

Monitoring Report on the first year of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution's Language Scheme.

Background

In April 2010, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions agreed the second language scheme under section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 with the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The first year of this language scheme expired on 20 April 2011.

One of the functions of the Language Commissioner under section 21 of the Official Languages Act 2003 is to monitor compliance with the provisions of this Act. As part of this responsibility, an investigation into the implementation of the scheme was carried out during which the following steps were taken:

1. A questionnaire was sent to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions on 17 August 2011.
2. A meeting was held on 9 November 2011 between Colm Ó Coisdealbha from the Office of the Language Commissioner and Helen Cullen and Elizabeth Staunton from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Summary

Based on the evidence supplied to us during the monitoring process, it is our opinion that continuous and satisfactory progress is being made by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in implementing the second language scheme.

It is evident that the approach to implementing the first language scheme is being followed and that this work is well coordinated by the Communications & Development Unit. This is evidenced by:

- The website of the Office which is available in bilingual format
- Reception/switchboard practices implemented
- The role of the Irish Language Officer

The Office of the DPP has little direct contact with the public and thus direct dialogue with members of the public is limited. That being said, the Office's main publications, including amended versions of the information booklets "Going to Court as a Witness" and "The Role of the DPP" are published simultaneously in both languages.

Overall it is clear to us that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions accommodates the Irish language in its activities, via the Language Scheme, and we commend the Communications & Development Unit on their continuous work.

Report

The remainder of this report describes the commitments of the scheme and the information supplied to us in this regard.

4.2 Receptionists

Receptionists are the first point of contact with the public. It shall be the policy of the Office to ensure that standard Quality Service practice applies in this area. Accordingly, from the beginning of the scheme:

- Receptionists will ensure that the name of the Office is given in Irish and in English
- Receptionists are familiar with the basic greetings in Irish
- Suitable arrangements are in place so that members of the public can, without delay, be transferred to the officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available

We were informed that the reception staff give the name of the organisation in Irish and English when they answer the telephone. The staff received further training towards the end of 2010. In addition, a staff member who commenced these duties in May 2011 was given training. Overall, the Office of the DPP is satisfied that the procedure for complying with this commitment is firmly embedded in the culture of the organisation and that the staff are fully capable of compliance.

4.3 Irish Language Officer (ILO)

The Irish Language Officer will continue to:

- provide support and assistance in relation to translation of routine correspondence and particular aspects of legal documentation in Irish that may arise from time to time
- advise when it is necessary to send out Irish language material for professional translation
- provide back-up assistance and a point of reference to all staff taking telephone calls or dealing with other written or electronic correspondence in the Irish language

We were informed that the Irish Language Officer is active and that she supports the requirements of the staff regarding translation of material or dealing with enquiries received in Irish.

We were informed that the Irish Language Officer has recently translated 8 items of correspondence and that she assisted from time to time with the translation of legal documents. The Irish Language Officer did not need to send any material to professional translators during this period.

4.4 Communications & Development Unit

The Communications & Development Unit is now responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the Irish Language Scheme. The Unit will by the end of the Scheme, except where otherwise stated:

- report through the Partnership Committee to senior management in relation to implementation to the Irish Language Scheme 2010 - 2013
- carry out, in association with the Irish Language Officer, an inventory of demand for Irish services in the course of implementation of the Scheme 2010 - 2013
- carry out a survey of staff proficiency levels in the Irish language by end of December 2010
- liaise with the Irish Language Officer and the Training Officer in relation to the promotion of Irish language training courses

We were informed that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions considered that it would be more appropriate and beneficial for the Communications & Development Unit to report to Senior Management rather than to the Partnership Committee regarding the implementation of the scheme. We were informed that it is the practice of the Unit to provide a report on an annual basis, usually during the preparation of the Annual Report. Any matter relating to the implementation of the Act may be presented to senior management as required, however.

We were assured that the Communications & Development Unit maintains an inventory of the demand for services in Irish and that this demand is reported in the organisation's Annual Report.

We were also assured that the Communications & Development Unit undertook a survey of members of staff in the Office during October 2010. As part of the questionnaire, staff members were asked to assess themselves in terms of proficiency in Irish. The results of the survey illustrated a degree of fluency in 25 staff members, or 12.5% of the total staff. According to the survey, three staff members were fully fluent, 14 had a good level of spoken and written Irish, five had a basic level and a further three were able to deal with telephone calls in Irish.

4.4 Communications & Development Unit

- liaise with the Irish Language Officer and the Training Officer in relation to language awareness training on Induction Programmes
- liaise with the Training Officer in relation to ongoing training for switchboard operators, receptionists and staff in the Communications & Development Unit to ensure that communications in the Irish language are dealt with in a prompt and satisfactory manner

- liaise with HR Unit and Training Unit in relation to establishing an up-to-date record on the Peoplesoft system of staff with proficiency in the Irish language by December 2010

We were informed that the Training Unit issues regular notices regarding training opportunities available to staff members. As previously mentioned, the reception staff received training in April 2010, as did a staff member recruited in May 2011.

We were informed that the Office decided to maintain a record of the staff members who are capable of providing service in Irish on the telephone directory instead of on the computer system, Peoplesoft.

4.4 Communications & Development Unit

- liaise with IT Unit in relation to provision of an electronic Irish language spellcheck system for staff dealing with communications in the Irish language
- liaise with the Library & Information Service in relation to the directory of resource material available in the Irish language and ensure that the directory is maintained and updated as required
- maintain and update the Office website in bilingual format
- establish an Irish website address to facilitate direct entry to the Irish version of the Office website by June 2010
- ensure that the static content on any new websites that might be developed during the course of the scheme will be bilingual.
- ensure that all leaflets and application forms produced by the Office for distribution to the general public are and will continue to be made available simultaneously in both official languages on the website and, where appropriate, publish such documents bilingually under one cover.

We were informed that the software Gaelspell was installed on the Irish Language Officer's computer and on the Deputy Irish Language Officer's computer to assist them in their compliance duties in this area.

We were assured that the Library & Information Service keeps a directory of Irish language resource material up to date.

We were informed that the Office publishes website material bilingually. We were told however that a website address in Irish had not been developed as was planned in the language scheme. The Office felt that this would not be particularly beneficial as the title of the Office in Irish is seldom used, nor indeed the abbreviated version of the Irish title, compared to the use of the English abbreviation, i.e. DPP. Instead, the meta tag keywords describing the content of the Office's website in Irish were reviewed. The objective of the Office was that people would be directed to the Irish language version of the website during a search for certain words or terms on search engines such as Google.

We were informed that the search engine capability to access the Irish language version of the site was developed during this approach. It was the opinion of the Office that this action was more beneficial than providing a website in Irish. Although this Office does not dispute the advantages of the development that has been made, statutory commitments must be fully complied with. If a commitment is not advantageous it should not have been made in the first place. This Office has neither the power nor the authority to amend statutory commitments ratified by the Minister in a language scheme.

4.4 Communications & Development Unit

- The Office will ensure that where application forms and information leaflets are provided as separate Irish and English language versions, that a suitable statement will be included on the English version of the document stating that a separate Irish version of the document is available and that the Irish language version shall be as readily available as the English version.
- ensure that the Gaeilge icon on the Office Information Database is maintained and updated so as to include: a directory of staff with proficiency in the Irish language; a directory of counsel proficient in the Irish language; a glossary of legal terminology in the Irish language; useful phrases in Irish for staff dealing with telephone calls in Irish; a glossary of useful phrases for staff corresponding in Irish; a link to the Library & Information Services Irish resource; other useful information relating to Irish Language
- give precedence to the Irish language on the Office logo on all Office stationery, compliment slips, and business cards by a date to be determined by quantity of current stocks but no later than March 2011
- promote the inclusion of Irish articles in all editions of the in-house newsletter
- The Office does not currently provide interactive on-line services. However, should such services be introduced in the future they will be introduced simultaneously in both languages.

We were informed that the Office of the DPP did not publish any new application forms or information leaflets since the second language scheme came into force. We were assured that the Irish name is given priority on the Office's stationery, business cards and website.

4.6 Sub-group of Partnership Committee

The Irish Language sub-group of the Partnership Committee consists of members of staff from both the legal and administration divisions of the Office who have an interest in the Irish language and who wish to promote the language on an informal basis through the organisation. The Office is committed to supporting the work of the sub-group in promoting the Irish language within the Office through social and other activities.

We were informed that the Irish sub-group of the Partnership Committee is no longer acting in a formal capacity. However, we were told that the ex-members of the Committee continue to organise social events in Irish.

5. MONITORING

5.1 The Communications & Development Unit will be responsible for the effective operation of the Irish Language Scheme 2010 - 2013. The Unit will monitor implementation of the Scheme and report to senior management through the Partnership Committee on a bi-monthly basis.

We were assured that the Communications & Development Unit regularly reviews the implementation of the scheme. This is seen in the continued progress being made. This Unit has decided that it is more beneficial to report directly to senior management than to go through the Partnership Committee.