

***European Charter For Regional Or Minority Languages***  
***OSFC Code Of Courtesy For Irish and Ulster Scots***

**Introduction**

This Code of Courtesy sets out the procedures that OSFC staff should follow when dealing with members of the public who want to conduct their business in Irish or Ulster-Scots. OSFC will make arrangements for the Code of Courtesy to be made available in Irish and Ulster Scots on the OSFC website.

Linguistic diversity must be regarded as a common cultural wealth. Everyone is entitled to respect and courtesy, which extends to their language. Every effort should be made to convey this respect even if it is not possible to deal with the person in the language of his/her choice.

Officers should become familiar with the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages that apply to Irish and Ulster Scots and the measures OSFC has decided upon to implement them.

**Personal Names**

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/Ulster Scots 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/Ulster Scots and English names. It may be useful to put a record of both versions on file.

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”*.

If a person gives his/her name in Irish or Ulster Scots, for instance, 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.

If the name includes an accent, this should present no problem. Practically all computer software packages cater for this<sup>1</sup>.

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 - Irish**

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;
- making an appointment for a meeting when an interpreter is present.

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

If a person gives advance notice that they want to speak Irish, an interpreter should generally be arranged. This can be done through the NICS Central Translation Service, telephone Linguistic Operations Branch (028.90.2.58979). An exception to the general requirement to provide an interpreter might be recruitment

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<sup>1</sup> Vowels in Irish may have long accents, similar to the *accent aigu* in French. However, unlike French, the accent in Irish is also used in the case of capitals. When using Microsoft Word, the accent can be keyed in by pressing the *Alt Gr* key and then the vowel in question. In the case of capitals the *Shift* key should also be pressed. All such letters can also be accessed by using the *Insert-Symbol* facility. Some Ulster-Scots spelling systems use accents to represent inflexion. When using Microsoft Word, the accent can be keyed in by pressing the *Alt Gr* key and then the vowel in question. In the case of capitals the *Shift* key should also be pressed. All such letters can also be accessed by using the *Insert-Symbol* facility.

interviews, where necessary testing of communication skills in English could not be carried out properly unless English was the working medium.

If no notice is given, the person should be offered the choice of -

- making their point in English
- giving written views in Irish.
- making an appointment for a meeting when an interpreter is present.

If a meeting is arranged, double-check beforehand that the interpreter is available.

Never promise a service on which you cannot deliver.

### **Face-to-Face Interviews and Meetings – Ulster Scots**

In the spirit of the Charter departments and associated bodies are encouraged to make provision for Ulster-Scots interviews and meetings. However at present it is not normally possible to facilitate face-to-face meetings in the Ulster-Scots language due to the difficulty in ensuring appropriate quality assurance for interpreters. Further advice can be sought through the NICS Central Translation Service, telephone Linguistic Operations Branch (028.90.2.58979)

### **Telephone Calls**

The Charter only requires acceptance of oral requests and applications in Irish, there is no obligation to respond in Irish but Irish-speaking staff may do so. Whilst the Charter does not require acceptance of oral applications of Ulster-Scots, this offers the opportunity to take resolute action to encourage and promote the language in line with Part II of the Charter.

If a caller begins the conversation in Irish or Ulster Scots the officer may respond in this language [if they speak Irish or Ulster-Scots] or English. It would be good practice for Irish/Ulster-Scots speaking members of staff to be known so that callers who wish to speak Irish/Ulster-Scots can be put through to them. If the

officer does not speak Irish or Ulster Scots 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/Ulster Scots. 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/Ulster-Scots*
- *transfer you to our voice mail where you can leave a message in Irish/Ulster-Scots.”*

To contact the **voice mail** phone – 028.90.2.58971 (Irish)

028.90.2.58924 (Ulster-Scots).

### **Procedures for use of minority language voicemail**

If a caller contacts the administration team or an individual inspector indicating that they wish to conduct their business in Irish or Ulster Scots, the official receiving the call should speak to them in Irish/Ulster - Scots if they feel confident they can do so. If they cannot do so, or divert the caller to an Irish or Ulster-Scots speaking member of staff, they should divert or direct the caller to the appropriate voice mail (see above).

The voice mail is monitored by officials in Linguistic Operations Branch, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Messages received will be translated immediately or forwarded to an interpreter for translation.

Translated enquiries will be forwarded to the appropriate official for action.

**MESSAGE ON VOICE MAIL FACILITY (IN IRISH AND ULSTER SCOTS)**

“Welcome to the Northern Ireland Civil Service. If you would like to leave a message with us someone will come back to you as soon as possible. You can leave your message after the tone. To handle your call we need you to give us the following information:

- Your name
- Your address
- Your daytime telephone number
- The name of the person you would like to contact, if you know it
- The name of the department/public body you would like to contact, if you know it.
- The nature of your business

We will try to get back to you as soon as possible but if your business is very urgent you are advised to contact the particular department/public body directly in English.

**Correspondence – Irish**

The Charter obliges departments/public bodies 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.

The Charter does not oblige departments/public bodies to acknowledge or reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish.

**Correspondence – Ulster-Scots**

The Charter does not oblige departments/public bodies to accept written correspondence in Ulster-Scots, however it would be in the spirit of the Charter to do so. Further advice can be sought through the NICS Central Translation Service, telephone Linguistic Operations Branch (028.90.2.58979)

## **Addresses**

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](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 or Ulster-Scots street name staff should use this form in replying to correspondence or while processing applications. Both versions should be noted on the official record.

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/Ulster-Scots version. There are no restrictions on using Irish or Ulster-Scots versions of other parts of an address e.g. townland, town, county, country.

## **Enquiries and Monitoring**

Enquiries about this Guidance and further advice on requests to do business (oral or written) in Irish or Ulster Scots should be addressed to John De Largy, Office of the Social Fund Commissioner tel.028 90897543.