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Dublin

Is this response the personal opinion of the respondent or is the response given on behalf of the above organisation?

On behalf of the above organisation

Are you willing to have this response published on the Department's website www.ahg.gov.ie?

Yes

Communication under section 9 of the Act (Letters, emails & mail shots)

Current obligations under the Act:

- To respond to communication in the language in which it was received;
- To issue information in writing or electronically in Irish or bilingually.

1. In your opinion, are these obligations adequate, are they excessive or do they need to be amended?

We do not consider these obligations to be excessive in relation to emails, postal responses and automated email responses. No change needed.

Publications under section 10 of the Act

Current obligations under the Act:

- To publish certain documents simultaneously in Irish and in English (e.g. annual reports, audited accounts, public policy proposals, strategy statements etc.)

2. In your opinion, are these obligations adequate, are they excessive or do they need to be amended?

Dublin City Council is fully supportive of the aims of the Official Languages Act 2003 and is fully supportive of delivering appropriate information to the greatest extent possible in the language of choice of our customers. We believe some of the requirements are excessive and need to be reconsidered. For example, documents setting out public policy proposals and statements of strategy; Section 10(a) and 10(b) of the Act should be amended:

- The cost of production of these documents simultaneously in both languages is not reflecting the low level of demands of the general Irish speaking public in our functional area. Examples - a) Dublin City Development Plan 2011-17. Approx 200,000 words translated into Irish at a cost of €45,000. To date, no requests for Irish version have been received by the Planning Department. b) Dublin City Air Quality Management Plan 2009-12. Approx 13,000 words translated into Irish at a cost of €2,714. To date, no requests for Irish version have been received by the Engineering Department. c) In the last year a total of

8,826 English forms were requested from our Customer Services Centre compared to only 18 Irish forms. • Many of these documents, due the subject matter, use technical terminology. Translation services with background understanding in science, engineering, law etc required to translate accurately – these not always available e.g. Bio Diversity Plan 2008-2012. • The requirement to publish simultaneously can cause difficulties with obligatory timeframes of other legislation (e.g. Development Plan 2011-2017). • There is no distinction made between draft and final document in the Act and therefore numerous drafts of these documents are prepared in both languages at great cost in terms of money and staff time. The additional time required, financial expense incurred - particularly in areas with a low proportion of customers who speak / understand Irish - and the increase in administrative work required to fulfil this obligation is neither efficient, cost effective or in line with public demand and can not be seen as an effective mechanism for the support or development of the Irish language. The redirection of funding to training would, in many instances, be a more effective use of limited resources.

Signage, stationery & recorded oral announcements under Regulations of the Act (S.I. No. 391 of 2008)

Current obligations under the Act:

- To comply with the Regulations in regard to the use of Irish and English on signs, stationery and in recorded oral announcements.

3. In your opinion, are these obligations adequate, are they excessive or do they need to be amended?

We consider the obligations in relation to regulations for signage, stationery and oral announcements to be excessive: • Trademarks should be added to the exemptions already in place for logos. Trademarks cost public bodies, take time to design and register, and renewals are required after 10 years. Under the current regs there are cost implications and branding implications for public bodies if it is necessary to change existing trademarks. • To distinguish two languages best practice internationally recommends that differentiation be made by using at least two elements such as text size, font, colour etc. However, this is not possible under these Regulations because they require equal presentation of both languages. As a result, it is confusing for the public to distinguish between the two languages on stationery and signage. •

Street nameplates should be made exempt. Under the current regulations Nameplates fall within the obligations for signage. There are in excess of 11,000 such plates in Dublin City Council's administration area alone, some of which date back to the foundation of the State and earlier! The requirement to replace nameplates with errors in text in Irish by March 2012 is not realistic, efficient or cost effective. • The requirement to have an equal number of identical signs erected (minimum of 20) in Irish and English is not cost-effective or efficient. Amendments need to be made to the above regulations.

Language Schemes under the Act

The language schemes form the core of the Language Act. The language schemes set out the system through which public bodies develop their services in Irish over a period of time. It is through the language schemes that the use of Irish is dealt with on websites, leaflets, brochures, forms, through telephone services, through other interpersonal services, through online services etc.

4.(a) In your opinion, is the system of language schemes satisfactory, excessive or does it need to be amended?

The system of Language Schemes does not work. It needs to be amended:

- The vacuum that has been left due to the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht's delay in agreeing DCC's Second Scheme has had a stagnating effect on the objectives of the Act.
- The 600 named public bodies under the act have different objectives and functions, they provide different services and have different levels of interaction with the public. We recommend that Schemes relevant to particular categories of public bodies need to be identified.
- It is at the discretion of each body to decide what elements and services they will include in their scheme, the level of service they will provide and what group /members of the public therefore they will target. There is no standard or level of conformity between the different public bodies. As each of the 600 named bodies have different schemes, at different stages, offering different services through Irish this cannot be considered either efficient, cost-effective or in line with public demand.

4.(b) Would you recommend an alternative system which would be more efficient and more effective?

An alternative system is more likely to be more effective:

- It should be easier to implement, both for the bodies in question and the public. There should be a lower demand placed on bodies in non-Gaeltacht areas i.e. the obligations should be proportionate to the likely demands on a particular body.
- It should take less resources to implement and monitor.
- It should produce a level of conformity and standard service through Irish.
- A schedule with phased time frames inline with the current regulations would be best.
- Particular elements of service (application forms, bill payments etc.) could be specified etc.

Services from public bodies in the Gaeltacht

In order for the State to support the status and use of Irish in the Gaeltacht, it is vital that Gaeltacht communities can carry out their official business with the State through Irish.

5.(a) Are you satisfied with the services being provided by public bodies in Irish in the Gaeltacht?

Not Applicable to DCC

5.(b) Would you recommend any amendments that would enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of public bodies in this area?

Not Applicable to DCC

Other provisions of the Act

Other provisions of the Act ratify rights with regard to the use of Irish in the Oireachtas, in the courts and in the State's placenames system.

6. In your opinion, are these provisions adequate, are they excessive or do they need to be amended?

No comment.

Public bodies under the Act

The Act requires public bodies, which are listed under the Act, to provide services through Irish. The full list of public bodies featured under the Act can be found at www.ahg.gov.ie.

The following public bodies are listed under the Act – Government Departments and offices, local authorities, universities, other third-level institutions, vocational education committees, An Garda Síochána, the Courts Service, the Revenue Commissioners, the Health Service Executive, other State agencies, boards & companies.

7. In your opinion, is this list of public bodies under the Act appropriate or is an amendment necessary in this area?

The list of public bodies needs to be amended - categories of public bodies need to be identified in accordance with their range of functions and their level of interaction with the public in general.

The Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga

The Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga was established under the Act. The main role of the Office is to monitor the implementation of the Act.

8. In your opinion, are the powers and functions of that Office adequate or excessive and do they need to be amended?

The three roles of the OCT - Advice, Monitoring and Investigation - need to be clearly identified so that informal enquiries and requests for advice from the OCT can be made by public bodies without any possibility that the mere seeking of advice can result in a formal complaint or investigation being commenced by the OCT. A clear protocol may be necessary to assure named bodies.

In general

9. Are there other amendments to the Act that you would recommend in order to ensure that the legislation is suitable and appropriate to its function?

The act does not legislate for a particular standard of Irish to be used in order for public bodies to fulfil their obligations. To ensure a satisfactory standard for Irish public bodies should be obliged to avail of the in-house skills of staff proficient in Irish and / or employ qualified translators.

10. What services through Irish do you personally require from public bodies or what services do you think should be given priority?

N/A

11. What do you think are the obstacles or difficulties associated with providing the same standard of services in Irish by public bodies?

Key obstacles or difficulties:

- Lack of staff employed with equal standards of communication skills in both languages.
- Financial cost associated with translation, publication and training. A lower demand should be placed on bodies in non-Gaeltacht areas i.e. the obligations should be proportionate to the likely scale of interaction from customers to a particular body.
- The obligation to provide services in both languages simultaneously is onerous and disproportionate to the customer base.
- Section 10 prioritises elements of services which are not necessarily in line with the general demands of the public e.g. Development Plan 2011-2017.

12. What amendments would you recommend to the Act in order to develop State services through Irish in an efficient and cost-effective manner?

Suggested amendments:

- System of schemes should be replaced with additional regulations which would be comprehensible to the public and feasible to monitor.
- Recruitment policies to be developed which supports the appointment of staff with a competence in the two official languages.
- The act should specify a particular standard of Irish to be used in order for public bodies to provide services through Irish.