

Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure

In the meantime it is important to continue to note the current guidance on the use of Irish in the public sector Cent Sec 1/95. The Service First initiative is also relevant. Until new guidance is issued the following points might be helpful:

- Take note of Cent Sec 1/95 (a copy is attached for ease of reference) - but also note that in practice exceptions have been made to this. Oral and written communication has taken place in Irish, applications have been accepted in Irish, and publications produced.
- In the interests of customer service you may wish to draft and publish documents in Irish. There is no prohibition on doing so but do take a common sense approach. For example (and subject to Ministerial wishes) consider prioritising those areas or products with particular relevance for Irish speakers. Examples in the past have included curriculum guidance for Irish medium schools (DENI) and careers advice notes for Meanscoil students (T&EA). Sometimes an Executive Summary rather than the entire document may be enough eg the Northern Ireland Child Care Strategy.
- Cost effectiveness is very important and a balance has to be struck.
- Short, high profile items and headline documents such as Charters can create a positive image without undue added cost.

We have asked all departments through their private offices, press office and Steering Group to keep us up to date with developments. The response has been patchy and I would like to stress the importance of having this information if we are to ensure a co-ordinated approach.

In relation to translation and interpreting services we have supplied a list of commercial translators. However the need for quality control of outputs and to ensure standards of equality and consistency have highlighted the urgent need to gain the funding to secure on a short-term contact a person dedicated to government work who can produce translations in house through DCAL for all departments who wish to avail of such a service. However, some departments may have needs which will require dedicated resources in house given that the audit clearly shows uneven demand.

Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure

In relation to training, the overall NICS training needs analysis to be undertaken in the Spring will examine the need and demand for Irish language training. Furthermore, BDS are planning action research in the form of two training projects, one in Stormont and one in the City Centre, that will generate a programme of courses from beginners to "refresher" depending on demand.

I trust these actions meet with the approval of my colleagues and would appreciate their comments and feedback as soon as possible recognising the particular pressures highlighted both by colleagues and the Steering Group.

A Wallace

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cc: NI Permanent Secretaries

USE OF IRISH LANGUAGE IN OFFICIAL BUSINESS
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT CIRCULAR 1/95 (attached)

In December 1992 the Secretary of State gave a commitment to remove the legal prohibition on the erection by District Councils of non-English street nameplates.

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which comes into force on 16 May 1995, removes this prohibition and provides that a Council may place a version of a street name in another language alongside the English name. In practice, the second language is most likely to be Irish.

The attached Circular, which replaces Central Secretariat Circular 1/88 with effect from 16 May 1995, provides revised guidance on the use of the Irish language in official business, taking account of the new legislation.

The principles underlying the revised guidance, in so far as it relates to addresses, are that:

- in dealing with individuals and bodies which have adopted a lawful Irish street name as part of their address, the same principles of courtesy and respect for individual preference which apply in relation to Irish personal names should be observed;
- under the 1995 Order the erection by a District Council of a non-English street nameplate does not confer any new legal right to the use of the non-English street name for statutory purposes;

Cent Sec Circular 1/95

USE OF IRISH LANGUAGE IN OFFICIAL BUSINESS**Introduction**

1. The purpose of this circular is to offer guidance on the use of the Irish language in official business. In essence the guidance confirms that correspondence with the members of the public who wish to use the Irish language should be treated with due courtesy .
2. This circular comes into effect on 16 May 1995, replacing Central Secretariat Circular 1/88 from that date.

Personal Names

3. An individual is legally entitled to assume any name he or she wishes - in English or in any other language - and, if he or she is generally known by that name, it is valid for purposes of legal identification.
4. Departments should accordingly respect the wishes of any individual who has indicated a desire to be known by a personal name in the Irish language. Unless it appears that he or she is not generally known by that name, a personal name in Irish should be accepted for all official purposes, including correspondence and official documents. It may be necessary also to record previously used versions of a name on official files and computer records etc in order to help identification. However, only the version requested by the individual concerned should be used in correspondence and documents issued to that individual. Though little used nowadays, older forms of written Irish retained archaic letter

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characters. The Irish version of names for official purposes should use only Roman letter characters (ie as in English).

Addresses

5. The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 removed the previous prohibition on District Councils erecting street names in any language other than English. From 16 May 1995 a Council may place a version of the street name in another language alongside the English name. In practice, the second language is most likely to be Irish and some individuals, organisations, companies and local authorities will wish to use the Irish street name in their address.
6. The Order does not authorise or require the use of a street name in a language other than English as part of the address or the description of land for the purposes of any statutory provision. The legal position is therefore not altered in respect of any other statutory provision. Departments should continue to use only the English street name in most circumstances. However, in line with the general approach of this Circular, Departments should respect, as far as possible, the expressed desire of individuals and organisations to use a lawfully adopted Irish street name in their address. The following guidance applies to the use of Irish street names in correspondence and applications from such individuals or bodies where that street name has been lawfully erected by a District Council. Ordnance Survey will advise on whether that is the case and on the English version of the address.
7. When a person has used a lawfully adopted non-English street address in correspondence, Departments should respect that preference by replying in the same form, though the remainder of the address (including the town and county) should be in English. The Post Office's policy is to endeavour to deliver all correspondence, however addressed. Similarly, an

application using a lawfully adopted non-English street address should be acceptable and subsequent correspondence with the applicant in relation to that application should cite that address, though official records should also note the English version.

11. Where a letter in Irish could have legal implications.
8. There are circumstances where third parties may be involved, or where an official document will require to be scrutinised or where there is a requirement to publicise an application. Examples include notification of planning applications, driving licences, official certificates of various types. In all such circumstances the English version of the street address must be shown. Subject to cost and technical feasibility, the Irish version of the street address may also be shown alongside the English, but only when the individual making the original application used the Irish version. Where a Department cannot show both names, in response to an application using the Irish version, Departments should seriously consider informing the applicant of why this is the case, for example by means of a leaflet. This may pre-empt correspondence from individuals protesting about the use of the English name only.
9. Departments should continue to use the English version of all Northern Ireland place names, including townlands, towns and counties, in all circumstances. Where doubts arise as to the correctness of a place name, Departments may wish to seek the assistance of Ordnance Survey.

14. This circular also applies to the NI, but separate, additional guidance is issued in respect of the Prisons Department. The NI Court Service is also considering separate guidance.

Correspondence

10. Where a correspondent writes in Irish, Departments should use their best endeavours to obtain a translation in order to enable the inquiry to be handled. (CRISP records will help Departments to identify officers who are fluent in Irish.) It may on occasions be necessary to seek the correspondent's confirmation of the Department's understanding of any difficult

or technical points in the letter. For example, it may be sensible in replying to use a phrase such as "I understand from your letter that you are requesting". Departments should always reply in English.

11. Where a letter in Irish could have legal implications, Departments should exercise special care to ensure that any translation accurately reflects the original and that the meaning is clear. To establish certainty of understanding it may be appropriate to include a typed copy of the English translation with the Department's reply and to stress that such a reply is based on the Department's interpretation of the original letter as set out in the translation. In some circumstances it may be prudent to delay issuing a substantive reply until the correspondent has confirmed that the Department's translation accurately reflects the original.
12. Central Secretariat should be consulted if a Department receives a large number of letters in Irish and would face problems in responding within an acceptable timescale, or where a Department is of the view that an attempt is being made to use the Irish language in order to delay official business.
13. Central Secretariat will be glad to offer advice on any difficulties facing Departments as a consequence of this circular.
14. This circular also applies to the NIO, but separate, additional guidance has been issued in respect of the Prisons Department. The NI Court Service is also considering separate guidance.

- in official documents, where third parties will need to identify an address, the English address should always be shown but, on the basis of individual preference, an Irish address may be shown alongside, if resources and technical facilities permit.

Departments are asked to ensure that staff are familiar with the content of the Circular and to make arrangements for the application of the Circular by Next Step Agencies. In addition, Departments are encouraged to draw the Circular to the attention of Non-Departmental Public Bodies, in order to alert them to the new legislation on streetnames and the resultant revised administrative procedures which are being introduced by Departments. Non-Departmental Public Bodies would, of course, be free to introduce similar procedures, and Departments should encourage them to use their discretion in this way.

D. J. Watkins

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