



Legal Aid Board Scheme 2007–2010 under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 – Chapter 3 The Scheme

3.1 Existing Language regime for the Provision of Services

3.1.1 Legal Service – Law Centres

The Board's main law centre service is provided mainly through English. The Board also provides its full law centre legal service in the Irish language to those who request it, through its Galway Law Centre. In this context law centre legal service refers to the services provided by a solicitor in the Board's law centres. In the event that a client in another part of the country requires service in Irish, the solicitor providing service in Irish will travel to a location suitable to that client. This is the same procedure as applies when the English language service requires the provision of service by a solicitor from a law centre in a different catchment area. The reception and support services in this office are not yet at the level of being fully bilingual.

3.1.2. Legal Service – Refugee Legal Service

The Board's Refugee Legal Service (RLS) provides a legal service to persons applying for asylum in Ireland. This service is provided in English with the aid of interpreters for those clients who require it. From the establishment of the service in 1999 to date, no client of the RLS has sought to receive service through Irish.

3.1.3 Head Office Services

The Board's Head Office functions are mainly directed at support for frontline service delivery. Service is provided through Irish by the Board's Head Office units as required in response to specific requests. To date, there have been a limited number of requests for such service.

3.2 Public Interface

3.2.1 Forms and Leaflets

It is Board policy that all of its forms and leaflets should be available in Irish. To this end all of the forms and leaflets relating to its law centre service have been translated and are available in Irish and English in law centres. Where written/phone/email requests are received for information about the Board's services, a copy of the relevant leaflet is provided in the language of the request or in the language requested if different. Forms and leaflets are also distributed through a number of other outlets for example – the Citizen's Information Centres. They may be requested directly by contacting the Board's Head Office in Cahirciveen, Local 1890 – 615 200.

3.2.2 Website

The revised version of the Board's website, which is currently under preparation, will include an Irish language option – which will be a full mirror image of the English version. All web pages will be made available in both languages. Users will be able to choose the language version they wish to access at any point on the website. Board publications and policy documents being placed on the site will be made available in the languages in which they are published. The revised website will be available in both language options from the date of its relaunch (Summer 2007).

3.2.3 Publications

Since mid June 2004, major corporate publications are published bilingually, within one cover, in accordance with Section 10 of the Official Languages Act 2003.

3.3 Services to be provided through the Medium of Irish

The Board does not currently provide services solely through the medium of Irish and there are no proposals to do so. None of the Board's offices are located in a Gaeltacht area.

3.4 Services to be provided through the medium of both Irish and English

3.4.0 Assessment of potential future demand

In the first year of this scheme, the Board will undertake a survey of potential demand for its services in Irish. This survey will be undertaken in recognition of the possibility that the limited availability of the Irish language service has influenced demand for it. The examination of options to enhance service provision in Irish, which are outlined below, will be informed by the results of this survey.

3.4.1 Legal Service – Law centres

The Board's current arrangements for the provision of service are set out at paragraph 3.1.1 above. This section sets out the measures the Board proposes to take to improve and develop the existing service. The Board's Irish language legal service is currently located in its Galway law centre. The reception and support services in this office are not yet at the level of being fully bilingual. The Board will take the necessary measures to develop reception and support services in Irish at its Galway Law Centre. This element of the service will be in place within two years of the start of the scheme i.e. by 25 May 2009. The Board will build on the existing arrangements for service provision in Irish, outlined at 3.1.1, by making available a referral service. Specifically, persons contacting any of the Board's law centres or offices seeking legal service through Irish will be referred directly to Galway Law Centre. This will require that the enhancement of the capacity of the existing support staff, clerical and paralegal, to handle such queries, as outlined above, is in place. In addition, the Board will use the results of the survey of potential demand outlined at 3.4.0 above to identify locations where it needs to enhance its capacity to provide service in Irish. It is expected that such developments would focus on offices whose catchment area includes Gaeltacht areas, and also some of the larger urban centres. The measures to be taken will include the development of the capacity of the staff in these offices to provide service in Irish and also the identification of suitably qualified private practitioners to complement the Board's Irish language service. The enhanced arrangements outlined above will be in place by the end of the lifetime of this scheme.

3.4.2 Interpreter based service

The Board, through its Refugee Legal Service, already has extensive experience of the provision of service with the aid of interpreters. The Board will examine the feasibility of the provision of services for its clients in Gaeltacht areas with the assistance of interpreters. One of the options to be considered in this examination will be the operation of a pilot scheme for interpreter based services. This examination will be completed within 2 years of the commencement of the scheme.

3.4.3 Private practitioner based services

The Board currently uses the services of private practitioners to complement the service provided by its staff. The Board will investigate the capacity of private practitioners to provide service in Irish to the standards required by the Board. This investigation will be completed within two years of the commencement of the scheme.

3.4.4 Barristers

The Board also avails of the services of barristers, instructed by Board solicitors, to represent clients in court. The Board will seek to identify suitably qualified barristers to support its provision of service in Irish. This will be achieved within two years of the commencement of the scheme.

3.4.5 Head Office Services

The Board's Head Office functions are mainly directed at support for frontline service delivery. Staff on the Board's Head Office switchboard will be trained to respond to telephone enquiries made through Irish during 2007. The Board will provide training to enhance the capacity of other Head Office personnel to conduct business through Irish also during 2007. This will ensure that the front line services provided by Head Office will be delivered bilingually when required by 26 May 2008.

3.4.6 Services to be provided through the medium of English only

– Refugee Legal Service

The Board's Refugee Legal Service currently provides a service through the medium of English. The service is provided with the aid of interpreters for the majority of clients. It is proposed to continue to provide this service in this way. If a client of this service requests that it be provided in Irish this will be achieved with the aid of interpretation.

3.5 Communications

The Board's communications framework will include measures to increase awareness of its Irish language service largely through advertising in national and Irish language media.

3.6 Resources

3.6.1 Staff

The Board currently depends on one member of solicitor staff to provide legal service through Irish. Training will be provided to other solicitor staff with the necessary language competence to enable them also to provide a professional legal service in Irish. This will be achieved within the lifetime of this scheme. The Board will ensure that there is sufficient staff with the necessary skills to meet demand for service in Irish. All staff providing service through Irish will be within the Board's existing approved complement.

3.7 Quality Assurance

The quality assurance measures applied to the Board's services do not distinguish between those services provided in Irish and those provided in English. This will continue to be the case during the lifetime of this scheme.

3.8 Public Interface

3.8.1 Forms and Leaflets

It is Board policy that all of its forms and leaflets should be available in Irish. To this end all of the forms and leaflets relating to its law centre service will continue to be made available in Irish and in English. These forms and leaflets will be available in law centres. Where written/phone/email requests are received for information about the Board's services, a copy of both the Irish and the English language version of the relevant leaflet will be provided in response. All forms will be made available bilingually within one cover from the commencement of this scheme – apart from forms for the Refugee Legal Service. Forms and leaflets will continue to be distributed through a number of other outlets for example – the Citizen's Information Centres. They may be requested directly by contacting the Board's Head Office in Cahirciveen, Locall 1890 – 615 200 or by email from info@legallaidboard.ie.

3.8.2 Telephones

The Board will ensure that switchboard operators in all locations, including its Head Office in cahirciveen, are fully briefed and trained to be able to direct callers in Irish to the appropriate location to receive service in Irish. This training will ensure that by 26 May 2008 reception/switchboard staff are able to give the name of the body in Irish,

- that they are familiar with the basic greetings in Irish, and
- 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.

3.8.3 Public Offices

The Board provides service to clients through its network of 33 law centres, many of which are quite small. Personal callers to law centres who wish to conduct their business in Irish will be referred to offices where such service can be provided and will be facilitated in making contact with that centre. The Board will have a fully bilingual counter and support service available in its Galway Law Centre within two years of the start of this scheme ie by 25 May 2009. A fully bilingual legal service is already available in this office.

3.8.4 Board Website

The revised version of the Board's website currently under preparation will include an Irish language option – which will be a full mirror image of the English version. All web pages will be made available in both languages. Users will be able to choose the language version they wish to access at all web pages. Board publications and policy documents being placed on the site will be made available in the languages in which they are published. The revised website will be available in both language options from the date of its relaunch (Summer 2007). The website does not currently provide for interactive services. Where such services are developed they will be provided in both Irish and English.

3.9 Staff Development

The Board has identified a number of staff members with the ability to provide service through Irish. It will also seek to identify the offices most likely to require such staff, and aim to provide the competence in those offices through a combination of recruitment and training. Staff in relevant areas will be particularly encouraged to avail of Irish language training courses

3.10 Supports to service provision in Irish

The Board will provide the necessary facilities and support to staff responsible for providing service in Irish. This will include training, necessary IT supports (Irish language word processing, availability of standard documents etc), dictionaries, glossaries of technical terms and the other support materials necessary to enable provision of service in Irish to the Board's quality standard. In addition, any new computer systems which are initiated after the commencement of this scheme, will, where necessary, take account of the need to be fully capable of handling the Irish language. Existing systems will, where necessary, be adapted to handle the Irish language at the next suitable upgrade. The Board will ensure that 25% of press releases are provided in both Irish and English from the date of commencement of this scheme.