

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

Scheme under the Official Languages Act, 2003

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

This Scheme was prepared under section 11 of the Official Languages Act, 2003 (the Act) by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

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

- through the medium of Irish
- through the medium of Irish and English and
- through the medium of English

and the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not provided by the public body through Irish will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

Guidelines for preparation of a Scheme

Section 12 of the Act provides for the preparation of guidelines by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and their issue to public bodies to assist in the preparation of draft schemes. This scheme has been drawn up having regard to those guidelines.

The Office published notices under section 13 of the Act in May 2007, inviting interested parties to make submissions in relation to the preparation of the draft scheme. One submission was received by the closing date of 18 June 2007.

The content of the Scheme has been informed by this submission.

The content of the Language Scheme

The Scheme aims to consolidate and improve the Office's existing policy and practice in relation to delivery of its services in the Irish language. In line with this objective, the Office aims to provide services in the Irish language, to the extent possible, where Irish is the client's language of choice.

The Scheme takes into account the extent to which services provided by the Office through Irish. Areas for future enhancement of the service provided by the Office are identified in the scheme.

The Commencement Date of the Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It is commenced with effect from **19 January 2009** and will 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 the earlier.

Overview of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

Role and Mission of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

The work of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) is to assist the Comptroller and Auditor General in providing assurance to Dáil Éireann that public money is properly administered and spent to good effect. This work is carried out under a constitutional and statutory mandate and within the general framework of periodic statements of strategy. In the course of its work, the Office conducts a range of audits and reports the results to Dáil Éireann and audited bodies.

The work of the Office is primarily focused on providing an annual opinion on the accounts of State bodies. Under a discretionary mandate assurance is also provided on financial systems and value for money.

Under the Comptroller function, the C&AG authorises the release of funds from the Exchequer on foot of requisitions by either the Minister for Finance or the National Management Treasury Agency. Funds requisitioned are released to the extent that they are for purposes permitted by law and can only be drawn down to the extent authorised by Dáil Éireann.

Functional Areas of the Office

The work of the Office is directed by three Directors of Audit. It falls into three main areas

- Audit of Government Departments and Funds
- Audit of State Sponsored Bodies and other Agencies
- Value for Money Examinations

This frontline work is supported by a Corporate Services division headed by the Secretary of the Office who is also the Accounting Officer of the Office.

Services already available through Irish

The Office already provides some services through Irish or bilingually.

The following are published simultaneously in bilingual format

- The Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General
- Audited Appropriation Accounts

- Corporate Report of the Office
- The Statement of Strategy of the Office.

The Office website is available in both Irish and English. In the case of publications which pre-dated the bilingual publication policy of the Office, the website contains links in Irish to the English versions of the publications.

The Office ensures that all correspondence in the Irish language is responded to in Irish in accordance with the provisions of section 9(2) of the Official Languages Act.

VFM and Special Reports are currently published in English only.

Communication with Clients

The Office also communicates in written form with its audited bodies through

- Management Letters
- Audit Queries
- Other correspondence.

For those audited bodies which conduct their business through Irish, communications are made through Irish to the extent possible. Otherwise, the communications are made through English.

Chapter 2

Summary of Services/Activities provided by sections of the Office

In cases where a member of an audited body wishes to conduct business through Irish, if staff with competence in Irish are not available, arrangements are in place to put the client in touch with a member of staff of another section who can provide the service in Irish. None of the sections operates wholly or almost wholly through the Irish Language.

Audit of Government Departments and State Funds

Audits of government departments and state funds are primarily conducted through English. In those cases where Irish is the language of choice of a Department, the audit is conducted, to the extent possible, through Irish.

Audit of State sponsored Bodies and Other Agencies

Audits of state sponsored bodies and other agencies are primarily conducted through English. In those cases where Irish is the language of choice of a body or agency, the audit is conducted, to the extent possible, through Irish.

Value for Money Division

Examinations in this division are conducted through English.

Corporate Services Division including Reception and Switchboard

The reception is normally the first point of contact with the Office. English is the language used.

Sections of the Office not dealing with the public

No area of the Office has a significant amount of contact with the general public. The Office generally deals with the public bodies which it audits and not with the general public. Where possible, at least one staff member with the competence to conduct business through Irish is allocated to the audits and examinations of customers where Irish is the language of choice.

Chapter 3

Enhancement of Services

Statutory obligations and commitments

Section 11(1) (b) requires each public body to set out the measures it proposes to take to ensure that any services that are not provided through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided.

The Office is committed to a progressive improvement of the Irish language service offered to its clients. This commitment will result in identifiable actions to be taken over the lifetime of this scheme and in future schemes. These actions are proposed in the context of the following policy, legislative and pragmatic considerations

- the immediate legislative obligations
- the Office's commitment to providing a high quality client service as set out in our Customer Service Charter
- the demand for Irish language services as identified by the Office, and
- the availability of, and access to, resources necessary to support the actions, within the Office.

The Scheme will enable delivery of specific improvements across the range of media through which the Office communicates with clients including publication of electronic and written communication and face-to-face or personal contact.

Written and Electronic Publications

The Office does not have any brochures, information leaflets or application forms other than those published by the Public Appointments Commission.

The following documents will continue to be simultaneously published bilingually in accordance with the provisions of section 10 of the Official Languages Act 2003

- Comptroller and Auditor General Annual Report
- Audited Appropriation Accounts
- Corporate Report
- The Statement of Strategy.

The Office commits to the following enhancements

- With effect from 1 Jan 2009 the Office will publish the Customer Service Charter in Irish
- With effect from 1 Jan 2009 the Office will publish the Freedom Of Information Manual in Irish.

The Office commits to publishing all electronic versions of the above documents on its website in accordance with the above commitments. In addition, where a document is published on the website for which there is a requirement under the Official Languages Act to have a published version in Irish, the Irish version will be published on the website at the same time as the English version. Any re-design of the website will continue to provide for a version of the website which is navigable in Irish.

Personal Contact Reception

With effect from the commencement of the scheme the Office will ensure that reception staff will be able to give the name of the Office in Irish and that they will be able to provide a bilingual telephone greeting. Suitable arrangements are in place so that callers who wish to deal with matters in Irish will be connected with a staff member who can deal with their query.

If an Irish speaker is unavailable to deal with the call, the person receiving the call will explain the situation and take the caller's name, phone number and details of the query and will ensure that an Irish speaker returns the call as soon as possible.

Interactions with clients

The Office interacts with clients in the course of audits and examinations. The interaction may occur on an ongoing basis in the course of audit or at formal meetings. It is the Office's policy that at least one staff member with the competence to conduct business through Irish is allocated to the audits and examinations of customers where Irish is the language of choice, subject to availability of such staff.

Interactive systems

The Office does not currently have any interactive systems and there are no plans to introduce them in the future.

The Offices computer systems are fully capable of handling the Irish language and any new computer systems will continue to do so.

Resources

The successful delivery of existing and enhanced services in Irish is dependent crucially on the ability and willingness of staff to provide this. Currently six members of staff (4%) have volunteered to provide an Irish language service to the extent that their competence allows. Others have expressed an interest in improving their skills in the language.

Commitment

The Office will take steps to ensure that staff appreciate the thrust of the Act, understand the immediate legal requirements and the commitment to deliver a progressively enhanced service and see the service as an integral part of the commitment to quality client service. The Office will encourage staff to use their existing competence. The Office will train and support staff so that existing competence can be improved and it will provide the appropriate administrative supports required in order to ensure that the identified standards/actions can be met. Staff who have passed the civil service Irish language competence test will be encouraged to use and build on their existing skills from the commencement of the Scheme.

Volunteers will be sought across the organisation to participate in providing the service from the commencement of the Scheme.

Staff competence will be developed through language training courses provided externally. Staff will continue to be encouraged to attend language-training courses during or outside office hours.

Training needs will be identified in the course of the Performance Management Development System and the Training Unit will incorporate those needs into individual and generic training programmes as appropriate.

Irish language templates of frequently used letters/documents will be developed to encourage staff to participate in providing the Irish service.

A handbook of relevant vocabulary and phraseology relevant to government auditing will be developed within the lifetime of the Scheme.

Assessing Demand

In order to accurately assess the demand for services in Irish, the Office will examine, by 31 December 2008 existing procedures for recording enquiries and cases to ensure the accurate and comprehensive recording of the level of contacts, both written and oral, made with the Office through Irish.

Chapter 4

Monitoring and Revision

The Office's Audit Board will keep the operation of the scheme under review. It is proposed that this monitoring will be based on progress reports provided by the Corporate Services Division.

The day-to-day operation of the Scheme, together with ongoing monitoring of the level of demand for services in Irish, will be the responsibility of the Senior Auditors who will report to their Deputy Director.

Chapter 5

Publicising of Agreed Scheme

The provisions of the Scheme will be brought to the attention of clients by means of the following

- The Scheme itself and subsequent updates on the delivery of commitments on particular services will be published on the website and reported upon in the Office's Corporate Report
- Press release and advertising of the Scheme's publication
- Circulation to those who made submissions on the Scheme.

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