

SCHEME OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

UNDER SECTION 15 OF THE
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 2003

2015-2018



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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Background

The Official Languages Act 2003 provides a statutory framework for the delivery of services through the Irish Language.

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.

1.2 Preparation of the Language Scheme 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 15 of the Act on 24 October 2012, inviting representations in relation to the preparation of the draft scheme from any interested parties. Three submissions were received from a range of Irish language organisations. These submissions are available on the Department's website (www.health.gov.ie) and were taken into account when drawing up the scheme. The Department would like to take this opportunity to thank those who participated for their valued contributions.

The notice was also circulated to staff within the Department.

1.3 The Content of the Scheme

This scheme sets out the extent to which services are currently available through Irish, and identifies areas for future enhancement.

1.4 Commencement Date of the Scheme

The scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It commences with effect from 02 February 2015 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 later.

Chapter 2 - Overview of the Department of Health

The overall purpose of the health service is to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Ireland by keeping people healthy; providing the healthcare people need; delivering high quality services and getting best value from health system resources.

2.1 Our Role and Main Functions

The role of the Department of Health is to provide strategic leadership for the health service and to ensure that Government policies for the sector are translated into actions and implemented effectively.

We support the Minister and Minister of State in their implementation of Government policy, and in discharging their Government, Parliamentary and Departmental duties.

This role involves engaging with service users and other stakeholders, monitoring and evaluating the health service, and steering changes and improvements in the health service. In fulfilling this role over the coming three years, we will have particular regard to the key strategic goals set out at pages 3 & 4. The various means by which we will deliver on our role are as follows:

- Leadership and Communication
- Governance and Political Accountability
- Performance Evaluation and Information Management
- Policy Review and Development
- Legislation
- Cross-sectoral and International

2.2 Structure of the Irish Health System

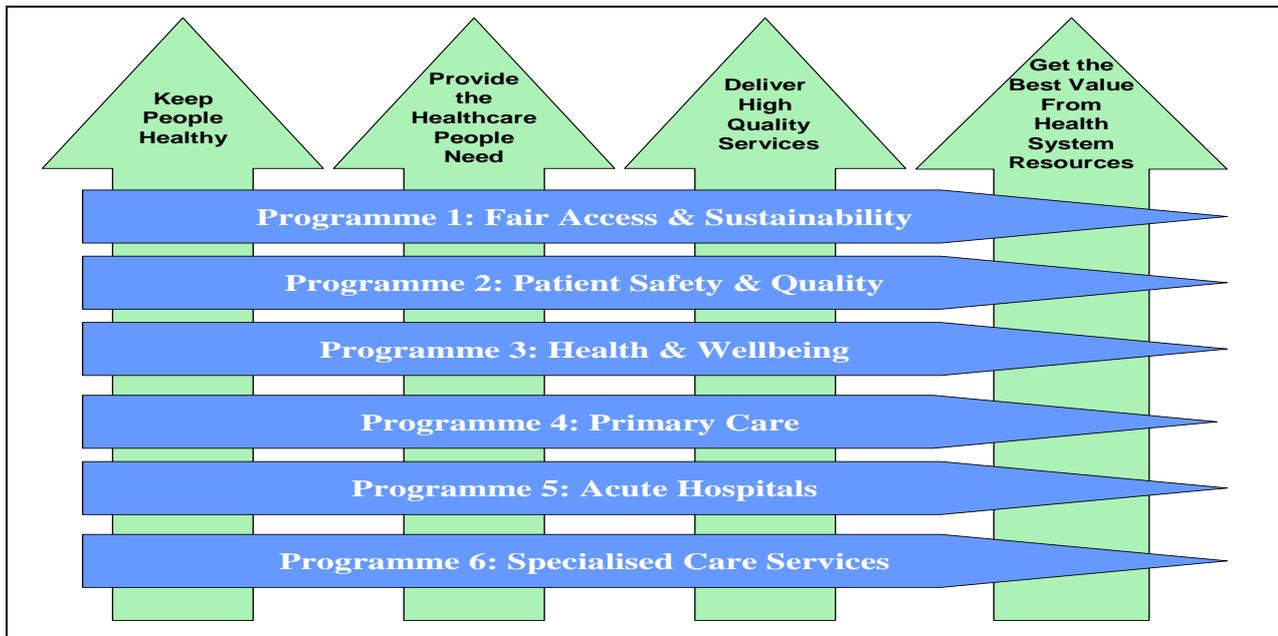
Health services are delivered within a complex system comprising users; multiple providers (public, voluntary and private) across a wide spectrum of individual locations and facilities; self-employed professionals (including individual GPs and community pharmacists); employees and their representative organisations; regulatory, representative and advocacy bodies; the Oireachtas and Government Ministers; the Department, HSE, the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and other health agencies as well as other Government Departments and State agencies; and various international organisations.

The Programme for Government commits to a radical reshaping of the entire health service.

2.3 Statement of Strategy 2011-2014

The Department's Statement of Strategy 2011-2014 sets out our strategic goals and actions by strategic programme area. Over the period of the current Strategy, the Department has set six strategic goals. Four elements underpin and inform all of the strategic programmes. This is represented in the figure below:

Strategic Programme Areas and Health Sector Objectives



1. Fair Access and Sustainability

To work towards the ultimate achievement of a universal, single-tier health service, supported by Universal Health Insurance (UHI), where access is based on need, not income.

2. Patient Safety and Quality

To provide leadership and stewardship of patient safety and quality for the entire health system in line with the vision and recommendations set out by the Commission on Patient Safety and Quality Assurance.

3. Health and Wellbeing

To help people live healthier and more fulfilling lives and to create social conditions that support good health, including good mental health, on equal terms, for the entire population.

4. Primary Care

To deliver significantly strengthened primary care services with expanded access to GP care free at the point of use and with an enhanced focus on structured care and chronic disease management.

5. Acute Hospitals

To reform our acute hospital system in order to provide faster access for patients to high quality services and to prepare for the introduction of a single-tier system of hospital care supported by Universal Health Insurance.

6. Specialised Care Services

To provide a wide range of long-term supports and services aimed at ensuring that people who need long-term services and care can achieve their full potential and enjoy a high quality of life in the workplace, and within their own homes and communities. This goal encompasses and reflects the Government's policy objectives for particular care groups as set out below:

Disability Services

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

Mental Health Social Services

To provide appropriate support to people with mental health problems by ensuring that the stigma of mental illness is reduced, ensuring early and appropriate intervention and improved access to modern mental health services in the community.

Services for Older People

To enhance the quality of life of older people, maintain their full potential, support them in their homes and communities, provide access to respite care and day care and, when required, provide access to appropriate quality long-term residential care.

Chapter 3 - Enhancement of Services to be provided bilingually

The Department is committed to ensuring that customers who wish to conduct their business through Irish can be facilitated to the greatest extent possible. This chapter sets out the measures which the Department will adopt over the lifetime of this second scheme to build on progress that was made with respect to the development of bilingual services over the period of the first language Scheme.

3.1 Speeches and Press Releases

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

The Department will publish all press releases in Irish and English on its website. We will endeavour to publish them in Irish and English simultaneously, to the greatest extent possible.

3.2 Correspondence

The Department will continue to ensure that all correspondence will be responded to in the language in which it is written in accordance with section 9(2) of the Act.

3.3 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

- The Department undertakes to develop "out-of-office" e-mail messages in the Irish language. These currently appear in the English language only.

3.4 Stationery

'Cuirfear fáilte roimh chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge' is incorporated on the official stationery of the Main Department, Secretary-General, Chief Medical Officer, Minister and Minister of State. The Department will continue to place this statement on any new stationery.

3.5 Information leaflets/Application Forms and other Documents

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. Information Booklets and Application Forms are therefore, generally not a feature of the Department's work.

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

In line with the relevant provisions of the official Languages Act, the Department's Statement of Strategy and Annual Reports will be published in Irish and English.

3.6 Website

As part of the ongoing redevelopment of the Department's website, the statement '*Cuirfear fáilte roimh chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge*' will be maintained on the website and all static content will continue to be made available in both Irish and English.

3.7 Reception/Switchboard/Customer Service Unit

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

- Reception/switchboard and Customer Service Unit staff will give the name of the public body in Irish and English.
- 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.

The Department commits to developing a document of key phrases and making this available to all staff, especially for use by the above staff members within the first year of the scheme.

3.8 Oral announcements/Telephone communications

Pre-recorded telephone announcements will comply with the provisions of regulations made by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht under section 9(1) of the Official Languages Act 2003.

3.9 Training & Development

The Department, as part of its Induction Training will include language awareness in its Starter Pack for new employees to ensure that all new staff understand their bilingual obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003.

Office notices will issue every 6 months to remind all members of staff of their legal obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003.

The Department will continue its 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.

Staff who are competent and willing to deal with customers or clients in Irish have been identified on the internal Staff Directory. A list of these staff will be placed on a dedicated area of the Department's intranet HealthNet for further ease of access.

Chapter 4 - Monitoring and Revision

Annual reviews will be undertaken with particular regard to the progress of each of the commitments made in Chapter 3 of this scheme commencing at end of 2015.

Chapter 5 - Irish Language Capability

Having regard to Government policy for enhanced provision of services in Irish, the Department will, by the end of year one of the scheme, identify any posts for which Irish language competency is an essential requirement. Every effort will be made to fulfil these requirements by the end of this scheme having regard to recruitment, promotion and training policies, as appropriate. This will enable this Department to plan and prioritise the incremental improvement of services in Irish in a more strategic manner.

Chapter 6 - 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 published on the Department's intranet HealthNet.

Externally

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

A copy of the scheme will be made available to the appropriate organisations that made a submission towards this scheme to the Department.

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.