



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

SCHEME OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**UNDER SECTION 15 OF THE
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 2003**

2021-2023

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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 objective of this scheme is to continue to build on the progress achieved in the provision of quality services to our Irish-speaking customers, following the introduction in 2009 of the first language scheme of the Department of Health and furthered in the subsequent language scheme agreed for the Department of Health for the period 2015-2018.

It is the Department's intention that the range of services available in Irish be broadened over the lifetime of the scheme. To ensure the demand for such services is met in a planned, coherent and accessible way, the levels of demand will be assessed on an ongoing basis, with regular and timed audits measuring the number of queries and requests for services through Irish.

The new scheme also builds on the principles of Quality Customer Service and will continue to ensure that persons who wish to conduct their business in Irish are facilitated. However, account will have to be taken of the prevailing public service context, and how constraints on resources and on public sector recruitment may have an impact on the progress that can realistically be expected.

The Department is guided by the principle that the provision of Irish language services should be based on:

- the underlying level of demand for specific services in the Irish language provided by the Department itself, rather than the Health Service Executive which has its own HSE Western Area Language Scheme covering the provision of health services through Irish in Gaeltacht areas

- the importance of a proactive approach to the provision of such services, and
- the resources, including human and financial resources required, and the capacity of the Department to develop or access the necessary language capability.

The Department published a notice under Section 15 of the Act on 26th November 2020 inviting submissions in relation to the preparation of the draft scheme from any interested parties. 3 submissions were received and 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.

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 Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. It commences with effect from ----- 2021 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, in which the Department of Health plays a key role, is to improve the health and well-being of people in Ireland by:

- keeping people healthy
- providing the healthcare people need
- delivering high quality services
- 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 Ministers 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 page 3. 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 Statement of Strategy 2021-2023

Over the next three years, the Department of Health will continue to deliver across the broad portfolio of our work to fulfil our core functions. In the context of our wider work, a number of strategic priorities have been selected to bring focus to our collective work over the next three years and enable us to measure our success.

The Department's Strategic Priorities for the period 2021-2023 are:

1. Manage Covid -19 and promote public health
2. Expand and integrate care in the community
3. Make access to healthcare fairer & faster
4. Improve oversight & partnership in the sector
5. Become an organisation fit for the future

These strategic priorities were chosen in response to the health, wellbeing, and social care needs of the people of Ireland, and in the context of significant national and international change, demands and demographics. These were chosen through an analysis of the environment, review and alignment with our wider strategic context, and extensive consultation with our stakeholders. These priorities reinforce the commitments set out in the Programme for Government and further strengthen the Sláintecare agenda.

These priorities fulfil the following criteria:

- They will deliver on commitments made in the Programme for Government
- They will progress Sláintecare reforms
- They are necessary in the context of COVID-19
- They are priorities that the Department of Health, in its unique role, must respond to or lead on.

2.3 Programme for Government and the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030

The Department is cognisant of the commitment in the Programme for Government that the Irish language be nurtured and developed, acknowledging the importance of the Irish language as the first language of the State, as a living language and as a vital component of the heritage of this island. The Department is also committed to supporting the whole-of-government approach to the protection and promotion of the Irish Language outlined in the 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030.

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 third scheme to build on progress that was made with respect to the development of bilingual services over the period of the previous two Schemes.

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. Speeches should start and end with a greeting in Irish, even if the rest of the content is in English. Speeches delivered in Gaeltacht areas or specifically concerned with Gaeltacht areas will be delivered in Irish only.

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

3.2 Social media account

The Department commits to increasing communications through Irish and English simultaneously to 5% of overall material posted on its official social media account @roinnsIainTe, by the end of 2022, especially in relation to important public health messages. The Department commits to increasing this percentage to 10% of overall material posted on its official social media account @roinnsIainTe by the end of 2023.

3.3 Website

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

The Department will ensure that all appropriate web pages contained within the main structure of www.health.gov.ie will be bilingual; this does not necessarily include

documents or other sites linked to these pages. (It is not appropriate in certain cases to provide an Irish page, for example, in the case of speeches, press releases, or schemes that are specific to a particular group of customers). Where Irish versions of information leaflets, brochures and corporate publications are produced simultaneously they will be made available on the Department's website, however, in cases where both versions are not available simultaneously, the Department will publish both versions as soon as they become available.

The static content of any new public websites managed directly by the Department introduced during the course of this scheme will be bilingual.

The Department interprets 'static content' as the following persistent elements of the website:

- The framework elements of the home page
- The framework elements of the landing pages
- Zonal titles
- Website Branding

The commitment applies to public websites and content managed directly by the Department – this commitment is not made on behalf of websites managed by agencies under the aegis of the Department or any websites fully or part-funded by Department.

3.4 Correspondence

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

3.5 E-Mail

- A bilingual disclaimer notice is appended to outgoing e-mails, with the Irish version appearing before the English version.
- 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 and English languages which can be used by all users.

3.6 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.

3.7 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. However, 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, **all** Annual Reports and any document setting out public policy proposals will be published in Irish and English.

3.8 Reception/Corporate Services Unit

Receptionists and Corporate Services 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 practice applies in this area, so that at the commencement of this third scheme:

- Reception and Corporate Services 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.

3.9 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.

3.10 Irish language awareness and Training & Development

The Department, as part of its Induction Training, will include Irish 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 once a year to remind all members of staff of their legal obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003.

Staff who are competent and willing to deal with customers or clients in Irish have been identified on a dedicated area of the Department's intranet HealthNet.

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.

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 the end of the first year of operation of the scheme.

The implementation of the scheme will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by the Corporate Operations Office. The contact person for the scheme will be the designated Irish Language Officer, based in the Corporate Operations Office.

Responsibility for ensuring implementation of the commitments in the scheme across all areas of the Department will rest with senior management within the Department.

Chapter 5 - Irish Language Capability

Having regard to Government policy for enhanced provision of services in Irish, the Department has identified a number of posts over the past few years for which Irish language competency is an essential or desirable requirement and has recruited and appointed staff who are proficient in Irish to those posts. Fluency in Irish is required in the role of the Irish Language Officer to the Department, as well as capable Irish language speakers in various units across the Department. It is ensured that officials with a fluency in Irish are placed in units where this will be required and public engagement will be an active factor e.g. press and communications, reception, Ministers' Offices, Oireachtas Co-Ordination, Corporate Operations Office etc., with a view to expanding to a minimum of one fluent speaker per unit in future. Furthermore, every effort will be made to maintain or if required to increase the number of staff of the Department who are proficient in Irish during the period of this scheme, in the main through specialist competitions run by the Public Appointments Service. This will be subject to any Government recruitment policy in existence during the period of this scheme.

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 this scheme will be made available to those individuals or organisations that made a submission in relation to the scheme to the Department.

A copy of this scheme will be forwarded to the Office of the Language Commissioner.