



County Donegal Vocational Education Committee

Scheme 2009-2012 in accordance with the Official Languages Act, 2003

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Chapter 1

Background and Introduction

Introduction

This is the second Scheme prepared by County Donegal Vocational Education Committee under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act, 2003 ("the Act").

Section 11 provides for the preparation by public bodies of a statutory scheme detailing the services they will provide:

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

The Committee's first Language Scheme was implemented over a three year period from 1st July 2005.

This Scheme builds on the Committee's first Scheme and on the custom and practice that has been operative within County Donegal VEC dating back to the formation of the committee by Vocational Education Act, 1930, as well as the principles of Quality Customer Service.

1.1 The Content of the Language Scheme

The primary objective of the Act is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. In this regard, the Committee already provides services through Irish or bilingually to a substantial extent, including services for Gaeltacht communities and Irish language organisations outside the Gaeltacht. The Committee's Customer Charter commits itself to:-

"Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through either of the official languages. This target will be pursued on a phased basis over the lifetime of the Scheme."

Extensive commitments were made in the Committee's first Scheme to improve the level of service in Irish. All these commitments, including the development of a fully bilingual website have been delivered. The objective of this Second Scheme is to continue the delivery of these commitments and to enhance the level of service over the period of the Scheme (2009-2012).

The new Scheme builds on the progress achieved across the organisation over the period of the last Scheme. It sets out a commitment on behalf of the Committee and its staff to develop the extent to which services are currently available through Irish and it identifies areas for future enhancement.

The new Scheme also builds on the principles of Quality Customer Service and will continue to ensure that persons who wish to conduct their business in Irish are facilitated.

1.2 Assessment of extent to which services are already available through Irish

This second scheme further develops the extent to which services are currently available through Irish. Areas for future enhancement of the service provided by the Committee are identified in the body of the scheme. The scheme also includes a commitment to assess on an ongoing basis the level of demand for services through Irish and to ensure that the Committee continues to meet this demand in a proactive, planned, coherent and accessible way. The Committee will continue to actively promote the use of the Irish language within the organisation, endeavour to increase demand for its services through Irish and monitor the number of queries/requests for services through Irish.

The achievement of the Committee's goals as set out in the first Scheme is due to a planned and progressive approach to; a) Recruitment and Placement, and b) Training and Development.

a) Recruitment and Placement

As part of its recruitment policy, the Committee continues to publicly advertise through Irish for staff to work in its Gaelcholáistí and in all Schools/Colleges/Centres located in Gaeltacht communities.

Priority has been given to the placement of staff within Schools/Colleges/Centres located in Gaeltacht areas with a sufficient proficiency in Irish to enable effective delivery of services. Proficiency in Irish has been deemed essential for administrative posts in Schools/Colleges/Centres located in Gaeltacht areas.

Candidates for specific posts with the Committee where fluency in Irish has been deemed an essential requirement must have their interview conducted through Irish. Where candidates have the choice afforded to them to have an interview conducted through Irish or English, their preference is indicated at application stage and interview boards are constituted accordingly. The Committee's recruitment policy has been amended to reflect this.

b) Training and Development

In 2006, the office of the Education Officer and Adult Education Staff introduced Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge, (NUI Maynooth) for administrative staff across the Committee's Schools/Colleges/Centres. Classes for administrative staff took place in Letterkenny and Donegal Town as the Committee sought to fulfill its commitment to improving the Committee's Irish language capability. Administrative staff who undertook and successfully completed the Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge examinations at four levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2) in 2009, were satisfied with their progress and their improved competence and confidence in the use of Irish.

Through the Committee's Performance Management and Development System, and other consultations with staff, an inventory of supply and demand for Irish services has been carried out.

All Irish language courses and courses delivered through Irish are evaluated on an on-going basis. The method of gathering and evaluating feedback has been formalised, so that the Irish Language classes may be enhanced where it is deemed necessary.

Arrangements have been made with designated staff in order to provide services through Irish where requested. Reception and switchboard staff have been notified as to who those designated staff are so that calls may be directed accordingly.

1.3 Commencement Date of the Scheme

This scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The scheme commences with effect from 22nd September 2009 and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years from this date or until a new scheme has been confirmed by the Minister pursuant to Section 15 of the Act, whichever is the earlier.

1.4 Overview of County Donegal Vocational Education Committee

i. Mandate and Mission

County Donegal VEC was established under the Vocational Education Act, 1930. It derives its powers and functions from this primary legislation and subsequent amending legislation inclusive of the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 2001. County Donegal VEC is one of the largest of the 33 VEC's nationally. The Committee's statutory remit is the provision of second level, continuing, further, adult and community education (and associated) services to the people of Donegal. Geographically the Committee's remit extends from Malin in the north of the county to Bundoran in the south, Arranmore and Tory Islands in the west and Carrick in the south-west. Donegal is unique in that it is bordered on the west by the Atlantic Ocean, to the east by counties Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh and to the south by County Leitrim with a border to the State of only 20 kilometers.

The Committee provides a wide range of educational services in these areas. The associated educational services range from providing full-time second-level education in 15 Post Primary Schools/Colleges, the Gartan Outdoor Education Centre, six dedicated Adult Education & Training Centres located throughout the county, a Centre for Education in Letterkenny and provision for adults in numerous schools and community based centres.

The Committee through its Youth Services Programme, supports voluntary Youth Groups, Local Youth Projects and Youth Services to provide education, developmental and recreational programmes for young people.

The Committee in addition to providing part-time adult education in various schools and centres provides a comprehensive basic education and literacy service and supports community education initiatives across the county. Other further education programmes/services include Youthreach, Vocational Training & Opportunities Schemes (VTOS), Back to Education Initiatives (BTEI), and Adult Education Guidance Services in Letterkenny, Donegal Town and four community based Outreach Centres.

County Donegal Vocational Education Committee is committed to the provision of integrated educational and associated services of the highest quality, based on Partnership, to meet the educational needs of the communities in Donegal.

Mission Statement

To promote, offer and support accessible, inclusive and holistic learning opportunities which will enable young people and adults to empower themselves to reach their full potential in society.

ii) Customers and Stakeholders

The outcome of the work of the Committee impacts on a wide array of people, ranging from second level students, learners with special needs, adult learners, second chance learners and local communities, especially those in rural and disadvantaged areas. However, the Committee's customer base and key clients are:

- Adult Learners
- Applicants and grant recipients under the various student support schemes administered directly by the Committee
- Communities throughout the county
- Committee and Sub-Committees (Members)
- Employees of the Committee
- Employee Representative Organisations
- Government Departments and Affiliates
- Local Authorities
- Social Partners, including the community and voluntary sector and employee representatives
- State Agencies
- Students and/or their parents
- The Department of Education & Science
- The Health Services Executive (North-West)
- Voluntary, Youth & Sporting Organisations

iii) Functional Areas of the Committee

The functional areas of the Committee comprise:-

a) External Role

- Adult Education & Training Centres
- Adult Learner Guidance Services
- Back to Education Initiative
- Basic Education Services
- Centre for Education, Letterkenny
- Community Education Services
- Gartan Outdoor Education Centre
- Local Music Education Services Project
- Second-Level Schools & Colleges
- Student Support Services
- Vocational Training & Opportunities Scheme
- Youth Services
- Youthreach

b) Internal Support Units

- Corporate Services Division
- Estates Management Division
- Finance Division
- Human Resources Division
- IT Unit

Chapter 2

Enhancing sustainable capacity in the Irish language

This Chapter sets out the position in relation to service provision by individual Schools/Colleges/Centres within the Vocational Education Committee.

2.1 List of Committee's Sectors providing services in Irish

The following Schools/Colleges/Centres under the aegis of the Vocational Education Committee work through the Irish language and consequently provide services through the medium of Irish, and will continue to do so during the lifetime of this Scheme, except where the customer/client specifically requests such a service be provided to them in the English language:-

- Ionad Oideachais Aosaigh, Gort A'Choirce
- Gaelcholáiste Chineál Eoghain, Bun Cranncha
- Coláiste Ailigh, Leitir Ceanainn
- Coláiste Pobail Cholmcille, Oileán Thóraí
- Gairmscoil Chú Uladh, Béal An Átha Móir
- Gairmscoil Mhic Diarmada, Oileán Árainn Mhóir

2.2 List of Committee's Sectors providing services in Irish and English

The following is a list of Centres/Colleges/Schools within the Vocational Education Committee which currently are in a position to provide a service in the official language of the customer's choice:-

Adult Education & Training Centres

- Ballyshannon
- Donegal Town
- Letterkenny

Adult Learner Guidance Service

- Letterkenny

Basic Education Services

- In Gaeltacht areas

Community Education Support Services

- County-wide

Second Level Schools and Colleges

- Abbey Vocational School, Donegal Town
- Carrick Vocational School, Carrick
- Deelee College, Raphoe
- Errigal College, Letterkenny
- Merville Community College, Merville

Administrative Offices, Ard O'Donnell, Letterkenny

- Corporate Services
- Human Resources
- Student Support Services

2.3 List of Committee's Sectors currently providing services in the English language only

The following is a list of Schools/Colleges/Centres within the Vocational Education Committee, which although working to improve capacity in the Irish language among staff, are currently not in a position to provide a service through the Irish language.

Adult Education & Training Centres

- Buncrana
- Milford
- Lifford Youthreach

Adult Learner Guidance Service

- Donegal Town

Centre for Education, Letterkenny

Gartan Outdoor Education Centre

Second Level Schools and Colleges

- Magh Éne College, Bundoran
- Mulroy College, Milford
- Finn Valley College
- St. Catherine's Vocational School, Killybegs
- Crana College, Buncrana

Administrative Offices, Ard O'Donnell, Letterkenny

- Estates Management
- Finance Division

3.1 Promotion

County Donegal VEC believes that active promotion of bilingual services available to the public is central to increasing the demand for such services.

Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge, formed in February 2008, is a Working Group which brings together key members of staff from the Committee's Administrative, Second Level and Adult Education Sectors. It is a further development of the group formed in 2005 to introduce the Committee's first Scheme 2005 – 2008.

Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge meets regularly, four to six times a year, to discuss and set the strategy by which the commitments of the Scheme can be achieved and delivered upon. For the current Scheme, Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge will prioritise commitments and agree on an implementation strategy to achieve objectives set.

Building on the achievements of the previous Scheme and the increasing capacity to deliver services bilingually, the Committee will seek to actively promote the Scheme 2009 – 2012, in a number of ways including;

- Formalisation of the internal induction procedures to make staff aware of our obligations under Acht na dTeangacha, 2003 and the work of Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge.
- Enhanced signage displaying VEC services in Irish and English, both internally and externally, at all Schools/Colleges/Centres to promote the availability of bilingual services across the Committee.
- Increased level of Irish content on the corporate website will also promote the availability of bilingual services and encourage members of the public to conduct their business with the Committee through Irish.
- Increased use of Irish by staff in Committee's Schools/Colleges/Centres will allow customers to see that Irish is in daily use within the Committee and encourage members of the public to engage with us through Irish.
- Promotion of a bilingual service through strategies developed by Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge.
- On-going support, training and development for Committee's Schools, Colleges, Centres and Administrative Office Divisions to increase capacity to meet their requirements as set out in the Scheme and increase the Committee's overall capacity to provide bilingual services.

3.2 Offices located in Gaeltacht Areas of County Donegal

In addition to those set out in Paragraph 2.1 of the previous chapter, not later than 2010, the Committee will ensure that the Irish language becomes the working language in its other offices in the Gaeltacht.

- **Gairmscoil Mhic Diarmada, Oileán Árann Mhór**

From September 2009, administrative services will be provided at Gairmscoil Mhic Diarmada in accordance with the legal Agreement dated 28th July 2008, which is in place.

- **Gairmscoil na Carraige, An Charraig**

From September 2010, Irish will become the working language of Gairmscoil na Carraige.

3.3 Means of Communication with the Public / Information to the Public

i) Application Forms

County Donegal VEC will continue its policy to always offer each customer the choice to receive application forms and associated documentation in the official language of their choice. Accordingly, it is the policy of the Committee to ensure that all application forms and associated documentation are and will continue to be made available simultaneously in both official languages on our website.

During the first year of this scheme, the Committee will identify certain application forms and information leaflets which can be made available under one cover. The Committee will ensure that such forms and leaflets as identified are provided in both official languages under the one cover by the end of this scheme.

County Donegal VEC will ensure that where application forms and information leaflets are provided as separate Irish and English language versions, that equal prominence is given to both versions at all public locations and that the Irish language version will be as readily accessible as the English language version. Customers will proactively be made aware of the availability of a separate Irish version by way of a suitable statement on the English version of the document and by any other means that the VEC deems appropriate.

ii) Publications

Corporate publications, brochures and information leaflets are and will continue to be made equally available in both Irish and English.

iii) Press Releases

Press Releases will continue to be made available in both Irish and English. The bilingual version of the press release will also be made available on the Committee's website.

It is the continuing practice of the Committee that speeches by members or officials are made available in the language(s) in which they are delivered.

Although documents of a technical nature are available in English only, responses to such documents are accepted/received in either Irish or English.

3.4 Reception Offices

The Committee will introduce a specific range of signage to be displayed at reception and welcome areas of Schools/Colleges/Centres, appropriate to those listed in Section 2, which clearly indicates to the public that services are available through Irish.

From the commencement of this scheme, the names and contact details of individual members of staff with a competency in Irish will be made available. Additional members of staff will be included in this listing as Committee's staff continues to reach proficient levels of Irish to provide services required.

Receptionist and Switchboard Staff will be fully aware of whom best to refer to within each School/College/Centre so that services may be provided in the customer's language of choice.

Receptionists/switchboard operators within each School/College/Centre are the first points of contact with the public. It shall be the policy of the Committee to ensure that standard Quality Customer Service (QCS) practice applies in this area, which is that by the date of commencement of this Scheme:

- Reception/switchboard staff will give the name of the School/College/Centre in Irish.
- They are at least familiar with the basic greetings in Irish.
- Suitable arrangements are in place so that they can put members of the public in touch, without delay, with the office or officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available.

3.5 Corporate Website and Information Systems

As the Committee's corporate website is fully bilingual, customers who use the website have the choice to view content in Irish or English. The Committee will continue to maintain a fully bilingual website and will ensure that all publications including, information leaflets and brochures, that are produced in Irish or bilingually will continue to be made available on the Irish version of the website at the same time as the English version.

The Committee has conducted a review of the websites of its Schools/Colleges/Centres and will undertake preparatory work with a view to making them bilingual as part of the Committee's third or subsequent schemes. The static content on any new websites introduced by the Committee during the course of this scheme will be bilingual.

The email address eolas@donegalvec.ie has been added to the website as part of a proactive approach to encouraging and enabling customers to contact the Committee through Irish.

The provision of bilingual on-line interactive and computer services is a long term objective, which requires a balanced approach to meet both the functional and language requirements of the software systems.

The Committee will ensure that new computer services installed by the Committee will be fully capable of handling the Irish language and that existing systems will, where necessary, be made compatible in conjunction with the next suitable planned maintenance or upgrade work.

The Committee's only existing on-line interactive service, SMS Alerts for Student Support Services, can communicate with customers in Irish and English. Future on-line interactive services will be made available bilingually.

3.6 Improving the Committee's Irish language Capabilities

The Committee actively encourages and supports staff in the development and improvement of their Irish language skills. Fully funded classes during working hours were provided in Letterkenny and Donegal throughout the life of the Committee's first language scheme.

As a result, colleagues regularly choose to conduct their day-to-day business with each other and with staff of the Administrative Offices through Irish.

Information is relayed to staff in relation to the range of Irish language classes available. Some members of staff are taking part in classes organised by Gaelscoileanna in various locations, while others have enrolled in more formal courses such as the Diploma in Irish from NUI Galway.

3.7 Public Meetings Policy

The Committee conducts the majority of its public meetings in the English language only. However, it is the continuing policy of this Committee that any public meetings held in the Gaeltacht, or dealing with Gaeltacht issues will be either conducted through Irish or bilingually.

In the case of public meetings dealing with Irish language issues generally, such meetings may be either conducted through Irish or bilingually.

3.8 Training and Development

The provision of Irish Language Classes will be revised in accordance with management's strategy to meet the goals of the Scheme 2009 – 2012, giving due consideration to the evaluations conducted following previous examinations held and to available resources.

The Committee will continue to encourage and support staff who avail of courses organised by external providers, such as:

- Irish Courses with Oideas Gael
- NUI Galway's Diploma and Degree courses in Irish

3.9 Induction

Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge will work with Human Resources to facilitate the inclusion of the Scheme 2009 – 2012 in formal and informal induction programmes for staff employed in the various sectors of the Committee.

A summary document will be drafted and published to ensure that staff:

- understand why the Committee implements a bilingual policy,
- understand the context and background to the policy,
- are fully informed about how the policy will affect their work, and
- are made aware of the support and training opportunities provided for upskilling.

Chapter 4

Implementation, Monitoring and Reporting

4.1 Implementation

Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge* will keep the effective operation of the Scheme under review. Line managers in each of the School/Colleges/Centres who are responsible for the implementation of the Scheme within their own School/Colleges/Centres will report on a regular basis to the Chief Executive Officer.

Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge will lead the implementation of the Scheme and will agree on a number of priorities to be addressed annually to effectively implement the commitments of the Scheme 2009 – 2012.

4.2 Monitoring

Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge will receive regular reports on the implementation of the Scheme 2009–2012. Day to day monitoring of the Scheme remains the responsibility of the line managers in each of the Committee's School/College/Centres, reporting regularly to the CEO.

Revisions for the successful implementation of the Scheme may be taken by Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge, as appropriate.

4.3 Reporting

Reporting on the implementation of the scheme occurs in the Committee's Annual Reports. Each of the Committee's Annual Reports contain a statement on the progress and implementation of the Scheme in effect.

* Membership of Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge is listed a Appendix 1 (see page 14)

The contents of this Scheme along with the commitments and provisions of the Scheme will be publicised to the general public by means of:-

- Official Launch of the Scheme
- Press Release
- Circulation to appropriate agencies and public bodies
- Advertising of provisions
- Corporate Website

In addition, once Schools/Colleges/Centres which have committed to delivering a service are in a position to do so this will also be publicised in the manner outlined above.

In addition to the measures set out earlier in the scheme, the Committee will take every opportunity in its day-to-day interactions with customers to promote and publicise the services it provides through Irish, including by:

- directly informing customers on a pro-active basis of the option of dealing with the Committee and its Schools, Colleges and Centres through Irish, for example, by the display of notices at reception areas indicating the Irish language services that are available and also by prominently listing these on the Committee's website;
- including footnotes on selected guidelines, leaflets, and applications forms explaining that these documents are also available in Irish (in cases where bilingual printed material is not produced under a single cover); and,
- including notes in publications and advertisements that the Committee provides services through Irish and, accordingly, welcomes customers who wish to deal with it in Irish, according to the commitments in its agreed Scheme.

A copy of this scheme has also been forwarded to;

- Oifig an Choimisinéir Teanga
- An Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta

A copy of this scheme is available at www.donegalvec.ie or by request to eolas@donegalvec.ie

The English language version is the original text of this scheme.

Appendix 1 Membership of Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge

Membership of Coiste Forbartha na Gaeilge:

- Seán Ó Longáin, Chief Executive Officer, Chairperson
- Mary Ann Kane, Education Officer
- Finola Furey, Head of Human Resources
- Frankie Quinn, Head of Corporate Services
- Martin Gormley, Adult Education Officer
- Cróna Gallagher, Adult Education Officer
- Fiona Ní Chnámhsí, Principal, Garimscoil Chú Uladh
- Dolores Mhic Géidigh, Adult Literacy Organiser
- Aidan Mc Closkey, Human Resources Division, Secretary