitoring and Revision

Ongoing monitoring of service provision and of the level of demand for services through Irish will be carried out by the Customer Service function in the Corporate Development Unit and updates will be presented to the Management Advisory Committee of the Department at least once a year.

Future customer surveys will continue to include questions in relation to satisfaction with the provision of services in Irish, and the demand for these services.

Chapter 5 - Publicising of Agreed Scheme

The contents of this scheme, together with its commitments and provisions, will be publicised both internally and externally.

Internally

A copy of the scheme will be circulated to all staff as soon as possible after completion. A copy of the scheme will be published on the Department's intranet HealthNet.

Externally

A bilingual version will be made available on the Department's website.

A copy of this scheme has also been forwarded to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.

The English language version is the original text of this scheme.

