

Communications & Information Standards



**Northern Ireland
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Our Ref: FOI 62-11

Ms Máire Zepf
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24 October 2011

Dear Ms Zepf

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Thank you for your request of 18 October 2011 for the following information:

“What is the statutory, administrative or political basis of Members’ practice when exercising their legal right under Standing Order 78 of providing translations into English of what they have just said, e.g. another Standing Order, a precedent set by a past Speaker, the discretion of the current Speaker or Deputy Speaker, or an inter-party agreement? In particular, is the practice voluntary or compulsory, and is it admissible for sanctions to be applied in the case of non-compliance?”

An Irish interpreter has been retained for many years without the simultaneous translation facility being extended beyond the Speaker and Clerk to ordinary Members – at what one assumes would be comparatively modest cost. Has the issue been raised with the Office of the Speaker? If so, what decision was reached in that regard, and what was the reasoning behind it?

In the Chamber Irish is by far the most commonly used language other than English (use of Ulster Scots being nugatory or non-existent), and there is a

strong correlation between use of Irish, political opinion and religious belief. Has the Office of the Speaker considered the potential for indirect discrimination against groups listed in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 of requiring Members to translate what they have just said? In order to minimise the risk or impact of such indirect discrimination, is it the policy of the Office of the Speaker to allow reasonable adjustment to the time allotted to Members so that they may comply? If the Office of the Speaker has no official policy, what are the individual policies of the Speaker and his Deputies in that regard when performing their official functions?

Without prejudice to your obligation under the Act to provide answers to the above questions, we also request copies of all documentation, correspondence and records relevant thereto.”

Your request was received on 21 October 2011 and is being dealt with under the terms of the above legislation.

If you have any queries do not hesitate to contact me. Please remember to quote our reference number.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Aoibheann Baker".

Aoibheann Baker
FOI Unit