

MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MAIN FINDINGS

ADMINISTRATION OF THE LANGUAGE SCHEME SYSTEM

1. 122 requests to agree language scheme still outstanding at 31/12/2016

- 56 language schemes from a total of 116 expired; 6 of those for a period exceeding 7 years.
- 7 requests outstanding for a period of 9 years or more.
- On average, 20 language schemes per annum have been agreed in the last two years. It would take more than 6 years to clear the requests outstanding at the end of 2016 alone.

2. A substantial period of time involved in agreeing language schemes

- On average it takes 3.5 years from the time a public body is requested to prepare a language scheme until it is agreed and 4 years for a second language scheme.

3. Failure to prepare or agree a language scheme

- No public body has been reported to the Houses of the Oireachtas owing to its refusal or its inability to prepare or agree a language scheme.

THE QUALITY OF LANGUAGE SCHEMES

1. Regressing from commitments given in language schemes

- Commitments that were the subject of an investigation were reduced or set aside in 64% of the following language schemes agreed.
- In the case of one public body, Westmeath County Council, a commitment that was the subject of an investigation and reported upon to the Houses of the Oireachtas was changed.
- Regression in commitments in 52% of the second or third language schemes agreed in 2015 and 2016.

2. No progress from one language scheme to the next

- Of the 23 second or third language schemes agreed during 2015 and 2016, substantial improvement in relation to any range of commitments could be detected in only 17% of them.

3. Posts specified with an Irish language requirement

- Only 17.5% of language schemes confirmed in 2015 and 2016 had posts designated with an Irish language requirement.
- Only 7.5% of language schemes confirmed in 2015 and 2016 had definite arrangements for the recruitment of staff with Irish.

4. Provision of services in the Gaeltacht

- Of the 28 language schemes (of the total number of schemes agreed) where it is estimated that services to Gaeltacht communities would apply, a third of them made no commitment in relation to the provision of services in the Gaeltacht.
- A date confirming Irish as the working language was specified by only 11 of the 17 public bodies with a confirmed language scheme believed to have offices or centres located in the Gaeltacht.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

RECRUITMENT

1. Implement a new recruitment policy that rebalances the number of state employees who can provide services through Irish.
2. Ensure that a minimum level of staff with Irish (as measured against a recognised framework) are available in every state body to provide services to the public.
3. Adopt measures immediately to increase the number of staff with Irish in the public sector.
4. Implement a long-term recruitment policy based on a comprehensive plan for the provision of services through Irish.

5. Establish an independent monitoring process that reports to the Houses of the Oireachtas as to the operation and effectiveness of the recruitment policy.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES THROUGH IRISH

1. Prepare a comprehensive plan, based on research, involving language experts and experts in public administration, on the provision of public services through Irish.
2. Detail the services that will be provided by the State in Irish, how those services will be provided, the resources necessary to implement the plan and the legislative framework that best supports it.

THE GAELTACHT

1. Establish a link between language planning and language rights by way of a legislative provision that requires state employees who are based or who regularly work in the Gaeltacht to have fluency in the Irish language.

REGULATIONS, CLASSIFICATION AND PUBLIC BODIES

1. Reduce the functional scope of language schemes, over time, by regulating the provision of more service through regulations. This would ensure a natural evolution to common standards of services and would reduce the administrative burden of agreeing individual language schemes.
2. Classify public bodies based on their importance and their level of interaction with the public in general, including the Irish language and Gaeltacht communities. The highest standards in relation to the use of Irish would be placed, by way of regulations, on those organisations that provide most services to the public.
3. Public bodies to be automatically subject to the legislation rather than relying on updating a schedule as is the case at the moment.