

## **Legislating for language rights: The Official Languages Act Ireland 2003**

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language and provisions to support the language are to be found in 160 specific provisions in Irish legislation. In 2003 the President of Ireland signed The Official Languages Act 2003 into law following passage through both Houses of the Parliament. The Act is organised under 5 main parts: Part 1 Sections 1-4 Introduction and Definitions; Part 2 Sections 5-8 Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament), Acts of the Oireachtas, the Courts; Part 3 Sections 11-18 Language Schemes; Part 4 Sections 20-30 The Language commissioner; Part 5 Sections 31-35 Placenames.

The Act was amended twice in 2011.

The Programme for Government, “Government for National Recovery,” announced a review of the Language Act...“to ensure expenditure on the language is best targeted towards the development of the language ...and that obligations are imposed in response to demands from citizens.” This review was started by the Minister on 03/11/2011.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform announced that the Government had decided to “merge the functions of Language Commissioner with Ombudsman Office. To be progressed in the context of the ongoing review of the Official Languages Act 2003. (17/11/2011).

This paper will:

- review the evidence as to the strengths and weaknesses of the Language Act since enactment in 2003 paying particular attention to the Language Schemes;
- examine the work of An Coimisinéir Teanga;
- review the implications for the delivery of public services in the Irish language and the policy issues arising from the proposed transfer of functions of the Language Commissioner;
- critically review “Language Schemes” as a vehicle for service delivery based on the evidence from Ireland and to a lesser degree other analogous cases, most notably Scotland and Wales.