

20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 - 2030

Progress Report: 2010 - 2015

Department of Health

Background

The Department of Health has responsibility for health policy formulation and implementation of that policy. The Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for the provision of health and personal social services to the public and the State agencies operating under the aegis of the Department also have direct statutory responsibility for the provision of other health related services.

The Department of Health prepared an implementation plan on how the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* would be implemented in the health sector. However, as the Department is not the statutory provider of health and personal social services, responsibility for the delivery of most of the actions in the plan fall to the Health Service Executive (HSE) and other State health agencies.

Measures for Irish in the Department of Health

The Department's Irish Language Scheme 2015-2018 sets out the extent to which the Department's services are currently available through Irish and identifies areas for future enhancement such as press and communication services. The Department's website has recently been redesigned and all of the information on the Department's organisation and functions is available online in Irish.

The Department is committed to ensuring that customers who wish to conduct their business through Irish can be facilitated to the greatest extent possible. The Department has seven staff who are capable of carrying out their duties through both Irish and English. In addition, six members of staff have undertaken the Certificate in Professional Irish in the last year.

Having regard to Government policy for enhanced provision of services in Irish, the Department will, by the end of year one of the current Irish Language Scheme, identify the posts for which Irish language competency is an essential requirement. This will enable the

Department to plan and prioritise the incremental improvement of services in Irish in a strategic manner.

Measures for Irish in the HSE

Primary care teams

The HSE is committed to a process of developing primary care teams (PCTs) which can provide services through Irish in the various Gaeltacht areas. To date, the primary care team in the Galway Gaeltacht has been set up and consists of speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, public health nurses, social workers, a psychologist and a dentist, supported by four administrative staff.

Recruitment of staff with fluency in Irish

The HSE continues to recruit staff who are fluent in Irish, as vacancies arise in the Gaeltacht, through the implementation of the HSE recruitment protocol. There are currently nine qualified personnel providing Speech and Language Therapy in Irish in the various Gaeltacht areas.

In 2015, nine staff, ranging from a speech and language therapist, nurses and multi-task agents to a caretaker and a chef who are fluent in Irish, have been recruited to health service posts in Gaeltacht areas.

HSE services available in Irish

The HSE commits to a process that will ensure that Irish speakers' linguistic rights are respected by its staff. Examples of some of the initiatives introduced as part of this process are as follows:

- The Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) call centre in Waterford recruited two customer service personnel with fluency in Irish to deal with Irish speaking clients of the PCRS. In addition, the PCRS changed its IT systems and all customers wishing to receive communications in Irish are flagged to ensure that they receive a service in Irish.
- Irish language versions of the medical card, GP visit card and Drugs Payment Scheme card have been introduced.

- All standard letters for appointments, referrals, etc. are updated in Irish regularly.
- The HSE's dental management IT system has been adapted so that all template letters and appointment cards can be provided bilingually. This system is available in some parts of the State and will be rolled out nationally over the next two years.
- A patient sign over hospital beds, identifying the native language of the patient, is currently being rolled out in Galway University Hospital.

Irish language training for HSE staff

Irish language courses continue to be provided for frontline health professionals who require Irish language competency to carry out their work in Galway, Mayo and Letterkenny. There is one-to-one tuition for some health staff in the Galway Gaeltacht, including psychologists, physiotherapists and GPs' secretaries.

HSE National Steering Group

The HSE set up a national steering group which is charged with reviewing the national health services' compliance with the general obligations of all public bodies under the Official Languages Act 2003. The group held its first meeting in June 2014 and now meets regularly. The group has reported on the HSE Western Area Language Scheme 2005 and oversaw the drafting of the first national HSE Irish Language Scheme which is currently awaiting sign off by the HSE before submission to the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.