

20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030

Background

The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 was published on 21 December 2010, following cross-party support in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Strategy promotes a holistic, integrated approach to the Irish language which is consistent with international best practice. The Strategy is the result of a consultative and research process, including a report commissioned by the Department (DCU, 2009), the *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* (NUIG & NUIM, 2007), and the report of Coimisiún na Gaeltachta (2002). These reports can be found on the Department's website at www.ahg.gov.ie.

General overview of the Strategy

The specific objectives of the Strategy are to:

- increase the number of people who speak Irish on a daily basis outside the education system from 83,000 to 250,000;
- increase by 25% the number of people who speak Irish on a daily basis in the Gaeltacht; and
- increase the number of people who use State services through Irish and who can access television, radio and print media through the language.

The Strategy sets out nine areas for action, including education, the Gaeltacht, the family, public services, the media, the economy, legislation and cross-cutting initiatives.

Programme for Government 2011-2016

The Programme for Government 2011-2016 states that the Government will support the 20-Year Strategy and will deliver the achievable goals proposed therein. Accordingly, the Taoiseach decided to re-establish the Cabinet Committee on the Irish language and the Gaeltacht under his own chairmanship.

Implementation structures for the Strategy

The Government took the following policy decisions on 31 May 2011 regarding the implementation structures for the Strategy:

- that the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht will retain primary responsibility for matters concerning the Irish language;
- that Foras na Gaeilge will continue to fulfil its responsibilities on an all-island basis as an agency of the North South Language Implementation Body;
- that the Department, in conjunction with relevant State partners, will be responsible for the implementation of the Strategy outside the Gaeltacht. The potential for Foras na Gaeilge to deliver certain elements of the Strategy, on an agreed basis, will be explored; and

- that Údarás na Gaeltachta will be responsible for the implementation of the Strategy within the Gaeltacht and the *status quo* will be maintained regarding the current functions of Údarás na Gaeltachta.

The Údarás na Gaeltachta legislation will be amended as necessary in the Gaeltacht Bill which is to be published in 2012, in accordance with the Government's Legislation Programme.

New statutory definition of the Gaeltacht

The Government intends to take action under the 20-Year Strategy to safeguard the future of the Irish language in the Gaeltacht in co-operation with communities in Gaeltacht areas. Developing a comprehensive language planning system at community level in the Gaeltacht is a key component of the Strategy to ensure that the Irish language survives as a community language in the Gaeltacht.

The Government took the following policy decisions on 31 May 2011 regarding the new definition of the Gaeltacht:

- that statutory provision will be made for a new definition of the Gaeltacht, which will be based hereinafter on linguistic criteria rather than on geographical areas, as is currently the case;
- that statutory provision will be made for a language planning process in order to prepare language plans at community level for each Gaeltacht area and for the Minister of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to periodically approve and review those plans;
- that statutory provision will be made for a new type of 'network Gaeltacht' area outside the existing statutory Gaeltacht areas. These will be areas, predominantly in urban communities, that will have a basic critical mass of community and State support for the Irish language; and
- that statutory provision will be made for Gaeltacht Service Towns, i.e. towns which service Gaeltacht areas.

The new definition of the Gaeltacht will be given statutory status under the Gaeltacht Bill which is to be published in 2012, in accordance with the Government's Legislation Programme.

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht will work closely, in conjunction with other State organisations, with Gaeltacht communities in order to assist them in developing and implementing language plans.

Implementation of the Strategy

The Strategy itself recognises a need for a phased approach to accomplish its various measures. Four phases associated with the process are specified, namely:

- Establishment Phase which will be devoted to the communication of the goals and content of the Strategy and setting up the organisational and operational structures;
- Implementation Phase I when the foundations will be set during the first years of the Strategy;

- Implementation Phase II which will focus on the full implementation of all relevant measures; and
- Implementation Phase III when all measures will be mainstreamed.

The Strategy's establishment phase is ongoing under the leadership of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. A Strategy Unit has been established in the Department which is responsible for directing the planning and implementation of the Strategy. The Strategy Unit is in consultation with key stakeholders regarding the implementation of those aspects of the Strategy which pertain to them.

Three high level working groups have been established with key stakeholders to progress the implementation of various areas of action in the Strategy:

- A working group between the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills to identify priorities regarding the implementation of the Strategy in education, taking current resource constraints into consideration.
- A working group between the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Udarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge to distinguish between the individual functions to be carried out by these public bodies under the Strategy in a way that will ensure the best value for money for the Exchequer and the avoidance of duplication of provision.
- A working group between the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation regarding enterprise investment in the Gaeltacht.

Monitoring the implementation of the Strategy

As the Strategy is to be implemented by a number of key stakeholders over a period of twenty years, it is important that its implementation is monitored on an ongoing basis.

As the Department with primary responsibility for the Strategy, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht will continuously monitor the implementation of the Strategy in co-operation with the key stakeholders referred to therein.

Progress reports will be provided to the Senior Officials Group which supports the Cabinet Committee and to the Cabinet Committee itself. The Cabinet Committee will maintain oversight of progress and report to Government as necessary.

*Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
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