

Code of Courtesy on the use of Irish in official business

serving the community through the administration of justice

Document Details

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The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to staff on the use of Irish in official business. This guidance complies with the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority languages (“the Charter”).

The following Code of Courtesy on the use of Irish in official business is designed to assist staff in fulfilling our obligations under the Charter.

This document supersedes guidance as issued on 8 October 2004 through Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Notice 42/2004.

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service currently will translate documents into alternative languages on request. If you require this service please contact:

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service
Laganside House
23-27 Oxford Street
Belfast
BT1 3LA

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Introduction

1. The Charter regards linguistic diversity as a common cultural wealth. Everyone is entitled to respect and courtesy, which extends to their language. Every effort will be made to convey this respect even if it is not possible to deal with the person in the language of his/her choice.
2. Officers should become familiar with the provisions of the Charter that apply to Irish and the measures we have decided upon to implement them.

General

3. All staff should respond courteously to customers who want to use Irish.

Personal Names

4. A person is legally entitled to assume any name he or she wishes – in English or in any other language. If he or she is generally known by that name, it is valid for purposes of legal identification. Unless it appears that he or she is not generally known by that name, staff must respect the wishes of anyone who wants to be known by the Irish version of their name, and should use only that name in official business. Care should be taken to avoid confusion and duplication if an individual is known by both Irish and English names. It may be useful to put a record of both versions on file.
5. If an officer believes that the person in question may also have been using an English form of their name, they might ask, *“Is this the form of your name you always use?
I have to ensure that all your records are together”*.
6. If a person gives his/her name in Irish, and the officer dealing with the person has difficulty in writing or even pronouncing it, they should ask the person to help them spell it.
7. If the name includes an accent, this should present no problem. Practically all computer software packages cater for this.
8. In short, a person may use whatever form of their name they choose. This right should never be questioned. Every effort should be made to write and/or pronounce a person’s name correctly. Don’t be embarrassed to seek that person’s help.

Face-to-Face Interviews and Meetings

9. If someone starts speaking in Irish to staff who do not speak Irish you should explain this and offer the person the choice of:
- continuing the interview/meeting in English;
 - giving written views in Irish; or
 - making an appointment for a meeting when an interpreter is present.

If in doubt, clarify that the language in question is Irish.

10. If a person gives advance notice that they want to speak Irish, an interpreter should generally be arranged, this can be done by contacting the Communications Group (Tel : 028 90 41 328594 or communicationsgroup@courtsni.gov.uk) An exception to the general requirement to provide an interpreter might be recruitment interviews, where necessary testing of communication skills in English could not be carried out properly unless English was the working medium.
11. If no notice is given, the person should be offered the choice of –
- making their point in English ;
 - giving written views in Irish; or
 - making an appointment for a meeting when an interpreter is present.
12. If a meeting is arranged, double-check beforehand that the interpreter is available. Never promise a service on which you cannot deliver.

Telephone calls

13. If a caller begins the conversation in Irish the officer may respond in Irish (if they speak it) or English. If the officer does not speak Irish they should explain this and offer alternatives for dealing with the call. The following form of words may be helpful:

“I am sorry I cannot answer you in Irish. But I can offer you the following options for dealing with your call. You may:

- continue the call in English
- write to us in Irish
- transfer you to our voice mail where you can leave a message in Irish.”

14. To contact the **voice mail** phone – 028 90 41 2900. The Charter only requires acceptance of oral requests and applications in Irish. There is no obligation to respond in Irish.

Procedures for use of Irish language voicemail

15. If a caller contacts the central switchboard or an individual department indicating that they wish to conduct their business in Irish the call will be diverted or the caller directed to the Irish language voice mail.

16. The voice mail is monitored daily by staff in the Communications Group. Messages received will be translated immediately or forwarded to an interpreter for translation. Translated enquiries will be forwarded to the appropriate department / official for action.

Correspondence (including emails)

17. The Charter obliges departments to accept written applications in Irish. If it seems that, taking translation into account, it will not be possible to provide a substantive reply by the relevant deadline, an acknowledgement should be issued in the normal way, explaining that the letter is being translated and that a substantive reply will follow. A positive gesture might be to issue at least the acknowledgment in Irish using a stock form of words. (An Irish language acknowledgment letter is available from the Communications Group)

18. The Charter does not oblige departments to acknowledge or reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish, but officials are encouraged to do so, using the Central Translation Service via the NI Courts and Tribunals Service Communications Group where necessary. English translations and the original letter with response should be filed. For the avoidance of doubt officials issuing responses in Irish who have no Irish themselves may wish to sign the English translation of a response and attach a copy to the unsigned Irish version.
19. When someone communicates with the Courts and Tribunals Service in Irish in writing you should refer the document immediately to the Communications Group, Laganside House who will arrange for it to be translated and returned to you. Where the document is, or appears to be, urgent or where there is a specific target time for response / action, you should draw this to the attention of the Communications Group.

Addresses

20. The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 provides that a District Council may place a version of a street name in another language alongside the English name. For up to date information on non-English street names adopted by District Councils go to http://www.osni.gov.uk/paper/dual_lang.html or contact the Ordnance Survey (info@pointer-ni.gov.uk). When a person has used a lawful Irish language street name staff should use the Irish form in replying to correspondence or while processing applications. Both Irish and English versions should be noted on the official record.
21. Where third parties may be involved i.e. where a document may need to be scrutinised (e.g. driving licence) or publicised (e.g. planning application) the English form of the street address should be shown as well as the Irish version. There are no restrictions on using Irish versions of other parts of an address e.g. townland, town, county, country.
22. When contact is being initiated, it would be in keeping with the spirit of the Charter to use both versions initially, and then continue using whichever language was used in the reply. Departments and associated bodies are encouraged to use both versions in their documents and publications.

Court proceedings, court offices and buildings

23. Articles 9 (1) and (2) (Judicial authorities) of the Charter, which makes provision in relation to the use of a minority language in court proceedings, have not been applied to Irish at this time. Court proceedings will therefore continue to be in English.

24. Staff in court offices / buildings should respond to any request to use Irish courteously and explain, as appropriate, that:

- All court proceedings must be conducted in English (except where an individual does not speak or understand English);
- We do not offer an Irish language service in court offices / buildings

Use of Irish in other business

25. The specified requirements in relation to the use of Irish under Article 10 (Administrative Authorities and Public Services) apply to all Headquarters Branches, the Fixed Penalty Office, the Court Funds Office and the Enforcement of Judgments Office (except in relation to applications to, or hearings before, the Master).

Counter services: EJO; FPO; CFO; and Headquarters reception / Communications Group

26. If a person begins speaking in Irish at a counter service you may respond in Irish or English.

27. If you do not speak Irish, you should explain this to the person and give the person the option of :

- Discussing the matter in English
- Sending details of the query in writing in Irish

Public meetings

28. If a person gives advance notice that they intend to speak in Irish, you should contact the Communications Group, Laganside House as soon as possible who will arrange for an interpreter to be present.
29. Where notice is not given and the officials present cannot speak Irish, you should offer the person the choice of making their point in English, giving written views in Irish or arranging a private meeting when an interpreter can be present.

Enquiries and Monitoring

30. Enquiries about this Code of courtesy and details of all requests to do business (oral or written) in Irish should be addressed to:

Communications Group
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service
Laganside House
23-27 Oxford Street
Belfast
BT1 3LA
Tel : 028 90 412262, 028 9041 2387

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