

Monitoring of the third year of implementation of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions' Language Scheme

Background

In July 2005 the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions agreed a scheme with the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003. The third year of the implementation of the scheme ended on the 30th June 2008. It is part of the functions of the Language Commissioner under Section 21 of the Official Languages Act 2003 to monitor compliance with the provisions of the Act.

As part of that remit a review/ examination was conducted on the implementation of the scheme and the following steps were taken:

- (1) A questionnaire was sent to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions on the 11th June 2008.
- (2) A meeting was organised on 13th August 2008 between Colm Ó Coisdealbha and Laura Pathe from the Office of the Language Commissioner and Helen Cullen and Liz Staunton from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

We were informed that the work is divided amongst three divisions, the **Directing Division** which takes decisions regarding cases, the **Solicitors Division** which deals with cases in court and the **Administration Division** which provides support services. In addition to this there are 32 State Solicitors located throughout the country. The Office employs a staff of 194 in total.

Report

As the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions' scheme is in its third year of implementation, this monitoring process is focussed on obtaining proof and confirmation from the Office that the particular commitments have been implemented. This report gives an account of what had been agreed in the scheme and the information that the Office made available to us regarding its implementation.

The following were agreed in the scheme:

- 1. The Office will measure on an ongoing basis the level of demand for services in the Irish language from the general public and take action to seek to ensure the availability of adequate resources to meet this demand.**

We have been told that an Irish Language protocol has been implemented by the Office which ensures amongst other things that calls and correspondence in Irish are referred to the Irish Language Officer. This ensures that the office is able to measure fairly accurately the level of demand for services in Irish. It must be taken into account also that the Office has quite limited contact with the general public.

2. The Office will, through the Partnership process, facilitate the maintenance of an Irish language sub-group comprised of volunteers from among the staff. This sub-group will have a role in coordinating the promotion of the language generally in the workplace, through social and other activities. This work shall be carried out in liaison with the An t-Oifigeach Gaeilge/Irish Language Officer.

We were informed that the Partnership Committee's Irish Language subgroup is active and organises social activities such as staff coffee mornings etc. These are organised on a regular basis.

3. To provide a focus for enhancing the level of service provided through Irish the Office has decided to establish a position of Irish Language Officer (Oifigeach Gaeilge). This officer will have a central liaison role, and function as a point of reference in terms of all Irish language-related work arising in the Office.

4. The Irish Language Officer (ILO) will provide support and assistance in relation to translation of routine correspondence and particular aspects of legal documentation in Irish which may arise from time to time.

5. The ILO shall also advise when it will be necessary to send out Irish language material for professional translation.

6. The ILO will liaise with Heads of Divisions in the Office in relation to training requirements for staff which may be identified as arising from time to time.

7. The ILO will also coordinate the provision of information and resources in relation to Irish language matters through an icon on the Office IT database, in liaison with the IT Unit, and through the Office's library service, and through personal contact.

8. The ILO will also 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.

An Irish Language Officer was nominated at the time the scheme was introduced and her duties are specified in the Irish Language Protocol. The Officer acts as a contact point for Irish Language enquiries and provides translations of subject matter that is not too complicated. We were informed that the Irish Language Officer translated 20 letters as well as providing answers for them since the scheme began. 38 applications were made for translations and a professional translation was sought in 10 instances. We were told also that the Irish Language Officer reports regularly to management and we asked that a copy of the most recent report be made available to us.

9. The Office will encourage and facilitate staff to attend training courses in Irish during the working day for the purpose of improving their language skills.

10. Training will be provided to switchboard operators and receptionist to ensure that communications in the Irish language are dealt with in a prompt and satisfactory manner.

We were informed that 33 staff members attended training courses since the scheme commenced. These courses were provided at different levels and two solicitors undertook the Certificate in Legal Irish. We were also informed that no specific course had been organised for switchboard and reception staff. It is permanent staff members who perform these duties. We reminded the Office, nevertheless, that it had given the commitment in the scheme and that it ought to be implemented. We were given a commitment that that would be done.

11. The IT Unit will establish an e-mail address for queries as Gaeilge. The Office will ensure that such queries are dealt with as comprehensively as English language queries.

12. The IT Unit, in liaison with the Irish Language Officer, will establish a central database for Irish language resources in the Office.

The email address Gaeilge@dppireland.ie was set up and the contact page is available on an Irish language version of the site.

As regards the central database, we were informed that it has been set-up. Having inquired about the matter, it was evident that commitments were given on certain elements in the scheme that are not yet on stream. These related to a list of barristers with Irish and a glossary of legal terms and we were informed that these would soon be made available.

13. The Library will provide a directory of resource material available in the Irish language and integrate it with its IT databases.

We were informed that there was a considerable collection of resource material in Irish available in the library. We were given to understand that all this resource material can be accessed through the iLink electronic information management system. This serves as a directory as was the commitment in the scheme.

14. The HR Unit will seek volunteers to provide Irish language services in units of the Office where a requirement for services through the medium of Irish may arise. Such staff will be identified by listing on the Irish language IT database.

15. The HR Unit will also keep under review the number of staff with proficiency in the Irish language and will seek to recruit staff with a capacity to work through Irish and English.

We were informed that the Human Resource Unit sought people who would be willing to provide an Irish Language service voluntarily. There are 10 members of staff named on the database spread among the various divisions.

Although a survey of competency in Irish was carried out in December 2004 no similar survey has taken place since. We were informed that it is intended that another survey be carried out as part of the second scheme. We informed the Office that we thought that this approach was not in keeping with the commitment of an on-going review that had been given. This point was accepted and a commitment was made that the issue would be discussed with the Human

Resources' Unit. Some discussion occurred on ways that competency in Irish might be assessed as part of the recruitment/ induction process.

16. The Irish Language Officer shall in liaison with the Head of Administration keep the effective operation of the scheme under review, and shall submit a report as outlined above every six months to management (An Tuarascáil Gaeilge).

As a result of a review of the operation of the scheme in May 2007 some changes were made to the monitoring system and a decision was made that this responsibility be left to the Communications and Development Unit. It was considered that this would bring better focus and co-ordination to the scheme. The Office is of the opinion that this approach is in keeping with on-going contact with the Irish Language Officer. Although this is not what was agreed in the scheme it cannot be considered to be in any way a weakening of it.

Additional Information

In a communication forwarded to us after the meeting we received an extract from the last partnership meeting report outlining the discussion on Irish Language related matters and the implementation of the Languages Act. It was reported to us also that the database has been brought up to date and in compliance with the requirements of the scheme. It was again confirmed that attention will be given to providing a training course for the switchboard and reception staff.

Conclusion

It is evident from the information provided to us that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is engaged in beneficial on-going work as regards the implementation of the language scheme. Recognition must be given to the Irish Language protocol that is being implemented in the Office as well as the role of the Irish Language Officer. There are some few commitments that the Office has not implemented and as for the ones that have not been fully implemented assurances were given that this would be done within a short period of time. There is every indication that the Communications and Development Unit is engaged in an active monitoring and implementation role regarding the implementation of the scheme.

Recommendations

1. To provide training for the switchboard and reception staff as had been agreed in the scheme
2. To set up a system to ensure that the Human Resources' Unit regularly reviews the language needs of the Office.

30 September 2008