

THE USE OF IRISH IN OFFICIAL BUSINESS

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES

ARTICLE 10 – ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

1. **The Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages** is an international agreement designed to protect and promote Regional and Minority languages. The UK Government signed the Charter on **2 March 2000** recognising Irish, Scots Gaidhlig, Welsh, Ulster-Scots and Scots as languages to which the general principles of non-discrimination contained in Part II apply.
2. The Government ratified the Charter on **27 March 2001** and specified Irish, Scots Gaidhlig and Welsh as languages to which some of the more detailed provisions of Part III apply.
3. The Charter comes into force on **2 July 2001** bringing with it certain obligations regarding the use of Irish.
4. This circular offers **interim** guidance to **help staff understand and as far as reasonably possible meet the minimum requirements** of the Charter regarding the use of Irish in official business in the period immediately following the coming into force of the Charter. It supersedes Cent Sec 1/95 and applies to staff in Northern Ireland Departments.
5. A Standing Interdepartmental Charter Group will produce more detailed policy guidance which will be circulated to staff in due course.

ARTICLE 10 – ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

6. A copy of Article 10, with the provisions which apply in respect of Irish **highlighted in bold** is attached at **Annex A**.

OVERALL POLICY

7. Staff should respond courteously and as positively as possible to persons who want to use Irish.

PERSONAL NAMES

Article 10 5

8. A person is legally entitled to assume any name he or she wishes – in English or in any other language. If he or she is generally known by that name, it is valid for purposes of legal identification. Unless it appears that he or she is not generally known by that name, staff must respect the wishes of anyone who wants to be known by the Irish version of their name, and should use only that name in official business. Care should be taken to avoid confusion and duplication if an individual is known by both Irish and English names and it may be useful to put a record of both versions on file.

TELEPHONE CALLS

Article 10 1 a iv ; Article 10 2 b ; Article 10 3 c

9. If a caller begins the conversation in Irish the official may respond in Irish (if they speak it) or English. If the official does not speak Irish they should explain this and offer alternatives for dealing with the call. The following form of words may be helpful:

“I am sorry I cannot answer you in Irish. But I can offer you the following options for dealing with your call. You may

- continue the call in English,
- let us have your views in writing in Irish
- [wait while I transfer you to an Irish speaking colleague]

Note: This option is only available for those Departments who have identified Irish-speaking staff.

- transfer you to our voice mail where you can leave a message in Irish. “

10. To contact the voice mail phone (028902) 58971. Details of the voicemail message and follow-up procedure are attached at **Annex B**. The Charter only requires (**Article 10 2 b**) the State to accept oral requests and applications in Irish. There is no obligation to respond in Irish.

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEWS AND MEETINGS

Article 10 3 c

11. If a person gives advance notice that they want to speak Irish, (*an Irish-speaking official or interpreter may be made available - Departments to decide*)

12. If no notice is given, the person should be offered the choice of -

- continuing the interview/meeting in English;
- giving written views in Irish
- [making an appointment for a meeting when officials will have an interpreter present]. *Note: This is at the discretion of Departments. DCAL will help identify an interpreter if necessary.*

PUBLIC MEETINGS, ENQUIRIES AND HEARINGS

Article 10 3 c

13. If a person gives advance notice that they want to speak Irish, (*an Irish-speaking official or interpreter may be made available - Departments to decide*).

14. If no notice is given, the person should be offered the choice of -

- making their point in English
- giving written views in Irish.
- [making an appointment for a meeting when officials will have an interpreter present]. *Note: This is at the discretion of Departments. DCAL will help identify an interpreter if necessary.*

CORRESPONDENCE

Article 10 3 c

15. When someone writes to the Department in Irish the letter should be referred as soon as possible to a translator. DCAL noel.stewart@dcalni.gov.uk will help identify a translator if necessary.

16. If it seems that, taking translation into account, it will not be possible to provide a substantive reply by the relevant deadline, an acknowledgement should be issued in the normal way, explaining that the letter is being translated and that a substantive reply will follow.

17. Staff are not obliged to acknowledge or reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish. English translations should be filed of the original letter and of any response in Irish.

ADDRESSES

Article 10 2 g

18. A District Council may place a version of a street name in another language alongside the English name. For up to date information on lawfully adopted non-English street names contact Raymond Clements (rclements.osni@doeni.gov.uk). When a person has used a lawful Irish language street name staff should use the Irish form in replying to correspondence, processing applications etc. They should note both versions on the official record.
19. Where third parties may be involved i.e. where a document may need to be scrutinised (e.g. driving licence) or publicised (e.g. planning application) the English form of the street address should be shown as well as the Irish version. Where it is not technically possible to show both, the English version only should be shown. There are no restrictions on using Irish versions of other parts of an address e.g. townland, town, county, country.

ENQUIRIES AND MONITORING

- 20.. Enquiries about this guidance and details of all requests to do business (oral or written) in Irish should be addressed to [*Departments - insert contact name and number*]

29 June 2001

European Charter for Regional or
Minority Languages

Article 10 - Administrative authorities and public services

1. Within the administrative districts of the State in which the number of residents who are users of regional or minority languages justifies the measures specified below and according to the situation of each language, the Parties undertake, as far as this is reasonably possible
 - a*
 - i to ensure that the administrative authorities use the regional or minority languages; or
 - ii to ensure that such of their officers as are in contact with the public use the regional or minority languages in their relations with persons applying to them in these languages; or
 - iii to ensure that users of regional or minority languages may submit oral or written applications and receive a reply in these languages; or
 - iv **to ensure that users of regional or minority languages may submit oral or written applications in these languages; or**
 - v to ensure that users of regional or minority languages may validly submit a document in these languages; or
 - b* to make available widely used administrative texts and forms for the population in the regional or minority languages or in bilingual versions;
 - c* **to allow the administrative authorities to draft documents in a regional or minority language.**

2 In respect of the local and regional authorities on whose territory the number of residents who are users of regional or minority languages is such as to justify the measures specified below, the Parties undertake to allow and/or encourage

a the use of regional or minority languages within the framework of the regional or local authority;

b **the possibility for users of regional or minority languages to submit oral or written applications in these languages;**

c the publication by regional authorities of their official documents also in the relevant regional or minority languages;

d the publication by local authorities of their official documents also in the relevant regional or minority languages;

e **the use by regional authorities of regional or minority languages in debates in their assemblies, without excluding, however, the use of the official language(s) of the State;**

f **the use by local authorities of regional or minority languages in debates in their assemblies, without excluding, however, the use of the official language(s) of the State;**

g **the use or adoption, if necessary in conjunction with the name in the official language(s), of traditional and correct forms of place-names in regional or minority languages.**

3 With regard to public services provided by the administrative authorities or other persons acting on their behalf, the Parties undertake, within the territory in which regional or minority languages are used, in accordance with the situation of each language and as far as this is reasonably possible:

a to ensure that the regional or minority languages are used in the provision of the service; or

- b* to allow users of regional or minority languages to submit a request and receive a reply in these languages; or
 - c* **to allow users of regional or minority languages to submit a request in these languages.**
- 4 With a view to putting into effect those provisions of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 accepted by them, the Parties undertake to take one or more of the following measures
 - a* **translation or interpretation as may be required;**
 - b* recruitment and, where necessary, training of the officials and other public service employees required;
 - c* compliance as far as possible with requests from public service employees having a knowledge of a regional or minority language to be appointed in the territory in which that language is used.
- 5 **The Parties undertake to allow the use or adoption of family names in the regional or minority languages, at the request of those concerned.**

PROCEDURES FOR USE OF IRISH LANGUAGE VOICE MAIL

1. Callers contact the central switchboard or individual Department indicating that they wish to conduct their business in Irish.
2. The official receiving the call will divert the caller to the Irish language voicemail – ext. 58971.
3. The voicemail will be monitored regularly by officials in Linguistic Diversity Branch (LDB), Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.
4. Messages received will be forwarded to an interpreter for translation.
5. Translated enquiries will be e-mailed to noel.stewart@dcalni.gov.uk (LDB) who will forward them to the appropriate Department / official for action.
6. It is at the discretion of individual Departments how they wish to action enquiries received through the voicemail facility and LDB.

MESSAGE ON IRISH VOICE-MAIL FACILITY

Welcome to the Northern Ireland Civil Service. If you would like to leave a message with us someone will come back to you as soon as possible. You can leave your message after the tone. To handle your call we need you to give us the following information:

- Your name
- Your address
- Your daytime telephone number
- The name of the person you would like to contact, if you know it
- The name of the Department you would like to contact, if you know it.
- The nature of your business

We will try to get back to you as soon as possible but if your business is very urgent you are advised to contact the Department directly in English.