



Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board

Official Languages Act 2003

Language Scheme 2016-2019

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1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

The Official Languages Act 2003 provides for the preparation by public bodies of a language scheme detailing the services which they will provide:

- through the medium of Irish,
- through the medium of English, and
- through the medium of Irish and English

and the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not currently provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

In accordance with section 14(3) of the Act, language schemes remain in force for a period of 3 years or until such time as a new scheme is confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, whichever is the later.

1.2 Preparation and Content of the Scheme

In the preparation of this scheme, due regard has been given to the Guidelines issued by the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht. In addition, there has been a comprehensive process of consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) is guided by the principle that the provision of Irish language services should be based on:

- the underlying level of demand for specific services in the Irish language,
- the importance of a proactive approach to the provision of such services, and
- the resources, including human and financial resources, and the capacity of the body concerned to develop or access the necessary language capability.

The scheme has been formulated with the intention of ensuring that all relevant obligations under the Official Languages Act by **LOETB** will be fully addressed on an incremental basis, through this and future schemes.

1.3 Commencement date of the Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed on **15/08/2016** by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It commences with effect from this date and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years or until a new scheme has been confirmed, whichever is the later.

2: Overview of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB)

2.1 Mission and Objectives

LOETB aims to provide comprehensive, inclusive, accessible, and quality education and training. LOETB guarantees quality service through the following measures:

- striving for the highest national and international standards in local education and training;
- recruiting the best staff available;
- organisational excellence and renewal through training and re-training of staff, with equal opportunities for all;
- on-going dialogue and partnerships with business, industry and commerce at home and with EU policy and vocational education agencies abroad;
- on-going partnerships with parents, students, the Department of Education & Skills, and SOLAS.

We are committed to a policy of alleviating disadvantage in Laois and Offaly and will provide and support education and training measures aimed at eliminating such disadvantage. As one of the main statutory organisations in the two counties, we will link with, assist and support other relevant service providers/development agencies – locally, nationally and internationally. We will regularly evaluate performance, reviewing our objectives, structures, programmes and priorities in order to match best practice and to meet changing patterns of national policy and local need or demand.

2.2 Main Functions

LOETB is a statutory body with extensive responsibilities for the delivery of education and training in second-level schools, further education centres and training services within the counties of Laois and Offaly.

2.3 Key Services

LOETB establishes and maintains schools and recognised centres of education and plans, provides, co-ordinates, and reviews the provision of education and training within its service areas. LOETB is also required (under direction from the Minister for Education and Skills) to provide support services to other education and training providers. Such supports may be in the context of capital projects and land, human resources, financial services, legal services, ICT, and corporate governance.

2.4 Who we serve

- all of the communities of counties Laois and Offaly;
- the students, parents/guardians who constitute the learning communities of all of our second-level schools and recognised centres of education;
- all other users of services provided by LOETB, including further education and training services, community education services, and youth work services;
- state departments/semi-state agencies, voluntary agencies, community groups, and individuals;
- LOETB staff.

3: Details of services currently being provided in English only or bilingually

All services are currently provided in English, save for the teaching of Irish in our schools and centres, which is delivered bilingually.

4: Enhancing the provision of Irish Language Services

The provisions shaded in grey in the table below are mandatory requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003.

Means of communication with the public		Commitment	
Recorded Oral Announcements		<p>The following recorded oral announcements will be in Irish or bilingual:</p> <p>(a) Recorded oral announcements provided on the telephone when the offices of the public body are closed;</p> <p>(b) Recorded oral announcements transmitted by a public address system;</p> <p>(c) Recorded oral announcements created and transmitted by means of a computerised messaging system or a computerised telephone answering system.</p> <p>This provision relates to 'recorded' announcements rather than 'live announcements'.</p> <p>Where a Place names Order is in force, a public body is required to use the Irish language version of the Place name specified in that Order in recorded oral announcements made by it or on its behalf.</p>	Mandatory
Written Communication	Letters and Electronic Mail	All written communication will be responded to in the official language in which it was received.	Mandatory

	Stationery	Headings of stationery, including notepaper, compliment slips, fax cover sheets, file covers and other folders, labels and envelopes are provided in Irish or bilingually.	Mandatory
Signage	Signage	All signage placed by Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) or on its behalf must be in Irish or bilingually, in accordance with the regulations (S.I. No.391/2008).	Mandatory
Publications	Publications	Documents setting out public policy proposals, audited accounts or financial statements, annual reports and strategy statements will be published simultaneously in Irish and English.	Mandatory
	Circulars/ Mailshots	Where a public body communicates in writing or by electronic mail with the general public or a class of the general public for the purpose of furnishing information to the public or the class, the body shall ensure that the communication is in the Irish language or in the English and Irish languages.	Mandatory
An Ghaeltacht	Gaeltacht Place names	The official place names of Gaeltacht areas will be used by the public body in accordance with the relevant legislation	Mandatory

The provision listed below are actions that LOETB propose to implement during the lifetime of the scheme.

Means of communication with the public		Commitment	Timeline
Oral Communication	Reception	Customers will be greeted firstly in Irish and then in English at all schools, centres, and administrative offices.	During the first year of the scheme
	Face to Face/Counter Service	A list of staff members who can provide a service through Irish will be made available at all schools, centres, and administrative offices.	During the first year of the scheme
	Switchboard	Switchboard staff at all schools, centres, and administrative offices will give the name of the public body in Irish and English.	Continuously
	Telephone Communication	Suitable arrangements will be put in place to facilitate telephone communication for customers who wish to conduct business through Irish in a timely manner.	By the end of the scheme
	Press Releases	Any press release will be issued both in Irish and English. These will be issued simultaneously.	Continuously
	Speeches	Greetings and concluding remarks of speeches will be in Irish.	Continuously
	Media Spokesperson	A member of staff will act as a media spokesperson following suitable training	By the end of the scheme
Written Communication	Application Forms	There will be an Irish version of the Teacher Application Form and Community Education Application Form available. These forms account for the vast majority of application forms received by LOETB.	By the end of the first year of the scheme

Information Communication Technology	Email	<p>We will publish a dedicated email address for queries in Irish on the LOETB website.</p> <p>Standard email messages such as disclaimers will be bilingual.</p>	By the end of the first year of the scheme
	Websites	<p>A message from the Chief Executive will be bilingual on the website.</p> <p>The website shall include a bilingual statement from the Chief Executive affirming the determination to implement the commitments entered into in the Board's Scéim Teanga.</p> <p>There will be a navigational link from a page in the English version of the website to the relevant page in the Irish version.</p>	By the end of the first year of the scheme
	Computer Systems	Any new computer system being installed will be fully capable of handling the Irish language.	From the beginning, as new systems are being installed

5: Improving Language Capability

5.1 Recruitment

The recruitment of staff with the appropriate level of competence in the Irish language in each area of work of LOETB will be the primary means of optimising the availability of services through Irish. Our recruitment policy, which is subject to the framework of agreed national recruitment procedures, will have regard to the need to improve Irish language capability on an incremental basis.

All new staff will be provided with an induction pack containing a copy of our agreed scheme in order to ensure that they are made aware of our commitments under the legislation.

5.2 Training and Development

LOETB is committed to making available opportunities for staff to attend appropriately accredited Irish language training courses, as resources permit. All staff will be advised of facilities/opportunities to improve their competency in Irish.

		Commitment	Timeline
Improving Irish Language Capability	Recruitment	New staff will be provided with an induction pack containing a copy of our agreed scheme.	By the end of the first year of the scheme
	Training and Development	Staff shall be provided with the opportunity to improve the Irish language capability by way of funding for recognised Irish language courses at certificate, diploma and degree levels, with the aim of further developing the standard, range, and frequency of the Irish language services we offer to the public. Such courses shall include courses in spoken and written Irish, and others not specified, which would impact positively on the general management and administrative staff capability to offer a high level of service in the Irish language.	Continuously

5.3 Designated Irish Language Posts

In addition to teaching posts with an Irish language competency requirement, the posts listed below have been designated as having an Irish language competency requirement. It is the intention that holders of these posts will have achieved specified accredited standards in the Irish language, commensurate with the responsibilities of the post. When designing these posts, particular consideration has been given to posts whose customer base consists largely of Irish speakers.

Title of Post	Location	Irish speaking community served	Indication of standard of Irish required
Principals, Deputy Principals, and teaching posts	Irish language Schools	Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí operating under the remit of LOETB	Advanced
Secretaries, and other administrative positions	Irish language Schools	Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí operating under the remit of LOETB	Advanced

6: Monitoring and Review

The implementation of the scheme will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by the Chief Executive of LOETB and his/her Management Team. The contact person for the scheme will be Joe Cunningham, Chief Executive.

A formal system for monitoring requests for services through Irish will be available and recorded in our Annual Report.

7: Publicising of Agreed Scheme

This scheme will be publicised both internally and externally. A bilingual version of the scheme will be made available on our website and circulated to all staff and appropriate agencies. Other means to publicise the scheme may also be used.

In addition, we will take every opportunity in our day-to-day interaction with customers to promote and publicise the services we provide in Irish through the following means:

- directly informing customers on a proactive basis of the option of conducting business with us through Irish, for example, by the display of notices at reception areas indicating the Irish language services that are available;
- prominently listing these services on our website;
- signifying on selected guidelines, leaflets and application forms that these documents are also available in Irish, unless presented bilingually;
- giving equal prominence to Irish and English language materials.

A copy of the agreed scheme will be forwarded to the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga. The English language version of this scheme is the official version.