

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANGUAGE POLICY**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 For the administration of its functions the principal language of the Department of Education (DE) is English.
- 1.2 We do however recognise our responsibilities under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages¹. The Charter is an international convention designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages; in Northern Ireland it applies to Irish and Ulster Scots.
- 1.3 The Charter came into force in 2001 and applies to all public bodies and their associated bodies. Part II of the Charter applies to Irish and Ulster Scots and it places an onus on DE to take account of the wishes of language speakers as we plan our activity. Part III of the Charter currently only applies to Irish in Northern Ireland and it contains specific undertakings for DE to support Irish, particularly in the area of education provision.
- 1.4 This policy sets out the administrative services which people can expect from us in Irish and Ulster Scots and informs those who wish to use these languages how they can communicate with us.
- 1.5 In addition, DE is committed to respecting the many other languages used today in our society by those from other countries who are now resident in Northern Ireland and this policy also highlights the steps we will take in relation to other languages.

2. Sources of Guidance

- 2.1 The policy has been drafted in line with DE's Equality Scheme which outlines our commitment to ensuring that the information we disseminate and the services we provide are fully accessible to the public; this includes providing

¹ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/148>

information in alternative formats on request (such as Braille or minority languages²), where reasonably practicable to do so.

- 2.2 As noted above, it also takes into consideration the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

3. What is Not Covered by this Policy

- 3.1 This policy covers the arrangements for those seeking to interact with the Department in English; in Irish and Ulster Scots; and other languages. It does not cover language provision within the school curriculum. There are specific arrangements, additional to the scope of this policy, for the provision of Irish medium education – these are outlined at paragraph 8.

4. Correspondence

- 4.1 The Department will accept correspondence in Irish, Ulster Scots and other languages; we will however reply in English. We will issue an acknowledgement when an immediate reply is not possible.

5. Names and Addresses

- 5.1 We will respect the wishes of anyone who prefers to use the Irish or Ulster Scots version of their name in correspondence (or official business), provided that they are generally known by that name.
- 5.2 When a person uses a lawful Irish or Ulster Scots street name, we will use that form in replying.

² To meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

6. Telephone Calls

6.1 If you telephone us and begin the conversation in Irish, Ulster Scots or another language, and the person you are speaking to is not able to respond in that language, they will offer the following options:

- to continue the call in English;
- to write to us in the other language; or
- in the case of Irish or Ulster Scots, to transfer you to our voicemail where you can leave a message.

7. Publications

7.1 All materials will be produced in English (the exception to this is publications issued to Irish medium schools and units as detailed in paragraph 8 below).

8. Irish Medium Schools

8.1 There are currently 28 Irish-medium Primary schools in Northern Ireland and a further 7 Irish-medium units attached to English-medium host primary schools. There are 2 Irish-medium Post-primary schools and 4 Post-primary units.

8.2 The Department has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish medium education. It also must meet the learning needs of pupils whose language of instruction is Irish. At our discretion we will therefore arrange, where practicable and financially viable, to provide information such as information leaflets to pupils and inspection reports in Irish.

9. Contact Details

9.1 For enquiries about this policy contact:

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43 Balloo Road
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