



Legal Aid Board Scheme 2007–2010 under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 – Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

On 22 March 2006, the Chief Executive of the Legal Aid Board was requested by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to prepare a draft scheme under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 (the Act) and to present it to him for confirmation on or before 21 September 2006. This scheme has been prepared in accordance with this request. Section 11 of the Act 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, and
- 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.

1.2 Preparation of the scheme

The Scheme was drawn up by the Board having regard to the Guidelines prepared under Section 12 of the Act by the Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and in particular that the provision of service in Irish should be based on the following:

- The underlying level of demand for specific services in the Irish language in the context of specific provision
- The resources, including human and financial resources, and the capacity of the public body concerned to develop or access the necessary language capability.

1.2.1 Consultation

In accordance with section 13(1) (a) of the Act, on 9 May 2006, the Board published a notice of the intention to prepare a draft Scheme. Bilingual advertisements inviting submissions were published in the national press and on the Board's website, and notices in Irish were placed in one Irish language publication. The same information was conveyed to Board staff via our internal bulletin board. A total of three submissions were received from the external consultation and these are available on the Board's website.

1.3 Assessment of demand for services through Irish

In June 2006, all law centres and head office units were requested to indicate the level of demand for services in Irish since the beginning of 2004. This indicated that there had been limited demand for the service up to that date. Requests for legal service in Irish were confined to one law centre where a full Irish language legal service is already available. A total of five clients requested service in Irish from the law centre service during the period. To put this in context the Board provided service in some 12,500 cases through its law centre service in 2005 alone. A working group was established to prepare the scheme, representing all relevant functional areas of the Board.

1.4 Scheme objectives

The Board is committed to the implementation of the provisions of the Official Languages Act. It is proposed to achieve this gradually, building on the existing arrangements for service provision with this first scheme which will be developed in accordance with demand and resource availability.