

**NORTHERN IRELAND
POLICING BOARD**

MINORITY LANGUAGES POLICY

**Compliance Branch Policy
September 2008**

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MINORITY LANGUAGES POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

In addition to English, many other languages are used in Northern Ireland, including indigenous minority languages (Irish and Ulster-Scots), minority ethnic languages and British and Irish sign language. The Board has a number of statutory and other obligations to consider when dealing with correspondence/requests for information etc. in languages other than English.

We also have 'statutory' obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in respect of "Irish and Ulster Scots". Additionally, the Belfast Agreement committed Government to "recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots language and the languages of the various ethnic minority communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland."

The Northern Ireland Policing Board recognises the existence within the wider community, of substantial, vibrant and flourishing linguistic and cultural communities, including Irish Language, Ulster Scots language and a range of Non-Indigenous Communities. We welcome cultural diversity as a positive influence. The Board acknowledges our responsibility to those significant communities, recognising minority languages as an expression of cultural wealth. We also recognise that some of these communities have not traditionally been fully engaged with Policing. As a Board we will continue our commitment to engage with these communities.

2. IRISH AND ULSTER SCOTS

The 'European Charter' does not establish any individual or collective rights for the speakers of regional or minority languages. It does not cover 'Sign Language' or the languages of Northern Ireland's 'minority ethnic communities'. The Charter's overriding purpose is cultural. It is designed to protect and promote regional or minority languages as a threatened aspect of Europe's cultural heritage. Under this, the Board is obliged to accept written correspondence in Irish. If it seems that, taking translation into account, it will not be possible to provide a substantial reply by the relevant deadline, an acknowledgement should be issued explaining that the letter is being translated and that a substantive reply will follow.

The Charter does not oblige the Board to acknowledge or reply in Irish. However, where possible and subject to cost and value for money considerations, officials should issue a reply in Irish using the centrally appointed Translation Service where necessary.

Although there is no requirement to accept requests in Ulster Scots, it would be in the spirit of the Charter to do so. Please note however, that due to difficulty in ensuring appropriate quality assurance for interpreters, it may not always be possible to reply in Ulster Scots.

2.1 Policy, Practice and Procedure

Documents

We will provide translations of documents into Irish or Ulster-Scots when they:

- are likely to be of particular relevance to Irish or Ulster-Scots speakers;
- are likely to be read and used generally;
- are requested by individuals;
- will contribute to promoting, maintaining and safeguarding either language.

We will consider requests for translation, bearing these points in mind, as well as 'overall costs' and 'value for money' considerations. Where and when required documents will be identified and translated pro-actively by officials.

The Board will continue to publish its major reports in English and will provide summaries of its; Annual Report; Annual Policing Plan, and Human Rights Report, if requested for translation.

Website

Material in Irish and Ulster-Scots will be made available on the Board's website and will be updated at the same time as material in English. All material in Irish or Ulster-Scots will be clearly identified on the website.

Personal names

We will respect the wishes of anyone who wishes to be known by the Irish or Ulster-Scots version of his or her name, and will use only that name in official business. Where a person is known by names in more than one language, in order to keep records together both names will be recorded on files.

The use of Irish or Ulster-Scots by staff

We will encourage knowledge of and use of Irish and Ulster-Scots by our staff. Where there is demand and staff are willing we will encourage staff to attend relevant classes or training courses to allow them to deal with Irish or Ulster-Scots speakers in the language of their choice.

Interviews and meetings

Where an Irish-speaking customer gives advance notice that he or she wishes to speak Irish in an interview or meeting, we will arrange for an interpreter to be present.

Where advance notice has not been given, we will offer the choice of continuing the interview or meeting in English, giving written views in Irish, or making an appointment for a meeting when an interpreter is present.

Please note that for Ulster-Scots customers, we cannot currently facilitate face-to-face meetings due to difficulty in ensuring appropriate quality assurance for interpreters. For the present therefore, we will, offer the choice of continuing in English, or giving written views in Ulster-Scots.

Telephone calls

We will accept oral submission in Irish. (For the present, the above note applies to Ulster-Scots) Where a caller begins a conversation in Irish, we will either respond in kind (if the member of staff speaks Irish), or offer the caller the options of:

- continuing the call in English;
- writing to us in Irish;
- transfer to an Irish-speaking colleague (where possible)
- or transfer to voice-mail, where a message can be left in Irish. (We will respond to the message in writing)

Correspondence

We will accept written correspondence in Irish or Ulster-Scots.

If, taking translation into account, it is not possible to provide a substantive reply by the relevant deadline we will issue an acknowledgement in the language used in the original letter, explaining that the letter is being translated and that a substantive reply will follow.

We will reply in Irish to written correspondence received in Irish.

We will reply in Ulster-Scots to written correspondence received in Ulster-Scots.

A copy of the correspondence and reply in English will be kept on the file. In all cases the English version of the correspondence will be considered the authoritative version.

Street names

When a customer uses a lawful Irish or Ulster-Scots language street name, we will use the Irish or Ulster-Scots form in replying to correspondence or while processing applications. In some cases it may be necessary also to include the English form.

When initiating contact, where possible, we will to use both versions of bilingual street names, and continue using whichever language is used in the reply.

3. MINORITY ETHNIC LANGUAGES

In addition to English, many other languages are used in Northern Ireland, including indigenous minority languages (Irish and Ulster-Scots), minority ethnic languages and British and Irish sign language. There are in excess of 76 minority ethnic languages spoken in Northern Ireland and the number is increasing. The largest of these is the Chinese community using numerous dialects including Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka and Fijianese. In addition, we have numerous other communities to be considered including, Indian, Pakistani, African, Arabic and Bangladeshi, using both national languages and dialects. More recently, we have seen increasing numbers of the European Communities of Poland, Lithuania, Serbia, Croatia, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Russia, Romania, etc.

The policy of the Board has always been to encourage respect for all of the languages used within Northern Ireland. In doing so we are conscious of our obligations under Section 75, Equality legislation where we undertake to make the information we hold available in different formats and languages on request. This obligation is detailed within the Board's Equality Scheme.

In relation to a number of areas including consultations and publications, the Board agreed to make the information available in different formats "and in minority languages for people who are not fluent in English". To this end, the Board is committed to sourcing appropriate 'Translation' and 'Interpreter' services.

3.1 Policy, Practice and Procedure

Documents

As stated in our Equality Scheme, we will provide translations of documents into a minority ethnic language when they:

- are likely to be of particular relevance to particular communities,
- are being targeted directly at particular communities
- are likely to be read and used generally;
- are requested by individual members of a community;

We will consider requests for translation, bearing these points in mind, as well as overall 'costs' and 'value for money' considerations. Where and when required documents will be identified and translated pro-actively by officials.

The Board will continue to publish its major reports in English and will provide summaries of the; Annual Report; Annual Policing Plan, and the Human Rights Report, if requested for translation.

Website

Material in minority ethnic languages will be made available on the Board's website and will be updated at the same time as material in English. All material in languages other than English will be clearly identified on the website.

Correspondence

We will accept written correspondence in any minority ethnic language. If, taking translation into account, it is not possible to provide a substantive reply by the relevant deadline we will issue an acknowledgement in the language used in the original letter, explaining that the letter is being translated and that a substantive reply will follow.

We will endeavour to reply to correspondence received in whichever language the correspondence is written in.

A copy of the correspondence and reply in English will be kept on the file. In all cases the English version of the correspondence will be considered the authoritative version.