

Nuala McLoughlin
Co Meath

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

Personal

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?

I think that it is adequate and appropriate that communications should be responded to in the language in which they are received. It also shows respect for the sender, and acknowledges the sender's language rights. However, issuing information in writing or electronically in Irish only or bilingually is counter productive. Issuing in Irish only is not practical outside the Gaeltacht unless the intention is to exclude the vast majority of the population from the communication. Issuing bilingually makes for text-heavy information and reduces the likelihood of any one reading it.

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?

In my opinion they are excessive. They are only ever read by people looking for specific items of information eg the statistics in an annual report. Simultaneous bilingual production adds to the cost and the size of the item and makes it more difficult for those who need to be able to locate information to do so.

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?

The current obligations make sense for stationery, especially if organisations are writing to people in Irish. Signage is more problematic - the An Daingean / Dingle controversy gave tourists a really bad impression of us as a nation. Unless an oral announcement is very short (eg the name of a LUAS stop) it is too long if said in Irish then in English and few people will bother to listen to it, or to pay attention to it. T

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 whereby organisations have to produce a new one every 3 years is excessive and needs to be amended.

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

Yes - if there must be a scheme (and I am not conceding that there is a justification for one) it should only be revisited every 10 years, and organisations that were too ambitious in their first scheme should be allowed to reduce their targets to ones they can realistically hope to meet.

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?

I have not had any experience of this

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

I have no basis for doing so

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?

Irish in the Oireachtas is seldom used for meaningful discussions or debate. Irish for placenames has a value as part of our heritage. Our Constitution guarantees rights of access to the courts to protect and vindicate our rights. However, the cost to the state of running the courts, and the expense for parties who have to pay for legal advice are so high that the requirements in relation to the courts are excessive.

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 is far too long and it should be reduced severely.

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?

They are excessive and open to abuse.

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 has been in force now for sufficient time for its success to be assessed by an external expert to ascertain what improvements - if any - it has made to the overall usage of Irish since it was commenced.

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

I do not require any services through Irish. However, I would consider that staff working in residential care homes for older people in Gaeltacht areas should, where the patients are native speakers, include a number of native speakers to ensure that the patients can feel well cared for.

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

Imposing obligations on public bodies and their staff under pain of prosecution is never going to lead to the provision of good standards of service. Fostering a love for Irish by radical reform of the school syllabus, by training primary school teachers to impart the language without inducing a hatred for it in the pupils, offering financial support to enable school children to have summer holidays in Irish colleges, and offering free language classes for all ages would be a better use of resources.

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

The 2003 Act is well intended but it appears to have failed in its objectives.